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Indigenism, Miscegenation, and Acculturation in Ecuador

The present essay is the result of personal reflections motivated by the experience of the collaboration of the Yambiro Project, a partnership between students at the College of Saint Benedict and the Women's Cooperative in Otavalo, Ecuador. This enriching experience permitted me and the students who participated in this summer study abroad program in June 2014 to come in contact with the problematic reality of the indigenous communities, a reality that goes beyond the merely financial aspects.

The Yambiro project is a non-profit initiative intended to provide economic support to women of Ecuadorian indigenous communities through the sale of their artisanal work in our institutions. The money acquired from selling women's craftwork is intended to cover salaries and production and to fund scholarships for children in need in these communities. Nevertheless, our contribution does not end there. In my opinion, the most important component of this project is the interaction among professors, students, and the community. During our stay in Otavalo, students took part in a class, GEND 180, Gender and Culture, while also using their free time to teach art, science, math, English, and physical education classes to children between the ages of four and fifteen after school. In addition, students collaborated in solidarity work such as distribution of food to poor families or individuals, gathering wood for fuel for the elderly, and restoration projects such as replacing broken windows or painting walls in the recreation area of the community. The group of students who participated in the program in 2014 organized fundraising events and used the donations to carry out land improvement works for basic infrastructure. The experience was rewarding and enriching for our students, an authentic educational trip in the lives of these university students.

The city of Otavalo, populated with 100,000 inhabitants, is situated in the province of Imbabura, north of Quito, and is probably one of the most important touristic centers of Ecuador, after the capital and the Galapagos Islands. The canton of Otavalo, famous for its craft and textile market, is considered the largest artisan market in Latin America. This size is due to the fact that the indigenous population represents more than half of the total census and consists of ethnically and culturally *Quechua-Otavalo* people. Their community contains eleven parishes, named by the local administrative division under the canton. Of these eleven parishes, two are urban and nine are rural, and each one of these parishes is made up of communities.

Our group of students collaborated with two communities: the Yambiro community in the rural parish of San José of Quichinche, the biggest parish of Otavalo, and the Foundation Caritas de Esperanza in the urban community of Esperanza de Azama. Both of these communities have their own social organization and are settlements that surround the city center. One of the characteristics of Otavalo is the strong presence of indigenous neighbors in the city itself and not only in the surrounding communities. For this reason, Otavalo is a multiethnic community that inevitably makes us reflect on the notion of multiculturalism or the coexistence of various cultures.

These characteristics convert the city of Otavalo into an extraordinary laboratory for the study of social and cultural relations of indigenous people. In fact, during the last decades, the Otavalo indigenous people have stood out in the leadership of indigenous movements on a national level. In 2003, the city itself was recognized by the National Congress as the “Intercultural Capital of Ecuador,” making Otavalo a national symbol and international reference for Latin American indigenism by being a society in which indigenous communities have attained economic and social improvements without renouncing their historic and cultural values.

The contact with this interculturality in Otavalo made me reflect beyond the ideological and political discourse of these communities. In this essay I analyze the concepts of indigenous identities and the ideological principles on which indigenism is founded. I explore how indigenism mixes in a paradoxical, complex, and, at times, confusing way national, sectarian, and ethnocentric elements. I question whether indigenism offers satisfactory solutions to some of the principal problems that are present in these communities, such as marginalization, gender violence, illiteracy, unemployment, and healthcare. To better understand these problems, I examine their cultural and social codes, their integral and harmonious cosmivision (spiritual world view), and the limits and contradictions of indigenism for overcoming segregation and marginalization in these communities, not only from a social and economic point of view, but also from cultural and gender perspectives. Finally, I reflect on how these contradictions are often converted into an impediment for the construction of truly multiethnic societies in which diverse cultures can coexist harmoniously in Otavalo or any other place, including our campus community, because the problem of *cultural integration* is a current and transcendent issue in our society and is connected not only with social problems, but with political and economic ones as well. The path of this work that leads to the final conclusions requires us to address critical concepts such as “indigenism” and “multiculturalism.”

The Concept of Indigenism

Although it is not my intention to offer a historical analysis, it is necessary to clarify the cultural and ideological concept of indigenism. In this study, I refer to indigenism as the set of cultural and political ideas and practices that constitute the ethnic identity and associated rights of the indigenous people in Latin America. Thus, indigenism can be viewed as a series of ideological principles that have inspired various political movements. Historically, we can find precedents starting from the early times of colonialism, but the term gained social prominence during the first decades of the last century, becoming today one of the

most important social and political schools of thought in many Latin American countries.

Therefore, ideologically, indigenism defends political ideas aimed at recognizing the identity of Latin American indigenous people, the economic and social development of their communities, and the right to fair political representation in local and national governments. It also defends the recovery of pride and cultural self-esteem lost during colonial and later democratic times. In addition, indigenism has contributed to artistic expressions through literature, music, and art that explore this indigenous reality and cultural identity as their principal theme.

