

Transcommunality

From the Politics of
Conversion to the
Ethics of Respect

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development, with guidance from elders and friends, that this work of mine is propelled by those currents flowing from the springing hopes of my ancestors.

I do not feel like one of those "crossing border hybrids" now so much discussed by scholars who examine postmodernity. Nor does the older Latin American term "Zambo," for "half black/half Indian," describe how I know myself. It is not in such a divided fashion that I recognize my existence. To the contrary, in the language of my Algonkian ancestors, *Noh Neen*—I am a man—who stands at *newichewannock*—"the place between two strong currents." Without these two distinct streams there can be no such in-between place. But this place is real and complete unto itself. In the same way, I emerge a full man, not a simple bifurcated halfling, from the two strong currents of Africa and Native America. It is this *newichewannock* that marks the place of my spirit, and that propels me today.⁴

3

Emplacements of Affiliation

Emplacements of Affiliation and Their Linkages

TRANSCOMMUNAL COOPERATION emphasizes coordinated heterogeneity across "identity lines"—not only of "ethnicity," "race," "class," and "gender," but also of organizationally, philosophically, and cosmologically diverse settings. Transcommunality entails a changed way of thinking, a paradigm shift or, to use the Andean Indigenous terminology, *Pachakutiq*, "a change of direction" (Delgado, 1994, 1). Transcommunality moves beyond the classic Eurocentric, progressive emphasis on homogenizing unity based on the leadership of a "vanguard party," while also escaping from aimless ever-splintering relativism of the post-modern perceptions of diversity and multiculturalism. As Gilles Deleuze says, in another context, it is not enough to say "Long live the multiple" (1993a, 29).

There is no doubt as to the tremendous discipline and courage that many vanguard groups have maintained in the face of often brutal and overwhelming odds. However, much Euro-based progressive political thought is impressed with the seal of the tradition of conversion of one's neighbors to one's own particular perspective, generally viewed as the only accurate position. This approach involves, as Gemma Corradi Fiumara says, the "illusion that we can speak to others without being able to listen" (1990, 29). Important parts of Marxist practice, for all its heroic and

courageous developments, are heirs to the politics of conversion, and this should be addressed directly. Conversionary politics requires its adherents to assert a distinct set of beliefs to which others, if they are to be partners in the struggle for justice, must convert. By contrast, transcommunitality emphasizes a general ethics of respect in which mutual recognition and acceptance of diverse, even divergent perspectives occur among partners. Transcommunitality sees distinct group locations with their often clear-cut boundaries and well-developed internal senses of communal integrity as essential. It is precisely from these clearly defined, rooted locations that diverse communities can reach out to one another, creating constellations of cooperation that reinforce rather than undermine a positively interactive heterogeneity.¹

These ethics of respect can lead to some transformation of interacting participants as they learn more about one another. However, this transformation is not a one-sided conversion to a single perspective, but rather involves an opening up to shared understandings. My development of the concept of transcommunitality, drawing in large part from many Indigenous models of alliances in the Americas, offers a flexible approach in which the autonomy of cooperating participants rather than uniformity is key. This transcommunal approach entails a *Pachakuteq*-like "change of direction" as described by Guillermo Delgado, from a lineal worldview in which one group presumes to lead the rest along a single path, to a more circular orientation in which there are many different angles of approach, all of which can lead to the same central position but all of which have their own distinct locations.²

Consequently, for transcommunal activists, diversity need not be a barrier to cooperation. Rather, diversity is absolutely essential for any effectively coordinated multitude of positions. As John Calmore points out, "in a multicultural society . . . justice will develop from the diverse views" of those in different arenas of struggle (1995, 1233). Once this premise is accepted, a key issue becomes that of developing a framework within which diverse activists in multiple positions can work together without losing

the unique essence of their being that is crucial to their strength, which itself is necessary in order for them to be effective as bridges to one another. Transcommunitality offers such a framework. Transcommunitality is a method that incorporates fusion and fission, structure and fluidity. It allows for a high degree of diversity, autonomy, and coordination of its participants. This coordination involves a particular form of dialogue similar to that described by Tzvetan Todorov, which is "animated by the idea of a possible progression in the discussion." Such dialogue, says Todorov, "does not consist in the juxtaposition of several voices but in their interaction" (1993, 52). In parallel, bell hooks describes the essential equality of a dialogue that "implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination" (1989, 131).

