

## **DOCUMENTO DE DISCUSIÓN**

**DD/21/15**

### **Indigenous Protest as a Performance Genre**

Artículo de Investigación presentado en el panel “Participación Política Indígena y Afrodescendiente II” del XXXIII Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de Estudios Latinoamericanos (LASA), en San Juan, Puerto Rico, 27-30 Mayo, 2015.

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**Diciembre, 2015**

## **Indigenous Protest as a Performance Genre**

### **Abstract**

When carrying out organized political protest, indigenous peoples around the world often perform traditional dance and music, as well as wear traditional attire. Rather than taking these performances for granted, as habitual acts of resistance, this paper examines the conditions of possibility that have enabled them and argues that such explicit, self-conscious cultural performance is a recent development enabled by contemporary globalization.

More so, such performances have become a performance genre on their own right, a conventional style for the staging and reading of indigenous protest. Drawing from fieldwork research in the Ecuadorian highlands and aiming to provide a general theoretical framework, I examine the political work of indigenous protest as a performance genre that structures and is structured by the nature of audiences to which is geared and the alliances that it enables.

From Mapuches in Chile to Kichwas in Ecuador to Siksika in Canada, indigenous peoples around the world often perform traditional dance and music, as well as wear traditional attire, when carrying out organized political protest. Through these performances indigenous demonstrators not only forge solidarity, as they bring cultural values to the protest and come to see themselves as the actors driving the movement, but also interpellate the movement's others, the national and international audiences reading those performances, mostly through television and the internet. Expressing common grievance and displaying themselves as worthy and determined, demonstrators aim to "effect changes in attitudes and practices of those inside and outside the 'movement.'" Certainly, as Roy Eyerman has argued, for a social movement to be successful, the movement's others "must be 'moved'" (2006: 196).

Rather than taking such indigenous cultural performances for granted, as typical acts of resistance, this paper examines the conditions of possibility that have enabled them, arguing that such overt, self-conscious performances did not exist a few decades

ago. Rather, they are a recent development linked to contemporary globalization. More so, such performances can be analytically considered as a performance genre, as a conventional style for the staging and reading of indigenous protest. Drawing from fieldwork and archival research in the Ecuadorian highlands and aiming to provide a general theoretical framework, I examine the political work of indigenous protest as a performance genre that structures and is structured by the nature of audiences to which is geared and the alliances that it enables.

A warning though: analytically considering indigenous protest as a performance genre, I am not questioning the validity, or the authenticity of those performances, or the legitimacy of indigenous peoples historic demands. Ultimately, political acts and events are always performative. Representing competing versions of the social order, they aim at finding resonance beyond the performances, and as such they might reproduce but also transform the status quo (Askew 2002; Goldstein 2004; Guss 2000, Fabricant 2009). As other choreographies of protest (Foster 2003), indigenous performances during political mobilizations are geared and shaped by specific audiences.

Although some indigenous cultural performances during protests might be considered as “invented traditions,” these practices go beyond the strategic mobilization of indigenous essentialism for political purposes. As several scholars have noted, self-conscious cultural performance is today a prime way of “being-and-becoming” a modern indigenous subject, who acts politically in the world stage (Sahlins 2000: 475; Weber 1998: 388; Oakdale 2004: 61; see Comaroff 2010: 530). Such performances might be considered as “culture that is about culture,” or what Greg Urban calls “metaculture.” The development of metaculture, according to Urban, produces native ways of seeing and judgments about past and present, which, through

self-consciousness or understanding, impart a force to the culture that it is about and guide its future. Culture and metaculture are dynamically interconnected through representation, but such representation “does not reflect what something is but rather affects change of that something” (2001: 38).

The awareness, manipulation, and staging of culture by indigenous peoples to gain political leverage (Oakdale 2004: 60) have been studied in terms of a) “the commodification of authenticity” in tourist markets, by which indigenous peoples reproduce essentialist views of indigeneity to their advantage (Canessa 2012); b) the ways in which aspects attributed to indigenous peoples by colonizers have become part of indigenous self-images (Taussig 1987); c) the non-indigenous expectations for supposed authenticity when indigenous people demand a political voice (Ramos 1994; Conklin and Graham 1995; Conklin 2007); and d) the construction of alternative citizenship through the performance of indigenous culture (Lazar 2008).