Since in every historical and political movement there are different tendencies with distinct objectives, one can summarize that indigenism defends the plurinational state, the right to self-determination, legal pluralism (recognition of the legal indigenous tradition), reindigenization of the communities, education based on the respect of cultural values, and the organization of society based on the indigenous cosmivision, known in Ecuador as *sumak kawsay*,¹ or “good living.” These principles would result in the rejection of western neoliberal economy and the concept of “development,” preferring an economic system based on solidarity, generosity, reciprocity, and respect for nature through a return to the spirituality of “Mother Earth” (Pachamama).²

Perhaps one of the central problems of indigenism is its attitude of rejecting whatever is regarded as “development.” It is often stated that one of the principal motives of the exploitation of man and nature is the concept of “development” as one of the driving forces of capitalism and liberalism, whereas one of the central tenets of indigenism is the rejection of this concept. Although we can agree with the criticism that indigenism makes about development, considering it irrational, selfish, and destructive, we cannot deny the hope for a better future that responsible development has the potential to realize.

Ultimately, *sumak kawsay* is about a philosophy of life, a cosmovision of the indigenous people based on the desire to maintain harmony with the community and the rest of living beings and nature, not so much as a vital aspiration, but as an everyday practice. The Ecuadorian professor and essayist Milton Cáceres Vázquez observes:

The challenge entreats us to return to the wisdom of our ancestors and the spirituality of Pachamama as the highest political consciousness and the womb of new economic, social, political, environmental, educational and healthy creations, abandoning what is today called development in any of its forms. It is vital to find alternatives to development; it is also time to find alternatives to the alternatives. This latter is the power for the moment of fight against the globalizing empire of neoliberalism that establishes itself like an idol in the market and sells like a vulgar merchandise everything that is human, sacred, valuable and worthy, everything that we should share like a human intercultural fraternity.³

According to these principles, the recovery, recreation, or reconstruction of an ancestral indigenous cosmovision in which indigenous, socialist, environmental, pacifist, syndicalist, and feminist ideas are unevenly mixed with concepts of the theology of liberation and other sources offer as a result a utopic, ideological proposal mixed with myths and stories. In line with these narratives, the ideal indigenous person would be crowned for his qualities such as wisdom, balanced behavior, inner strength, future vision, compassion, and perseverance and would possess the fundamental ethical values such as domestic harmony, solidarity, generosity, and reciprocity.

This mystical and humanistic philosophy that shares principles with many other philosophies and religions, Eastern and Western, was lost because of the contact with the Spanish colonizers (return to the myth of the noble savage and the lost paradise). Therefore indigenism presents its reconstruction as an alternative to the development of capitalism and neorealism at the end of the last century. Thus it separates the world of human thinking into two paradigms: on one hand, the western, incapable of studying *sumak kawsay* epistemologically, and on the other hand, the indigenous paradigm or Andean cosmovision.

Imposing this division results in sectarianism and irrationalism with clear ideological motivations.

If we doubt the capacity of science and reason, two Western and Eurocentric concepts, to interpret the indigenous world, we open the door to the uncertain world of superstition presented in the form of spirituality. For indigenism, defender of *sumak kawsay*, Western science is in the service of so-called “development” or “progress” and for this reason encourages forms of exploitation and domination, giving priority to the market interests over individual interests. In the indigenous cosmovision, the epistemological capacity would fall to the wise men (*amawtas*) and/or shamans (*yachaks*) whose abilities are complex, since they are the moral, spiritual, and legal authorities that perform medical and cultural duties and are responsible for the social cohesion. It is certain that shamanism is an important source of knowledge derived from the medicinal properties of nature, but it is not less certain that with this ancestral knowledge we too often encounter superstition and hot air. During our stay in Otavalo, we had the opportunity to experience this situation in the Clinic Jambi Huasi.

The Foundation Jambi Huasi is a non-profit private institution whose aim is to nurture the ancestral Andean culture. This foundation was established in 2004 with the encouragement of the constitutional acknowledgement of alternative medicine. The *Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador* in 2008 acknowledges medicine according to the so-called Andean cosmovision in various articles:

Article 57. Indigenous communes, communities, peoples and nations are recognized and guaranteed, in conformity with the Constitution and human rights agreements, conventions, declarations and other international instruments, the following collective rights:

(...) 12. To uphold, protect and develop collective knowledge; their science, technologies and ancestral wisdom; the genetic resources that contain biological diversity and agricultural biodiversity; their medicine and traditional medical practices, with the inclusion of the right to restore, promote, and protect ritual and holy places, as well as plants, animals, minerals and ecosystems in

their territories; and knowledge about the resources and properties of fauna and flora.

Article 360. The system shall guarantee, through the institutions that comprise it, the promotion of family and community health, prevention and integral care, on the basis of primary healthcare; it shall articulate various levels of care; and it shall promote complementariness with ancestral and alternative medicines.

The comprehensive public healthcare network shall be part of the national health system and shall be comprised of the coordinated set of state institutions, social security and other suppliers that belong to the State on the basis of legal, operational and complementary ties.