Transcommunitality does not negate the communities and perspectives from which interacting participants emerge. Rather, it involves a form of responsiveness in which the participants' mutual awareness of each other is enhanced and modified. Such interaction is similar to that dialogue described by Patricia Hill Collins in which "everyone has a voice, but everyone must listen and respond to other voices in order to be allowed to remain in the community." Collins asserts that sharing "a common cause fosters dialogue and encourages groups to transcend their differences" (1990, 236–237). Similarly, transcommunitality entails a process of self-transformation among its participants as they interact and communicate with one another.

But transcommunitality is not only "dialogic" in the sense of speaking and listening, as important as they are. Transcommunitality also entails constant learning through continuous interaction of diverse participants, which in turn builds mutual trust and understanding, both as to what kinds of relations are possible, but also as to what kinds of relations are not possible.³ Such progressive transformation of distinct, interacting participants in common projects does not require a melting-pot's boiling-down of distinctions into a single homogenized whole. *Mutual learning*

and transformation are only possible precisely because there really are different vantage points based on distinctive experiences. As Mikhail Bakhtin points out, none of us can engage in such a pure empathy with another that we lose our own identities in the process. Bakhtin says, "If I actually lost myself in the other instead of two participants there would be one." This would be an "impoverishment of being" (1993, 16).

In contrast to such "impoverishment," transcommunality offers an *enrichment* of social being through its emphasis on autonomous participants whose interaction reaffirms their sense of distinctive, rooted affiliations while also nourishing shared identity among them.⁴ The glue holding these transcommunal ties together is that of face-to-face interpersonal relationships of mutual trust, built up through *shared practical action*, in which people from what I call different *emplacements of affiliation* can work together around shared tasks and objectives.

The open, inclusionary approach of transcommunality emphasizes the creation of shared structures and outlooks through negotiations among diverse participants, rather than being a priori and imposed from one source. Different activists, rooted in their own distinctive community and institutional settings, form the foundations for interaction. The solid ground of cultural, social, philosophical, and organizational affiliations allows for transcommunal bridges to be built. Martin Luther King Jr. proposed such transcommunal outlooks in his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*. King asserted the necessity of an African American people who would "be mindful of enlarging the whole society." He argued that "we must not overlook the fact that millions of Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Indians and Appalachian whites are also poverty-stricken. Any serious war against poverty must of necessity include them" (1967, 156).

King was moving toward addressing the lack of positive relationship among racial/ethnic groups, which is a historically important dilemma for those working on the creation of cooperation. The interaction of many racial/ethnic groups is often limited at

best and hostile at worst. For those trying to organize interracial/ethnic cooperation, the decades of inequality, oppression, and the corrosive influence of authoritarian divide-and-rule strategies create tremendous difficulties in shaping positive interaction.

However, there is another equally significant area of concern for those seeking to act transcommunally. This involves gaps among fundamentally distinct emplacements of affiliation. An *emplacement* is a site of collective life shared by a group of people that provides them with a rooted and demarcated sense of shared perspective and affiliation. An emplacement may be geographically located (or from the point of view of some communities, spiritually located in a particular geographical setting). Or an emplacement may involve dispersed members who nonetheless feel solid commonality based on "sites" defined in terms of religious, ideological, philosophical sets of shared beliefs, values, and objectives. Such affiliations are not exactly "identities." In fact, that term, as in "identity politics" carries with it too much psychological baggage. For example, "multiple identities" rings of mental disorder. However, "multiple affiliations" comes more easily to the lips insofar as people can have such pluralistic affiliations, perhaps arranged in rank order of significance or perhaps arranged equally. So emplacements of affiliation are places and organizational environments of belonging that are experientially fundamentally significant to those involved and which may or may not involve some degree of exclusivity vis-à-vis other affiliations.