The emergence of indigenous movements and their emphasis on ethnic identity to challenge exclusionary political practice entails, according to Alvarez et al, the enactment of cultural politics, the contesting of previously naturalized relations of power (1998). Ethnic identity becomes a political resource, as much as culture becomes explicitly political (Albó 2004: 34). As Colloredo-Mansfeld argues, participating in indigenous movements becomes “a new way of being indigenous, while self-conscious, overt displays of indigenous culture become a new way of being political” (2009: 88). In explaining such indigenous self-conscious cultural performance, studies have focused on structural enablers and political opportunity at the expense of paying little attention to the development of ethnic consciousness on the ground. When and how culture becomes self-reflexive metaculture? When and how overt displays of culture become repertoires of indigenous protest performances? Considering indigenous

Discussion Paper. Do not cite. protest as an emergent performance genre allows us to examine its different political work in terms of its multi-level audiences. My task is to examine, first, the conditions of possibility for indigenous self-conscious cultural performance and, second, the ways in which genre conventions might empower but also impose limits to the political aspirations of indigenous peoples.

### ***Indigenous Protest in Ecuador Across Time***

On 16 December 1961, around twelve thousand indigenous peasants marched in protest through the streets of Quito, Ecuador, demanding the implementation of a sweeping and equitable land reform. The march was organized by the Ecuadorian Federation of Indians, a subsection of the Ecuadorian Communist Party. The demonstrators were mostly wretched bonded laborers, wearing ponchos and hats. They held banners and signs with the names of their communities and unions, and with slogans demanding land, bread, education and justice. Reflecting the politics of that time, some of the signs also featured phrases supporting the Cuban revolution (Becker y Tuttillo 2009: 205; Guerrero 1993: 83).

The march was short and quiet, lasting only an hour and half. However, in a time in which Quito had only 400,000 inhabitants, it was a shocking event for its citizens. As the center of racialized political power, Quito was a city in which existing indigenous presence was made invisible. Quiteños imagined their city as an exclusive *blanco* (white) space and behaved as if there were no Indians there (Kingman 2006). They also imagined the Indian as a passive subject in need of civilization who turned irrationally violent during uprisings (Prieto 2004: 22; Clark 1998: 197). Such views had dictated the ways in which the state had dealt with indigenous mobilization since colonial times, indiscriminate repression.

In the 1961 demonstration, more than likely, the indigenous peasants feared state repression as much as Quiteños were apprehensive of Indians moving en masse. Reflecting the relieve from such anxiety, *El Comercio*, the main national newspaper, qualified the demonstration a day later as a “pacific invasion.” The German-Ecuadorian writer and journalist Lilo Lenke, who witnessed the demonstration, later described the protestors as “landless, poverty-stricken Indian farmers.” For Lenke, the question was “how much longer Indians... will wait. It cannot be too difficult to get them marching again, the next time perhaps in a not so humble mood” (1962:65).

Five decades later, indigenous demonstrators are anything but humble. They have returned to Quito to stage protests in 1990, 1992, 1994, 2000, 2001, 2006, and 2012. Instead of lowering themselves in dignity and importance, indigenous demonstrators today perform indigenous culture overtly. During uprisings and demonstrations, indigenous protestors have danced in their regional styles, following the music of guitars, drums, bandolinas and melodicas. They have performed in duets playing the *pinkullo*, a small Andean flute and a small drum. Some have played the *pututo*, a seashell trumpet that in pre-conquest times was a war instrument and today is used to warn or call together community members. *Yachaks*, indigenous healers, have taken time to fire up incense and perform ritual offerings to the powers of the landscape. Kayambi, Otavalo, Puruhá, Huaorani and Tsáchila peoples, among others, have performed music, dance and ritual as part of their choreographies of protests.