Article 362. Healthcare as a public service shall be provided through state, private, autonomous, and community institutions, as well as those that practice alternative and complementary ancestral medicine. Healthcare services shall be safe, of a high quality, and humane and they shall guarantee informed consent, access to information, and confidentiality of the information of patients.⁴

It was in the Jambi Huasi Clinic that we had the opportunity to assist in a session of traditional medicine, ancestral and alternative, that consisted of a ritual to diagnose diseases with the help of a guinea pig. The diagnostic system consists of rubbing the guinea pig (white or brown to clean and black to cure) on the entire body of the patient. According to Quechua beliefs, the human organism is very similar to a guinea pig. For this reason, it can absorb the human energy and reveal any illnesses. After this “scanning” process, the guinea pig is sacrificed and skinned by the shaman, who then proceeds to the autopsy by looking at all the organs to diagnose any possible illness in the patient such as heart problems, intestinal diseases including cancer, and life expectancy. One can draw one’s own conclusions from this practice. No doubt that Western medicine, specifically pharmacology, can learn much from traditional Andean medicine, but superstition should not be equated with science.

Indigenism and Indianism

Indianism emerged in the second part of the 20th century and was enriched by the ideas of Fausto Reinaga among others. It is a much more radical movement in search of indigenous “authenticity” within indigenism. It contends that indigenism is an ideological instrument that national states and governments use to destroy the authentic indigenous culture through the integration of a national homogeneous culture. For the partisans of Indianism, indigenism was converted to an ideological trap of the state to maintain the colonial exploitation and marginalization of the villages as sociological minorities. In other words, it is an internal colonialism, white and mestizo, of the “non indio” against the “indio.”⁵ This criticism toward official indigenism led indigenism closer to the ideology of Indianism. If we take into consideration this development at the present time, it is complicated and perhaps unnecessary to maintain the duality of indigenism and Indianism beyond the historical details.

Globalization and Indigenism

Although indigenism is habitually presented as a defense against globalization, some of its characteristics continue to be consequences of it since the process of globalization acts in two opposite directions: it facilitates the extension and propaganda of exogenous cultural concepts that can be assimilated and incorporated in the local cultures, and for this exact reason, it also provokes an adverse reaction fortifying and reactivating the desire for unique identity. In other words, the process of sociocultural homogenization provokes a revival and strengthening of identity that boosts the local culture. In this way, at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, a real theoretical and ideological explosion occurred, occupying thousands of pages of reflection and analysis, so much that it could overshadow globalization.⁶

In any case, it is known that globalization is not a new process since almost all imperial impulses, with a few exceptions such as Alexander the Great in Persia, follow the globalization process in which

a conquest of political power is usually followed by cultural expansion. Something similar happened in the Andean space after the conquests of Quechuas (the Inca Empire) in the 15th century and their colonization of the Caranquis, Cayapas, and others.

Seen in this light, globalization would be nothing more than another chapter in the historical process of the expansion of capitalism that started in the 14th and 15th centuries and has not stopped to this day. A process of commercial exploitation of human beings and nature, together with the flow of trade and capitals, provokes population movement and thus migration of ideas and cultures. What has drawn our attention the most in the last decades and especially in recent years is that the technological development of mass media and means of transportation have reached the most remote places in our planet as we never before imagined. The revolution in navigation and maritime technology at the end of the 15th century unified continents that until then were living in isolation. Similarly today, the internet revolution enables us to carry the world in our pocket. If there is something that brings humanity together from Patagonia to Alaska and from Ecuador to Japan, it is the cellphone that people carry in their pockets and the possibility of obtaining vast quantities of information in only a few seconds. The old idea that two subjects situated at a large distance from each other have no possibility of exerting influence on one another could be valid if the distance were huge. The reality, however, is that distances in our world are getting smaller and smaller every day, and therefore the possibilities of influences and interactions become greater every day.

Taking into consideration the collective awareness of the risks of cultural homogenization due to economic expansionism, especially by the American cultural industry, UNESCO composed in 2001 a “Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity,” declaring it a world heritage. Thus, cultural diversity is as necessary as biological diversity.

The Limits of Indigenism: Sumak Kawsay as Ideological Ruse

Indigenism suffers from the same principle it criticizes: ethnocentrism. While it rejects the logocentrism of the Western tradition because it considers it mono-epistemic, it embraces *sumak kawsay*—equally particular and exclusive—as its philosophy of life. Nevertheless, hegemonic concepts are not exclusive to the conventional or liberal thought of the Eurocentric traditional criticism. When the social movements against hegemony, such as indigenism, achieve power, they too become the dominant culture. The solution is not simply to replace Western ethnocentrism with endocentrism because this approach would promote social segregation, exclusion, and discrimination.