"Emplacement" means of course "place" and "placing" of something or someone in a given location, and implies a fortification, a defensive position. The reality of human society and history is not only that we live in places or have memory of significant places. Most of those places are also in some way "fortified." By fortified, I do not necessarily mean by weapons (although that can be the case). Rather I mean the fortifications of distinctive group symbols, ceremonies, holi(holy)days, food, clothing, music, jokes. These symbol-walled hill forts constitute most communal identities. There are the fences (perhaps, to use the phrase in

Robert Frost's poem, "good fences" under some circumstances) that constitute a key part of human life. Such "fortified" emplacements are not necessarily aggressive, nor must they be hostile toward those outside the fencing (although such hostility obviously can and does happen). But those within such settings clearly mark off certain moments and spaces as their own that others either cannot enter, or can enter only with permission or at certain times. Useful to note is that the equivalent Spanish term *emplazamiento* also can mean a summons—a call to the plaza, the place. In this communicative sense of calling people together, "emplacement" also is of value to any discussion of cooperation and communication.

Thinking transcommunally requires a pragmatic recognition of this fundamental fortified-place aspect of human communal existence. *Places* and the consciousness attached to them are, as Arif Dirlik says, "integral to the human experience" (2001, 15). He adds that such places are not simply locations/moments but are constantly produced by human activity. As Dirlik emphasizes, we must work with this basic reality. We do not need to try to wish it away in order to talk about the relationship between pluralism and cooperation. That wishful route leads, at its worst, toward oblitative state policies aimed at crushing distinctive cultures and communities in the name of unity. By contrast, transcommunal action draws from the strength of many such pluralistic and distinctive fortified places rather than trying to bypass or evaporate them. This drawing from multiple emplacements of affiliation gives transcommunality its practical rather than simply utopian dimension, and its embracing outlook rather than a closed-fist, dogmatic, conversionary perspective.

Certainly, emplacements of affiliation are significant in part because each has its own distinct "rules of the game" and its unique goals, methods, and outlooks. For example, those who work on issues such as violence against women, child labor, or environmental destruction can be said to have distinctive organizational/goal-oriented/philosophical emplacements of affiliation. Those working from left and labor perspectives of necessity have as a

central organizing worldview the significance of class in general and of working-class status in particular. When they wrestle with the questions of bringing members of different racial/ethnic groups together, it is primarily within the context of their "working-class identity" vis-à-vis the owners of the means of production. So we can imagine a multiracial, labor-oriented emplacement in which organizers have managed to bring together Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans. But such organizing is reasonably premised on the basis that all those involved in the particular alliance are essentially workers who face the same fundamental conditions in the workplace and confront the same companies. For example, efforts by the United Electrical Workers to build bridges between U.S. (Anglo, African American, and Latino) workers and their colleagues in Mexico are now underway since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994. The key unifying feature is their shared status as electrical workers, employed at the same company, General Electric. Basic objectives, essential worker outlooks, and similar conditions (albeit with different wage structures and work conditions north and south of the border) characterize this situate form of organizing.

However, there are other significant emplacements energized by very different concerns. In a multitude of such settings, other objectives, outlooks, and ways of life are often importantly different from those of the labor activists. As the Gramscian scholar Renate Holub points out: "The working class . . . no longer seems to constitute the backbone of the present nation-state. . . . Impulses for radical democratic politics will, therefore, no longer emanate from the working class . . . but from the formation of new social and cultural groups that pursue various liberatory and emancipatory agendas" (1992, 175–176). I basically agree with my friend Renate Holub but must add that an important portion of what she calls the "impulses for radical democratic politics" are not completely "new." Rather, many such impulses are rooted in ancient traditions. I am thinking here in particular of many forms of Indigenous activism around the world as but one of such rooted "impulses" for freedom.

Indigenous Activism

Thomas thought about all the dreams that were murdered here,
and the bones buried quickly just below the surface.

—Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues* (1995, 7)

Many Indigenous⁵ activists from the Arctic to Argentina, and across the Pacific into Asia and Africa, emphasize not “class” and “individual human rights” as central issues, but focus instead on *community-based* land and on *free determination* to decide whether and to what degree integration and separation from the nation-state should take place. They focus as well on spiritual power.⁶ The land, which is ancestral, is a place of spiritual strength and renewal and cannot be viewed from such perspectives as just a material object. A sense of spiritual infusion alongside genealogical rootedness in a particular place, combined with a deep concern for autonomy or sovereignty, becomes more salient than “class” in such settings. To be more exact, the very distinction between “spiritual” and “material” does not apply to many such outlooks. Rather, these dimensions are fused in complex and fluid ways.⁷ Moreover, an intense concern for sovereignty of Indigenous cultures at one level is quite the opposite of the globalistic views of many leftists and environmentalists who often critique sovereignty and “identity politics” as a source of chauvinism and a barrier to cooperation. By contrast, for many Indigenous communities and peoples we might say that “cultural justice” rather than the more commonly used term “social justice” would be more accurate as the rallying cry. These distinctive Indigenous outlooks must be recognized if we are to organize shared frameworks between labor and those who are struggling for sovereignty of their ancestral territory.