On 12 June 2012, the ECUARUNARI (Ecuador Runakunapak Rikcharimui: The Awakening of Ecuadorian Indigenous Peoples), the umbrella indigenous political organization in the Andean region, staged a demonstration in Quito’s center to commemorate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and demand to the government of President Correa the implementation of the right of prior consultation concerning extractive projects

affecting indigenous communities and the halting of the criminalization of social protest. The demonstration started with a ritual in which two *yachaks*, male and female, performed offerings to the sun and the mountains in exchange for protection and guidance. The ritual was followed by a protest march through the street of downtown Quito. Leading the march, eight young indigenous dancers performed in traditional colorful attire. When the march arrived to National Congress, the dancers defiantly performed in front of a line of around 30 policemen, some wearing riot gear, who were guarding the building, creating a powerful juxtaposition of moving, colorful, and joyful indígenas against stiff, dull, and potentially violent non-indígenas. Aware of the extensive presence of video cameras during demonstrations, indigenous demonstrators have performed such choreographies of defiance in several major uprisings throughout the 1990s and 2000s, particularly at very tense moments when repression might have been imminent. According to one interviewee, “Dancing and playing music fill the indígenas with energy while draining it from the armed opponents” (11/09/2011).

In the 1961 demonstration, in contrast, there were no self-conscious performances of indigenous culture. No meta-culture at play. As collective, self-conscious acts aimed at redefine self and other and reach support beyond the local, such performances were not available yet. At that time, when assimilation as state ideology prevailed and indigenous ways of life were heavily stigmatized, Ecuadorian indigenous peoples were not aware of the political power of indigenous cultural performance.

Take the Shuar, for instance. Becoming the first Amazonian group to organize under the banner of indigeneity, they created the Interprovincial Federation of Shuar Centers in 1964, in response to the efforts of the Ecuadorian state to bring settlers from the highland to their territories (Salazar 1977: 24). Oblivious to the indigenous populations in the eastern lowlands, the Ecuadorian land reforms of 1964 and 1973,

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promoted the colonization of those territories, as a way to weaken demands for land expropriation in the highlands (Lucero 2008: 105).

In the early 1980s, when a group of Shuar activists attended a meeting to express their concerns and negotiate with government officials, they wore western style clothing, as this photo demonstrates.



(Cuadernos de Nueva 1983: 14)

Today, in contrast, in any public display of their political identity, they wear traditional Shuar clothing, headdress, and body paint.





Both of these “presentations of the self” (Goffman 1981) can be considered as performances, as bounded acts separated from daily life done by subjects who consciously perform. However, it is the latter form that which has become the conventional way in which indigenous peoples express their political voice. As demonstrated by many anthropologists, the self-conscious display of culture to gain political leverage, as indigenous peoples enter national public spheres, is going on in many regions of the world.

***The conditions of possibility of cultural-conscious indigenous protest***

The overt display of indigenous culture during protest is a historical development that requires several subjective conditions of possibility that did not exist half a century ago. They are a) the awareness of the notion of culture in the plural, which sustains that all peoples have a culture instead of its interpretation as intellectual or artistic cultivation of the cultured few; b) the awareness of indigenous culture as something of worth, as something unique on which indigenous people can claim ownership; c) the awareness that there are audiences for the performance of indigeneity.

*a) Culture in the plural*

For most of the twentieth century, Ecuadorian national and local elites have held the idea of culture in the singular. The interpretation of cultural in the singular is a European, eighteenth-century development that became predominant in the nineteenth-century (Williams 1983). Linking social evolutionary thought and Western imperialism, cultural in the singular proposes a universal scale of cultural and rational progress. Human beings “become more ‘cultivated’ as they progressed over time intellectually, spiritually and aesthetically” (Overing 92). In the book *Cultural in the Plural*, Michel de Certeau argues that notions of culture that refer to “the features of

‘cultivated’ human beings” have strong political motivations because this is an imperial model that “introduces its norms wherever it imposes its power” (1997: 103).