Once the dialectic tension between capitalism and socialism disappeared by the fall of the Soviet communist system, indigenism began to be used as a popular anchor of what is called in Latin America the *socialism of the 21st century*, as an autochthone alternative to capitalism and neoliberalism. If capitalism is based on individualism, indigenism should be based on the concept of community; if capitalism supports individual competence, indigenism defends reciprocity; and if capitalism pursues profits, indigenism searches for solidarity and complementarity. In this way, postcapitalism and postcolonialism is initiated, with the return of the precapitalist and precolonial concepts of the *sumak kawsay* cosmovision.

Indigenism falls into revisionism and intends to resurrect the myth of the return to the lost paradise and noble savage, but it does it with Manichaeic idealism: the concepts of community including values such as reciprocity and solidarity are also basic principles in the organization of capitalist societies. One example is the system of taxation, which is a means by which to maintain the social structure through the mechanism of redistribution, reciprocity, and solidarity. How the obtained funds are used varies from country to country.

Ultimately, one of the most important changes is that indigenism does not want to transform the State but rather to modify the traditional forms of the relationships it has with the State. The poetic rather than political idea of “a world in which all worlds have place” was launched by Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). One can find a connection of this idea with quantum theory and its reference to the existence of parallel universes that make up one multiverse. This theory is perfectly adapted to the ideological context of postmodernity and its fragmented vision of reality.

In my opinion, however, it is erroneous to seek the appreciation of diversity, difference, and plurality through the creation of parallel worlds, of multiverses, or to see the world in the form of infinite matryoshka as the Zapatista ideology was proposing. If we conceive of Universe, World, and University in a pluralist manner, other worlds do not exist in this world and only the reality of each individual is different and changeable with time and consequently every person will be a world in continuous evolution. It is not necessarily a pluriversality, if we have a Universe that respects plurality. The solution is not to fragment, isolate, build ghettos, and call them *parallel worlds* but to live with diversity and accept that diversity and variation are essential parts of human nature and therefore of our societies.

Limits of Indigenism: Multiculturalism

In this section, I will analyze why the principles of indigenism are insufficient to solve the problems of marginalization and segregation of indigenous peoples.

Indigenism stems from cultural relativism or pluralism as a reaction to ethnocentrism. We should not accept as valid the exclusive disjunction between ethnocentrism and relativism or its results and consequences. Ethnocentrism has led us thus far to assimilationist perspectives, as it involves renouncing one’s own cultural identity in favor of the dominant culture, and relativism has led us to other

equally unsatisfactory or incomplete principles, such as integrationist views highlighting the possibility to cohabit harmoniously and interact with various cultural identities. In addition, there are segregationist theories encouraging separate habitation, either obligatory or voluntary, which come from radical ethnocentric or relativist ideas. In the case of indigenism, it has historically fallen into three different types: assimilationist, integrationist, and segregationist approaches. Unfortunately it has condemned cultural miscegenation as a possibility for overcoming the dialectics between the dominant and the dominated cultures.

It is habitual, from the relativist's point of view, to propose integration as the best alternative for the coexistence of distinct cultural groups that live in the same place. The cultural integration, in that sense, is considered multiculturalism, interculturality, or cultural pluralism and implies equality of values and the right to be different among diverse cultures.

Both ethnocentrism and relativism form part of the concept of culture. Obviously, it is as complicated to talk about culture, as it is to talk about indigenism because of its polysemy and semantic complexity. In this essay, I do not use the word "culture" in the Greek meaning of *paideia* (παιδεία), equivalent to "education," but in its wider sense as a system of knowledge, behaviors, manifestations, and production of an individual or social group in the intellectual, folklore, moral, and material fields. This inclusive definition incorporates intellectual and artistic activity, beliefs, traditions and customs, technology, economic practices, and laws. In that sense, a "cultural system" would be a concept similar to that of *civilization* when it refers to a social group or cosmovision. In other words, when we we talk about a determined culture we are referring to a way of interpreting and living life. It is a way of relating to the world that surrenders us, in other words, to "a lifestyle," and therefore it is a concept with anthropological characteristics beyond merely the formative or educational.

One might wonder if the cultural systems or cultures are social structures that shape the identity of a social group or if they are individual constructions, given that identity is part of our individual self-construction. In order to be able to respond to this question and find answers to the approach of the study, we need to analyze the components of the cultural system. To give a satisfactory answer to this question it is necessary to establish a methodology of analysis of such systems. In addition, to accomplish this analysis, it is useful to refer to the concept of *cultureme*, often used today in translation studies, although with a different meaning from the one suggested here.

Culturemes

To correctly interpret the relationship between culture and indigenism, it is of paramount importance and epistemological usefulness to explore the concept of culturemes. By culturemes I mean the parts or units of meaning that compose a cultural system. In other words, a cultural system is formed by an undetermined but enormous number of culturemes, whose configuration is determined by the identity of the system. Any significant alteration, whether by suppression, addition, or mutation, can alter the recognizable identity of the cultural system over time or instantaneously because it varies depending on the individuals who help shape it.