Often, many urban left and labor activists, already struggling to make some significant contributions to the relationship between categories of “worker,” “ethnicity,” and “race,” are generally oblivious to the significance of these communities, their traditions, and the dilemmas which they face. Guillermo Delgado, writing about Indigenous community activism in Latin America, observes that many leftist “popular” movements emphasize the

centrality of the urban/working class, but often marginalize and miss the salience that land, autonomy, dignity, and spiritual perspectives can have for many Native peoples: “From an Indigenous point of reference, Indigenous peoples’ histories remain colonial when reduced to class. Class is not everything. . . . Indigenous histories are not just about exclusion; above all they are about land” (1994, 6).⁸

Many Indigenous scholars also point to the significance of spiritually and kinship infused understandings that are quite different from western economic-materialistic models of human society and “nature.” As Jack Forbes informs us, there is a “closeness of Native Americans to the natural world and to animal life.” This closeness, he says, is not just one of an individualistic experience but also involves “good acts” that involve the well-being of others (1992, 29 and 155). Rebecca Adamson, president and founder of the First Nations Development Institute, observes: “The indigenous understanding has its basis in spirituality, in a recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living things. . . . The ‘environment’ is perceived as a sensate, conscious entity suffused with spiritual powers through which the human understanding is only realized in perfect humility before the sacred whole” (1996, 64).

Similarly, the Indigenous emphasis on ancestral space is clear in Hawaiian sovereignty activist Haunani-Kay Trask’s observation that “In our genealogy, Papahānaumoku—earth mother—mated with Wekeā—sky father—from whence came our islands, or *moku*. Out of our beloved islands came the taro, our immediate progenitor, and from the taro our chiefs and peoples.” Consequently, “Our relationship to the cosmos” is “familial,” Trask says: “If we husband our lands and waters, they will feed and care for us. In our language, the name for this relationship is *mālamā’āina*: care for the land who will care for all family members in turn” (1993, 82–83).

In parallel fashion, Mapuche leader Aucan Huilcaman notes that in Chile, their Indigenous conception of land is “connected in a substantial manner with being human and with our own

nature. Our conception of territory is a physical space where the Mapuche people should have control, planning power, and autonomy to exercise free self-determination" (1994, 18). Winona LaDuke, president of the Indigenous Women's Network, emphasizes the importance of land and communal self-determination when she writes:

Today native people have four percent of their original land base and on our lands we have two-thirds of the uranium resources in the United States and one-third of the western low sulfur coal resources. We also have vast oil reserves in our territories, for example, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Gwich'in Territory in Alaska. Obviously, in the case of the dams we have vast water resources on our lands. The implications in an era of energy junkies, in a society that consumes way beyond its capacity, are devastating for our communities. (1991, 17)

Matthew Coon-Come, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Cree of Québec, pointed to the close connections of his people with the land in a forum on environmental destruction: "I am here with others from my area. Our people from Whapmagoosui, Waswanipi, and Waskaganish are hunters and trappers, people who really live off the land. I am only one among many who believe in speaking for Mother Earth, for who can speak better than the ones who have lived with the animals and been tied to the land?" (1991, 7). In the report *Status and Rights of the James Bay Cree*, Coon-Come emphasizes the way in which these fundamental perspectives on territory are so crucial "to the right of self-determination." The nation-states of the western hemisphere, he says, "have denied our rights, denied even that we have these rights, denied that we are peoples who possess the right of self-determination" (Grand Council of the Cree, 1994, 33).