After World War II and the demise of eugenic doctrines, explicit racism based on biology was gradually disappearing from Ecuadorian public discourse, but indianness was still stigmatized as a detrimental condition of existence because it corresponded to a lack of culture. In 1959, the Ecuadorian sociologist Victor Gabriel Garcés wrote “the indígena is a man behind in his cultural development but a full and complete man” (1957: 17). He argued that science has discredited racial categorization, and men should be classified in terms of their cultural development rather than their race. Non-indigenous liberal intellectuals as him associated culture not only with education and literacy but also with the quality of human existence and an aspiration to improve it (1957: 57). Indígenas had folklore or tradition but lacked culture in as much as they were uneducated, illiterate, and content with their “unhappy” existence. Non-indigenous intellectuals also equated culture with urbanity and civics. Culture, according to Garcés, was the “forger of citizenship.” Indígenas could not participate in politics because citizenship demanded literacy, and citizenship have not flourished in rural areas because culture had not flourished there (1957: 61). Identifying themselves as cultos (cultured persons), non-indigenous elites considered themselves the cultural paradigm that the indígenas should imitate (Clark 1998; Prieto 2004). Accordingly, they equated social mobility with “cultural improvement,” with the opening up of possibilities to overcome being an indio (Garcés 1957: 56).

The notion of culture in the plural, together with the widespread recognition that indigenous peoples have their own cultures, became prevalent in Ecuador during the 1970s and 1980s. By 1983, as part of the articulation of their nascent political identity, indigenous leaders started to claim that they have their own culture and to challenge,

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for the first time ever, the assimilationists policies of the Ecuadorian state. As General Secretary of ECUARUNARI (Ecuador Runacunapak Rikcharimui: The Awakening of Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador), the indigenous umbrella organization in the highlands, Blanca Chancoso claimed,

The government speaks about integration.... We ask, into what do they want us to integrate?... Since the arrival of the Spaniards, we have been told that it is necessary to civilize the indígenas. I don't know whom they are going to civilize. We, indígenas, have our own culture. We possess our own language, our customs, and our organizational forms" (1983: 42).

Before this time, indigenous individuals did not speak about their worth as culturally different peoples. Instead, in the face of crass discrimination, many of them denigrated their own ways of life as "uncivilized" (Lentz 2000: 202).

*b) Indigenous culture as something of worth, as something on which indigenous people can claim ownership*

Before the 1970s, there was no articulation of indigenous ways of life as something of worth as a whole, neither by non-indigenous nor indigenous individuals. Non-indigenous intellectuals, government agents and clerics in particular criticized indigenous fiestas as harmful and irrational traditions that demonstrated that the indígenas were lagging in cultural development (Barlett 1980: 116). In Otavalo, the Fiesta de San Juan, known today as Inti Raymi, included not only widespread drunkenness but also a ritual combat between communities known as tinku, which could result in injuries and even deaths. The Ecuadorian anthropologist Gonzalo Rubio Orbe, who became the director of Instituto Indigenista Interamericano from 1971 to 1977, considered best in the name of culture to stamp out such traditions.

The form, practice, and customs that are observed in these fiestas have so many negative aspects of drinks, expense, scandals, and impoverishment, and so little and superficial religious content, that it is now time, in the name of culture, of the principles and rights of men and communities, and for the decorum and wellbeing of that same religion, that they ought to be suppressed or transformed (1956: 317).

Rubio Orbe, who was born in Otavalo, considered that the indígenas of the communities of Peguche, Quinchuquí and Ilumán were the most advance in Ecuador because of “social osmosis,” a process by which these indígenas had acquired some of the values and habits of the “white” population. These indígenas had self-esteem, initiative, and a jovial and confident disposition. They were sociable and communicative, and they did not let others exploit them. In Rubio Orbe’s own words, they were “indios despiertos,” awakened Indians (1953: 44).

During the 1970s and 1980s, many indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Andes halted the celebration of several festivities that were part of the ritual cycle of the cargo or fiesta system (Cervone 2012: 215; Corr 2010: 75; Guerrero Cazar 1990: 154; Lyons 2001: 43; Walter 1981: 183). Many of these festivities ceased to exist because members of the younger generation were unwilling to bear the onerous cost of the sponsorships, which channeled indigenous resources into non-indigenous hands. Their reluctance relates to several transformations of the social landscape. Land reforms transformed the land tenure structure and gradually put an end to the servile relations of production of the old hacienda regime; religious conversion from Catholicism to Evangelical Protestantism turned many indígenas away from participating in the fiestas; and schooling, labor migration, itinerant trade, and development projects opened new paths for social mobility (Muratorio 1982; Crain 1989; Ferraro 2000). Because of their literacy skills, the younger generation became the new leaders, shunned cargo

sponsorships, and criticized the their forebears' lifestyle as burdened by drinking and exploitation.