Although culturemes could originate within a determined cultural system, they have the capacity to be shared by other individuals of other systems that can recognize them as essential. For example, in the field of literature, *Don Quijote* would be considered a cultureme belonging to the Spanish culture. Nevertheless, there are Spaniards who have not read the book, and for this reason, in the individual cultural configuration of this person, *Don Quijote* is not present. On the other hand, there might be a large number of Germans who consider *Don Quijote* one of their favorite readings, and in this case, a Spanish cultureme has been incorporated into the German cultural system.

Therefore, we can affirm that the cultural systems do not have a specific substantial identity.⁷ They are phenomenal and ideological constructions configured as a function of the disposition of culturemes that vary over time in relation to the individuals in the referred social group. They also vary according to the importance that each individual has given them. In that sense, the cultural systems are constructed—and at times even invented—in a historical way by the accumulation of culturemes until they differentiate from other systems. This evolution involves assimilations, losses, or variations of culturemes. For this reason, we cannot say that cultural systems are fixed, static, or definite entities, and if these systems could configure identities, they would be neither immutable nor predetermined identities.

Cultures, as systems, are not substance, although some culturemes can be. They are phenomena. Culturemes are a set of characteristics or elements that can alter their distribution and vary their composition and nature and hence their meaning and configuration of identity. The transformation of culturemes is continuous, and their extraordinary vitality and dynamism makes the cultural systems extremely permeable, so they inevitably tend to mutate. The exchange of culturemes between individuals or social groups is unavoidable, and if they do somehow contact one another, they are modified, producing a blend, the so-called miscegenation.

To define a cultural system and therefore a cultural identity, we should undertake the comprehensive analysis of each cultureme that it comprises. Similar to the DNA sequence that makes up the human genome, we could talk metaphorically of a “cultural genome” whose DNA would be the culturemes. In this way, in order to decrypt a cultural code, we have to describe all the culturemes on an individual and subsequently on a social level. It is a complex endeavor, just like decoding a human genome, and similar to DNA. The complexity of the cultural genome is not only in the number of culturemes but also in the fact that “cultural genes” are modified and altered continually. In the same way that flies or worms in the genetic metaphor seem to us organisms absolutely different from humans, but share a similar pattern

of embryonic development, similarly cultures, although they seem very different and remote at first glance, can also share a determined number of culturemes, acquired and incorporated into the system over the centuries. Hence the ease by which these culturemes “jump” from one individual to another, from one system to another; a substantial number of them, vaster than what we encounter, are compatible and do not generate rejection beyond ideology.

If we take into consideration the methodological analysis of the alteration of culturemes among cultural systems that are in contact, we realize how cultures do not expand (this is the reason why globalization does not suppose homogenization) nor do they integrate with others. Simply, what is produced is a mix of culturemes that transforms them and causes them to evolve. When this natural and inevitable process of miscegenation is obstructed, there is usually an ideological, political motivation by individuals and governments. Therefore, it is essential to preserve the cultural identity. The process by which to do this is another issue entirely.

The mutability of cultural systems implies mutability of individuals’ own identities that will be reconfigured for each new form of the structure of culturemes. Seen from this perspective, indigenism will be based on a misconception of cultural identity as something immutable that needs to be protected from exogenous influences. It is a nationalist and traditionalist discourse that incurs the contradictions of any nationalism: to consider culture as a homogenous system in each individual and also a static system that should avoid variation of its structure of culturemes. In other words, it is based on the denial of the possibility that a variety of cultural systems exist on an individual, historic, and social level and the rejection of its dynamic and evolutionary nature.

Cultural identity, as we have seen, is a phenomenal abstraction with a questionable ontological value subdued under individual and temporal variability. On many occasions, it is used as justification for political and ideological approaches. Indigenism, as an ideological and

political system, finds a historical enemy in the political concept of *mestizo*⁸, and for this reason, it is opposed to the conception of cultural systems as *mestizo* structures, or, in other words, mixed, variable, and subject to evolution. The process of configuring a cultural system and therefore a cultural identity is submitted to continuous changes over time. The accelerated development of the means of transportation and communication in the last five centuries and specifically in the last decades has favored the possibility that isolated cultural systems, with few shared culturemes, will make contact. By doing so they interchange culturemes and generate different structures from the ones previously known. This interchange, evolution, fusion, and blend of cultures is inevitable in today's world, but it is not new; it has happened repeatedly throughout history, although now the velocity and magnitude is completely different. All cultural systems are miscegenational, especially what we popularly call Western culture, born twenty-five centuries ago in the Athenian heart of the Mediterranean Sea and evolved historically toward something as complex as it is now.

For this reason, it is necessary to take into consideration some points related to the concept of culture:

— Cultural systems are dynamic since their structures are composed by culturemes in continuous variation. For this reason, they are not closed or finished but rather subject to historical evolution.

— Cultural systems are progressively acquired throughout the life of an individual, although it is logical that during childhood one may first incorporate a cultural structure that does not have to be identical to that of the social group in which the individual belongs, because one can incorporate culturemes learned by his/her family. Therefore they have a subjective nature: a cultural system will be the lowest common denominator of the cultural structures of individuals that compose a social group. These cultural systems are transmitted from generation to generation, but not in an immutable way in its totality, not by inheritance, but by selection.