In Australia, Gordon Pablo, elder and spokesperson of the Wuthathi People, says: "People think that we want money, that we want compensation or royalties. *We want the land only.* . . . If these developments do go ahead, it will break the heart of we traditional people because the land is our mother. . . . I said to Mrs. Warner, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, 'How would you feel if

someone chopped up your mother in front of you?" Also for Pablo, as is not uncommon with many Native peoples, maintenance of language and culture is fundamental to the protection of the land: "I bin thinking about my people at Injinoo, especially about the younger ones. They seem to have lost the language and culture. That is why I made up my mind to come back to my hometown where I bin born. I am now Language Co-ordinator at Injinoo. . . . My aim is to record all this Wuthathi language before it is lost" (1992, 99–100, 106).

The artist Thancoupie, from Far North Queensland, Australia, similarly describes herself in terms of intense relationship with the land, which in turn is directly entwined with her culture: "My art and my politics interlock. . . . My designs are from this country, from this land, and that's political. I've used my foot in my designs, and my foot rests firmly on this ground, and my clay is made from this soil, and the Aboriginal struggle for this soil, this ground, this country—so that's political. I record the law and culture of my people in my art—law and culture that existed long before other people came to this country carrying their guns and their Bibles" (1993, 136).

As Inés Hernández-Avila, of the University of California, Native American Studies program, points out: "The removal and attempted alienation of Native peoples from their ancestral land bases by government forces almost always ensures cultural genocide. The land bases give form and sustenance to Native cultures; the ceremonial, spiritual life of any Native culture is guided intimately by the land base as teacher as well as provider" (1996, 336).

For many Indigenous communities, albeit in highly varied ways and diverse contexts that demonstrate their complex heterogeneity and distinct locations and histories, there are strong connecting threads of concern and outlook that emphasize the struggle for spiritually infused land, and communal self-determination as an ever tangible and fundamental fact of life. This core orientation is often dangerously misunderstood by many predominantly white progressives, for whom ethnic/cultural identity often is perceived as a "backward" barrier to working-class unity, which

is asserted to be *the* primary engine of "progress." Of course both the assertion of the centrality of the (primarily European/North American) industrial working class and the acceptance of the concept of "progress" are questionable from many Indigenous viewpoints. As Winona LaDuke says: "I consider myself a conservative. I think that most Native people are very conservative, and their conservatism comes from their perception that the immensity of cultural, technological, social, and ecological change that has occurred in the last 50 years is not conservative at all! It is entirely radical and frightening" (1998, 74).⁹

Importantly, LaDuke's self-description of "conservative" clearly cannot be reduced to a simple position along the usual "left to right" spectrum. I hear in her use of that term a conservatism that flows from people's history and lives and which is neither left nor right. Kinship with those gone before infuses this usage. Growing out of this emphasis on kinship is a concern for future generations, and for the well-being of the earth on which they must live. This future-oriented conservatism that is resistant to global destruction makes tradition a vital element. Robert Warrior suggests that "Traditions make the future a possibility, just as they did for the people with whom the traditions originated" (1995, 106). For such Indigenous perspectives, tradition can be a foundation for the future. As Denis-Constant Martin observes, in many settings tradition is active and alive. Tradition, he says, "transforms itself without ceasing. . . . In this sense, tradition consists of innovations that are rooted in a specific terrain . . . that is produced by tradition itself" (1992, 18 [my translation]).

By contrast, for much western-originated progressive thought, the move toward the future has often required a dramatic break with the traditional or "backward" past.¹⁰ From the Jacobins of the French Revolution, with their creation of a new calendar starting from "Year One" to the Soviet "New Man" and "New Woman," the past is perceived as a dead weight to be discarded. Obviously, arguments can be made for such perspectives; consider the barbarity of slavery and servitude that can hardly be justified in the name of "tradition." The "traditional" in some generalized abso-

lute abstract sense is not sacrosanct, static, and perfect.¹¹ By the same token, programs that seek to totally destroy the past in the name of constructing a perfect future are hardly beyond reproach, as twentieth-century history with its Hitlers and Stalins instructs us. From a transcommunal perspective, the task is not for one group or person to say which vantage point is more "accurate" in an abstract universalistic sense, but rather to determine how partisans of such fundamentally distinct outlooks can work together in mutual respect.