From the late 1980s, in tandem with their political mobilization, indígenas started to recuperate festivities that had "died out," as a part of what Barbara Butler calls "self-conscious indigenous revival" (2006: 393; see also Corr 2010: 75). A case in point is the community of Huaycopungo, where the Fiesta del Coraza was staged anew in 2000, after a sixteen-year hiatus (Butler, 2006, p. 342). The Fiesta del Coraza is a festivity specific to the valley of Otavalo in which the sponsor wears a spectacular costume.

Current community fiestas are very different from those of the recent past. Today, there are no exploitative authorities, priests or costume renters. Sponsorships no longer deplete the economic resources of the *priostes* (sponsors). Most of the funds come from a small fee paid by community members to the community councils, which are responsible for organizing the festivities. This revival has not only given indígenas a sense of pride but has also strengthened their solidarity.

The self-conscious revival that indígenas have put into action is not a direct outcome of primordial traditions and a pre-existent ethnic consciousness; rather, it is a work in progress. As Susana Oyagata argues, indígenas of Huaycopungo only started to revive the Fiesta del Coraza once they realized that it was theirs.

Indígenas from here already have the vision of somehow re-appropriating (our culture). A few years ago, the Fiesta del Coraza was very discredited. People did not want to hear anything about it. Some asked, 'Do we want to revive the Coraza? What for?' The evangelicals said that those were pagan festivities. Others asked, 'How are we going to revive a festivity in which we suffered discrimination, humiliation and, at the same time, exploitation? We do not want that'. But then we realised that the festivity belongs to us, that it is our own. From then on we have resumed the celebration. (2011, pers. comm., 29 September)

*c) Audiences for the performance of indigeneity*

Three or four decades ago, when indigenous ways of life were heavily stigmatized, indigenous fiestas were inward-looking events in which visitors were unwelcome and might be harassed. Today, they are outward-looking celebrations in which everybody is welcomed. Rather than being fixed by tradition, contemporary festivities demonstrate the creative cultural transformations that make tangible for participants a sense of their continuity as a people (B. Butler 2006: 374).

The development of self-conscious indigenous performance geared to audiences relates to the transformation of fiestas into festivals. Reflecting on the ways in which festivals have become part of the Andean cultural landscape, Stuart Rockefeller argues that festivals are not fiestas. The latter 'refer to celebrations, normally in some sense religious', whereas festivals 'consist largely of representations of what are taken to be the most significant performative elements of the fiestas' (1999, pp. 120–1). Fiestas might represent the social relations of the participants, but festivals aim to represent a culture, or cultures, as something of worth to an audience. In addition, festivals objectify chosen elements of the fiestas, placing them in another context, that of spectacle, a performative event of a certain scale structured around the distinction between performers and audience (1999, p. 125). As self-conscious reflections on indigenous culture, festivals are metaculture.

In Ecuador, indigenous music and dance started to achieve for the first time national and international recognition during the 1970s, in part through the effort of the French music producer Jean Chopin Thermes. Indigenous groups from Otavalo, such as Grupo Peguche, Obraje, and Nanda Manachi began to record vinyl albums and to perform in theaters and universities. Such cultural work, according to many contemporary indigenous leaders, was the foundation for the valorization of indigenous

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culture. Soon after, otavaleño music groups started to play music locally for tourists and also abroad, in plazas and fairs increasingly afar, following the path opened by itinerant traders. In addition, indígenas started to develop their own festivals.

Indígenas in Otavalo celebrate two festivals that may be considered invented traditions: the Pawkar Raymi (Festival of Flowering) in 1999 and the Kulla Raymi (Festival of the Inca's consort) in 1995 (Wibbelsman 2008: 50; Rogers 1999: 60). Both were adopted from the Inca ritual calendar. The Pawkar Raymi, in February, is a sport and music mega-event that developed from a football championship. The Kulla Raymi, in September, is a celebration of women and fertility staged each year in a different hosting community by the Federación Indígena y Campesino de Imbabura (FICI: Indigenous and Peasant Federation of Imbabura). Both the Pawkar Raymi and the Kuya Raymi receive financial support from corporate and state sponsors.