— Cultural systems are subject to two formative forces: the social, that intends to transmit the common group culturemes; and the individual, who can freely select the culturemes to incorporate in a subjective way. That is to say, the culture of an individual does not have to correspond identically to the group culture. This permits the cultural system to have an expansive social dimension and at the same time a particular realization.

— Culture is plural: There are as many cultural systems as social groups and perhaps even as many as there are people. This diversity is due to the phenomenological facility that culturemes possess to transform systems.

— All cultural systems are, therefore, hybrid and dynamic. Understanding culture as a fixed, static entity and intending to “protect it or foment it” through the seclusion of determined culturemes only serves ideological motivation and political interests. Ethnocentrism is one of the principles on which nationalisms are based.

Criticizing ethnocentrism of any sort is comparable to the recognition of a common cultural denominator or “cultural universals.” Despite the multiplicity of culturemes, there is a determined quantity that is present in all cultures and others that still need to be obtained such as universal human rights. In this context, we understand “universality” as “interculturality” as being about the lowest common denominator that is culturally valid and accepted by everyone. Without this recognition, the transcultural dialogue would not be possible.

The acceptance of relativism and the rejection of any ethnocentrism should empower us to accept the wealth that cultural variety supposes. Nevertheless, the appreciation and consideration of all cultural systems do not necessarily mean the acceptance of all their culturemes. Cultural realities such as machismo or homophobia cannot be justified on grounds of cultural relativism: all cultural systems evolve and should filter out these culturemes that are against the most basic human rights.

To deny the existence and validity of common universal culturemes is denying reason, and clearly without reason anything is possible. In the world of artistic creation, ignoring reason could be interesting, but in the world of thought, without reason and logos we come back to mythos. Thanks to postcolonial studies, we know that Eurocentrism is a partial and limited hermeneutic system. Admitting these deficiencies and limitations of western reasoning, however, the fact that we acknowledge that there is sociocultural diversity and the fact that we need hermeneutics that can be adapted to these differences does not mean that we have to value scientific knowledge the same as beliefs and traditions. The epistemological “decolonization” of the modern paradigm of knowledge does not concede the same validity to knowledge and ignorance, to rationality and obscurantism; cultural diversity is not equivalent to cultural ignorance, and similarly we cannot equate ancestral tradition with scientific reason.

In Search of Solutions: Miscegenation and Acculturation

The coexistence of diverse cultures in the same space and time has always occurred alongside the expansion of the cultures associated with politically and economically dominant societies. Globalization, when related to the cultural process, is not a new phenomena; what is new is the dimension that globalization can reach with the current technology.

As a consequence or reaction to globalization, for more than a century movements of assertion and empowerment of local particularism and national identitarianism and ethnicism, like indigenism, have been produced. These ideological movements find reason to exist in the defense of divergences and discrepancies and concede an exaggerated idea of one’s own value and of difference by simply believing that therein resides the identity: if I am similar to the others, my identity is diluted; if what I have is worse than what others have, why would I preserve it? For this reason, “me and mine” are different and we are the best. The identitarian movement, much like ethnocentrism or nationalism, is constructed on cultural myths.

Tradition is another cultural value of ethnocentrism: what is mine comes from my father, grandfather, and many generations, and it is valuable because it is old. Nevertheless, cultural traditions, however ancient they might be, cannot find their valence exclusively in the past. Our society, our era, has incorporated important social culturemes such as gender equality, respect for minorities, and religious freedom that are incompatible in the discourse of certain cultural traditions that should cease to be considered world heritage, since culture is historic. In other words, it evolves, and its culturemes are contingent and can be modified. Culture cannot be sacralized and become immutable: to respect the culture, as we respect nature, we need to take care of it and let it evolve on the basis of its own laws. There is no culture or society that is pure, stagnant, and immutable, so we should not try to create one because it will be a pointless effort. To favor the incorporation of new culturemes in the individuals of a society is not cultural colonialism or ethnocentrism; it is simply evolution, it is to allow freedom in the flow of history.

Cultures are acquired and accessed through the family and social environment, but it is the individual's right and duty to identify if it belongs to its own culture. It has the potential to select the culturemes that configure its own cultural identity. Cultures cannot impose themselves on individuals against their will simply because it is the task of each individual to configure his or her own map of culturemes. Cultural liberty is a democratic principle essential to any society that wishes to be respected.