The audiences for these festivals/spectacles go beyond the local, getting considerable attention from people abroad. As Auky Anrango, the main organiser of the 2011 Kuya Raymi, argues, their ambitions go beyond the local: “the recovery that we are doing, revitalizing the festivities, is in fact successful. And we want to make this visible not only at the provincial level but at a global level” (3/10/2011).

Such global awareness also shapes the performance of indigenous protest. As any protest trying to influence the movement's others at the national and international levels, indigenous choreographies of protest are shaped by media coverage, by the recording and distribution of videos and photographs. From the perspective of protest organizers', such coverage not only effectively distribute the message but also helps to protect relatively the demonstrators, documenting cases of state repression. Garnering support through media, the movement might gain negotiation leverage through public pressure, nationally and internationally. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities

sets their own video recording teams to document the demonstrations and to present an alternative perspective, through alternative channels, to that of the government.

***What is a genre?***

What is a genre? Derrida considered genres as a futile exercise of border policing. Genres imply drawing limits, which inevitably leads to norms and interdictions: ‘Do’, ‘Do not’ (1980). Rather than considering genres as ontological taxonomies, more contemporary analyses emphasize their pragmatic function as fields that generate and shape knowledge of the world. As John Frow argues, rather than asking, “what kind of thing is this?” We should be asking, “what kind of world is brought into being here?” (2007: 1633).

Genres are structures rather than events; they are “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (Miller 1994: 31). Their mode of existence is social, and their nature rather than logical is historical. As Tzvetan Todorov argues, genres are “only the classes of texts that have been historically perceived as such” (1976:102). Genres function as a “horizon of expectations” for their audiences (Dimock 2007: 1379), framing events with the “situational expectations and ranges of potential strategic responses” of the actors (Frow 2007: 1630). As such, they provide codified substantive, stylistic, and situational elements, from stages to emplotments to characters to behavior.

As a genre, indigenous protest demands the performance of indigenous authenticity. As anthropologist Alcida Ramos (1994) has argued for the Brazilian case, indigenous activists have to perform the role of the “hyperreal Indian,” a perfect Indian who is ‘more real than the real Indian’, in order to be heard – a performance that Baudrillard would call simulacrum. Indigenous activists have to perform authenticity



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because dominant discourse values indigenous peoples as survivors of the past. As such, they and their cultures are at risk of either extinction or assimilation. In Ecuador, the hyperreal Indian wears a poncho in the highlands and a loincloth in the lowlands; otherwise he runs the risk of being called an *aculturado*, a person who has assimilated into mainstream mestizo culture. This compulsion of non-indigenous observers to regiment indigenous ways of life is analogous to Michel-Rolph Trouillot's idea of the savage slot, the process by which the west constituted itself, assigning the slot of the primitive to its imperial others.

### ***Alliances and Globalization***

Non-indigenous people have not only appropriated indigenous resources and labor for centuries but also have legitimized that dispossession by means of constructing a social reality as a dichotomy with them at the top and their opposite, the stigmatized and impoverished indigenous group, at the bottom.

After conducting fieldwork in the Ecuadorian highland valley of Otavalo during the late 1970s, anthropologist Leo Chavez claimed, "local life was organized within the boundaries of two caste-like ethnic groups" (1982). The common terms for these groups were *indio* on the one hand and *blanco* on the other. Blancos had access to institutional forms of appropriation of indigenous resources and labor, which included forced-labor schemes and economic exploitation through festivities. The system worked because blancos shared a moral economy of complicity among themselves that dictated that they never should ally with the indios. Since blancos monopolized state and law enforcement offices, the indios did not have access to redress channels.

Globalization opened the possibilities for new alliances that enable to overcome the organization of local life as the dichotomy of blancos/indios. In Otavalo, through

the increasing contact with foreigners due to tourism and travelling, indigenous persons started to realize that discrimination was locally determined. As Lynn Meisch claims, “a leitmotiv of Otavalos’ travel stories is how much better they are treated outside Ecuador” (2013: 77). Foreigners not only treated otavaleños with respect but also demonstrated interest in learning about their supposedly stigmatized ways of life. From the 1970s, increasing numbers of tourists came to see the ‘authentic Indian market of Otavalo’, and indigenous activists started to realize that indigenous culture was something of worth.