In a multicultural or intercultural society, in a society where individuals with different cultural identities live together harmoniously, it is not only inevitable, but also convenient and recommended that we favor acculturation. By the term acculturation, I mean the interchange in both directions of culturemes among individuals who belong to different cultural systems and live together in the same social settings. The most important point is not to forget that it is a reciprocal process: in our trip to Otavalo, we possibly learned more about women in the indigenous communities than they learned from us. In other words,

acculturation should not be understood as deculturation, as it is not the loss or renunciation of one's own culture. Acculturation is the result of the contact among cultures: the incorporation of new culturemes and the reconfiguration of cultural identity. In this understanding, acculturation is an enculturation or endoculturation in which the process of acquisition of culturemes does not occur through former generational inheritance but through socialization and interiorization on the part of the individual of the culturemes of an external culture or group. Historically, acculturation and miscegenation have been misinterpreted concepts, even depreciated at times, since every cultural system at its ideological level tends toward ethnocentrism, overestimating its own and underestimating the foreign. It is worth remembering the keynote verse of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, "Poverty-stricken Castile, yesterday a dominant power, wrapped in her rags *scorns all those things she is in ignorance,*" referring to the individuals who lack the intellectual curiosity to better understand the other.

Miscegenation is not renouncing part of one's own culture. It is not disloyalty to the ancestral culture; it does not pretend to substitute some culturemes with others derived from another foreign cultural system. Miscegenation is the fusion facilitated by tolerance and empathy. It is the discovery and acceptance of the other to the point of making it yours. It is mutual enrichment, reciprocity. Miscegenation is not an option; it is the essence of all cultural systems throughout history. In reality, it is the unavoidable law to which all cultures are subject. Cultures are hereditary and transmissible, and during this process of intergenerational transfer, a number of variations are produced. Cultures are not homogenous within a society, but depend on each group, individual, and historical moment. They are not hermetic, as their level of permeability depends on the degree of intellectual tolerance of the individual and institutions. Finally, cultures are far from static and immutable, constantly evolving and incorporating new culturemes, endogeneous and exogenous. Today, for many reasons, but fundamentally because of the scope of technological advances of transportation and communication of the magnitude of migratory movements and labor mobility (voluntary or obligatory), as well as the

incorporation of learning foreign languages into our education and the possibility of accessing cultural resources from all over the world, it is pointless to continue to cling to the concept of culture as exclusive nationalism and authoritarian personalism.

Indigenism, as well as other ethnocentric ideologies, is motivated in many cases by the identification of anything that is miscegenational with a determined political power. The colonial Black Legend¹⁰ and the neoindigenous legend are two sides of the same coin: first Hispanophobic, Europhobic, and then liberal-phobic. The decolonial movement combined colonialism and capitalism and pretended to establish relationships of opposition between indigenism and capitalism, committing historic imprecisions on important occasions. In a way, culturally we are all *mestizos*.

Insufficiency of the Indigenous Model in Otavalo

In the beginning of this article, I explained how the experience we acquired collaborating with the indigenous communities in Otavalo through the Yambiro project permitted us to reflect on indigenism from a social and anthropological perspective. In the previous pages, the article aimed to provide an approach to the political and cultural aspects of indigenism, the contradictions of this ideological movement, and its relationship with globalization. Additionally, this study presented the limitations of the ideology of *sumak kawsay* and of multiculturalism in order for a society to achieve integration and harmonious coexistence of two different cultures. My proposal is based on the evolving concept of the culture that depends on the alterations of culturemes offered in each individual and social group. But, why do I believe that the indigenous model is insufficient to improve the situation of the indigenous communities in general and in Otavalo in particular? Some of the principles that indigenous people appear to use for the proper functioning of the community, such as reciprocity or equality, are theoretical idealizations that paradoxically can provoke the promotion of situations of exploitation. For example, one of the issues that we verified working in the Yambiro Project was the distribution

of the work that follows family relationships. Kinship relationships and the concept of family is very important in the communities and functions as an element of cohesion and solidarity. Nevertheless, in the work environment family relationships do not guarantee an egalitarian and fair system, and they even directly and indirectly favor child labor since the individuals who take the place of women in household maintenance when they enter the industrial production of handicrafts are not other domestic service workers but the older girls. These family relationships are hierarchical and dependent power relationships that on some occasions can also be used under the false sense of interfamilial solidarity to hire relatives with low salaries or employ children without any kind of compensation.

Something similar was observed with the community work. During our stay in Otavalo, we had the opportunity to understand how a community work system called “minga” operates. According to this tradition, some members of the community voluntarily contribute their time and work to improve the infrastructures or help other members of the community with the construction of homes and other tasks. This is a pre-Columbian tradition that extended to other countries and represents the spirit of reciprocity, complementarity, and solidarity in the communities. Through *minga*, we were able to restore a paved road that used to be muddy and led to the community school of Esperanza de Azama. Those patterns of cooperation increase solidarity ties and support among the members of the community. The historic and current reality of the *minga*, however, has both light and shade: the Incas but also the Spanish colonizers and the Ecuadorian landowners during the postcolonial era use it to obtain gratuitous work from the peasants. Nowadays, since *mingas* do not offer any compensation, they are difficult to maintain, and in some communities, fines are imposed on those who refuse to collaborate, breaking the basic principle of voluntarism. *Minga* as cultureme of these societies in Ecuador is evolving, as is the case in other geographical areas. Instead of contributing directly with their work, the members of a community do so with the fruit of their work. In other words, they contribute their money and pay professionals to do community work, which creates employment and professionalizes

jobs, which are completed in a better way. The concept of taxes contains the same principal of solidarity and reciprocity since those who have more contribute more.

The *sumak kawsay* is an indigenous version of the Western welfare state: the legitimate aspiration of every society to live harmoniously with its fellow citizens and with nature. But it is erroneous to link this cosmivision to the rejection of “progress” and “development.” It is necessary and urgent to correct the disparities of the capitalist system related to the exploitation of humans and nature. To achieve this goal, we need more than ever the help of research, technology, and incorporation of indigenous knowledge, which has been underestimated until now. Superstition and shamanism will not resolve the sanitary problems of these communities. Miscegenation applied to health means incorporating knowledge of the indigenous people after it has undergone scientific research. The diagnostic ritual with a guinea pig is folklore and that is how it should be treated. It cannot occupy space in a clinic. Apart from folklore, it is also a form of animal maltreatment.

The concept of miscegenation that I defend, when applied to education, is supposed to defend exactly what the Ecuadorian Constitution expresses. In Article 347 it states that it is the responsibility of the State “to guarantee the intercultural bilingual education system, where the main language for educating shall be the language of the respective nation and Spanish as the language for intercultural relations” and also “to ensure that the teaching of at least one ancestral language be progressively included in the curriculum.”¹¹ In other words, it is necessary to promote bilingualism not only to the indigenous people, but to the rest of the population as well. This goal should be achieved without impairing the learning of other foreign languages such as English.

The path to combat segregation and discrimination, in Otavalo as well as in our society and university, involves understanding that miscegenation and interculturality is a process of interchange and mutual enrichment, a meeting point without return in which we all

incorporate new cultures into our identity to allow it to evolve toward tolerance and respect for one another. It is a reciprocal process: it is not about coexisting pacifically in cultural ghettos, but trying to mix our cultures as has happened throughout history, albeit at today's rhythm. We have no time to waste; we all will end up winners.

Notes

1. *Sumak Kawsay* acquired institutional power when it was included in the reform of the *Constitution of Republic of Ecuador* in 2008. In the second chapter, "Rights of the Good Way of Living," it is declared in Article 14, "The right of the population to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that guarantees sustainability and the good way of living (*sumak kawsay*) is recognized." Also, in Title VI, "Development Structure," Chapter One ("General Principles"), Article 275, it says, "The development structure is the organized, sustainable and dynamic group of economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental systems which underpin the achievement of the good way of living (*sumak kawsay*)" (<http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>).
2. *Pachamama* in the Quechua language means "Mother Earth," which represents nature. In the ancestral beliefs of the Andean peoples, *Pachamama* is one of the most important deities.
3. Milton Cáceres Vázquez, "Carta para el levantamiento, para la historia de otro poder, de otro saber, de otro tener y de otro celebrar. Aquí todavía existimos desobedientes," in *Resumen Latinoamericano* 83 (May-June, 2006): 4-5. The translation is mine.
4. <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.

5. José Matos Mar, “El sistema indigenista interamericano,” *Anuario indigenista*, vol. 32 (1993): 325.
6. Héctor Díaz-Polanco, “Diez tesis sobre la identidad, diversidad y globalización,” *Justicia y diversidad en América Latina. Pueblos indígenas ante la globalización*, ed. Victoria Chenaut, Héctor Ortiz, and María Teresa Sierra (Quito: FLACSO, 2011): 37-62 (http://www.ciesas.edu.mx/proyectos/relaju/documentos/DiazPolanco_hecator.pdf).
7. Gustavo Bueno, “Etnocentrismo cultural, relativismo y pluralismo cultural,” in *El Catoblepas* (<http://nodulo.org/ec/2002/n002p03.htm>).
8. *The Encyclopedia Britannica Online defines “mestizo” as follows: “Mestizo, plural mestizos, feminine mestiza, any person of mixed blood. In Central and South America it denotes a person of combined Indian and European extraction. In some countries—e.g., Ecuador—it has acquired social and cultural connotations; a pure-blooded Indian who has adopted European dress and customs is called a mestizo (or cholo). In Mexico the description has been found so variable in meaning that it has been abandoned in census reports. In the Philippines “mestizo” denotes a person of mixed foreign (e.g., Chinese) and native ancestry.”* See <http://www.britannica.com/topic/mestizo>.
9. Antonio Machado, *Field of Castile. Campos de Castilla*, ed. and trans. Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).
10. “Black Legend” (in Spanish, Leyenda Negra) is a term indicating an unfavorable image of Spain and Spaniards, accusing them of cruelty and intolerance, formerly prevalent in the works of many non-Spanish, and especially Protestant, historians. Primarily associated with criticism of 16th-century Spain and the anti-Protestant policies of King

Philip II (reigned 1556-1598), the term was popularized by the Spanish historian Julián Juderías in his book *La Leyenda Negra* (Madrid: Tip. de la Revista de Archivos Bibliotecas y Museos, 1914).

11. <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/english08.html>.

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