Globalization also contributed to the emergence of an international imagined community of indigenous peoples. The internationalization of indigenous rights and increasing global networking have contributed significantly to the development of indigenous activism, vis-à-vis increasing international recognition and support.

#### *Sympathetic Global Audiences*

A genre brings *a* world, with particular affective charges, into being. The nature of the audiences mobilizes different moral and affective relationships. Anthropologist Stefano Varese has described the engagement of indigenous activists with international organizations and audiences as a case of “Think locally, act globally,” the opposite of the 1990s slogan of grass-root activism of ‘Act locally, think globally’ (1991). As several authors have argued, indigenous demonstrators often perform for international media to harness support for their causes, often challenging their historical oppression and marginalization.

The problem is that indigenous protest, as a performance genre, codifies morality based on the idea of the noble savage that imagines an exotic primitive, uncorrupted by modernization or capitalism, living in balance with nature, and

practicing the values of community. As Beth Conklin argues, “Westerners expect ‘genuine’ indigenous people to be disinterested in consumer commodities and moneymaking’ (2007: 129). Market economies, she adds, are a fact of life for most indigenous peoples in Amazonia today. And if Amazonians are late newcomers, indigenous Andeans have engaged with market economies for centuries.

Indigenous protest as a performance genre also reduces “indigeneity to a singular set of logics and dilemmas” (Tsing 2007: 33), skipping over the complexities of indigeneity around the world. Indigenous leaders mobilize essentialist discourses to get support from audiences abroad. However, such essentialism might sound hollow for the indigenous bases in the communities.

#### *Unsympathetic Local Audiences*

In Otavalo, non-indigenous persons often resent that outsiders consider indígenas as holders of a higher moral ground. Non-indigenous persons claim that they know better and are ready to criticize the indígenas as exploiters of their peers in the weaving workshops, as unprepared for political positions, and as untrustworthy and immoral persons who above all focus on their own personal gain.

Local non-indigenous people, who historically have exercised ethnic discrimination, are also an audience for indigenous culture-conscious protest. Indigenous protest mobilizes the symbolic value that international audiences give to indigenous cultures to fight against their historical stigmatization at the local level. Through cultural performance, indigenous activists deliberately challenge notions and sentiments of national belonging that have equated indigeneity with inferiority and non-indigeneity with superiority, with awareness that in a globalized world local indigenous culture has a worth that national non-indigenous culture lacks.

However, based on dominant notions that equate indigeneity with stasis and poverty, local non-indigenous persons can claim that some indigenous persons are not authentic anymore, that they are performing indigeneity for political or economic purposes. According to the assimilationist ideology of *mestizaje*, if *indígenas* change, they are *indígenas* no more—they have become mestizos. Still associating indigeneity with marginalization, many non-*indígenas* consider that a poor, monolingual, Kichwa-speaking peasant is more authentically indigenous than a rich multilingual trader or a savvy politician. What Alcida Ramos has argued for Brazil is applicable to Ecuador and other parts of the world: the economic success of some indigenous families has offended “those people for whom real Indians must be pure and poor.”

### ***Conclusions***

Rather than considering indigenous cultural performance during protests as acts of continuous, long standing resistance done by indigenous peoples acting on their historical consciousness, those acts are the outcomes of a new episteme, new conditions enabling their possibility, new conditions characterized by the emergence of metaculture, reflexive culture that did not exist half a century ago.

As a genre, culture-conscious indigenous protest works in the interaction of the performative space constituted by its local and global audiences. It structures and is structured by the broader alliances that have made it possible to overcome a dichotomized construction of social reality. It has empowered indigenous activists to transform the ways in which their countries have been imagined. However, it has done so in accordance to dominant discourse, reproducing essentialist and exoticistic notions of indigeneity. As a stylistic convention, the performance of expected indigeneity might

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reproduce stereotypical views that relate indigeneity with stasis. The genre is triggered but not controlled by the indigenous actors.

According to Wai Chee Dimock, “switching genres is one of the most eloquent signs of political agency” (2007: 1384). The difficulties that indigenous peoples find in doing so might be a measure of the limitations of their political agency. On the other hand, it is up to indigenous activists to find creative ways to denounce the continuing injustice bearing on indigenous peoples breaking the boundaries of indigenous protest as a performance genre.

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