For many on the left, the Indigenous emphasis on tradition may seem "conservative" in a negative sense of being on the "right-wing end" of the political spectrum. By contrast, those Indigenous views that emphasize conserving culture and tradition can often be seen as efforts to accentuate that which is *central* to a people, rather than being on the end of a political spectrum. For many Indigenous activists the conceptual framework is circular and three dimensional rather than having the linear restrictions of "the political spectrum." From this perspective, the center is a spiritual-cultural point of reference. It is a doorway open to all directions, north to south, east to west, and down into the earth as well as up to the heavens, so anchoring a wide variety of ways of being. In short, there are cosmological, or if you wish, paradigmatic differences between these more circular Indigenous outlooks and those that employ the lineal spectrum running from left to right as a description of the world.

Far from "backward," the resistance potential of such tradition-oriented thinking is, as Maivãn Clech Lãm points out, an important dimension of the global struggle for justice. Lam notes that much Indigenous activism has had "remarkable" success in precisely the areas of struggle considered by many within classic Marxism as secondary or "superstructural," namely the cultural, the legal, and the spiritual: "Columbus has been debunked; the world has suddenly learned that not all indigenous peoples are dead, that many in fact are actively seeking the restoration of lands and resources. . . . Finally, indigenous peoples have also conspicuously participated in, and often led, global countercultural

campaigns against consumerism, particularly of the kind that directly implicate the resources of their homelands" (1996, 261).

Similarly, Stefano Varese points out that the underlying impetus of Indigenous movements for self-determination, communal land, and continuity with the past of the ancestors directs a radical impulse at the very nation-state elites now carrying out the bidding of global economic syndicates. Varese writes: "The project of Indian liberation movements . . . clearly calls for the subversion and radical reorganization of the 'national' spaces, the total recuperation of the interrupted history, the 're-Indianization' of vast sectors of the population of the continent, and the unity of the continental Indian population." All of this "radical" project, which is concomitantly "conservative" and "traditional," involves, says Varese, "Recognizing multiplicity as the framework of knowledge and of existence and the interaction of differences as the only appropriate environment for the construction of civilization" (1982, 40).

In our terms here, such an emphasis on *interactive* multiplicity is transcommunal and stands opposed to smothering globalizing homogeneity of the powerful, as well as to the disintegrative fragmentation of meandering intellectualistic approaches to "diversity." As we can see from LaDuke, Warrior, and Varese, such Indigenous emphases on multiplicity can incorporate the conservative and the radical as well as the fluid and the structural. In many settings, the essential conceptual distance between such basic circular and lineal outlooks blunts the ability of many leftists to respect and appreciate the significance of such Indigenous outlooks and activisms. In one interview, Nilo Cayuqueo, Mapuche activist and organizer of the South and Meso-American Indian Information Center, points out that when Indigenous peoples cannot be placed along an anti- or pro-left spectrum, their own unique locations tend to be dismissed by the left. Cayuqueo says of the Mapuche activists: "We're not anticommunist, we're not anti-Marxist, or pro-Marxist. What we want is to be able to work together for our common interest, which is anti-imperialist. But [the left is] not willing to recognize the Indian people as being

oppressed, they just see them as another social category. . . . What we have is a conception of the world that is completely different from the European conception. I am not saying that Indian societies are perfect, but our system or organization is humanistic" (1982, 101–102). From a similar angle, Guillermo Delgado argues that class-centric urban progressives in Latin America are often unable to grasp the significance of such perspectives and approaches among Indigenous peoples for self-determination. Consequently, he says, many such activists often tend to wrongly fault "the ethnic and autonomous movements for being separatist." Such viewpoints lead not to cooperation, says Delgado, but to repeated efforts on the part of some progressives to constrain expectations and hopes for Indigenous territorial autonomy (1994, 6).

Concurrently, Atencio Lopez, secretary of the Kunas Unidos por Napguana in Nicaragua, says, "The struggle of Indigenous peoples . . . has always been obscured by non-Indigenous political groups, especially by guerrilla movements that have swept it under their ideological class struggle" (1994, 21). Ward Churchill's overall assessment of this issue is that Marxism "in its present form at least, offers us far worse than nothing. With friends such as these we are truly doomed." Churchill also points out that an "increasing number of thoughtful Marxists have broken with at least the worst of Marxian economism, determinism, and human chauvinism." Those who have done so, he says, "may possess the potential to forge mutually fruitful alliances with American Indians and other indigenous peoples." Churchill then raises the logical question of whether those who do so will be "viewed as Marxists any longer" (1996, 479). I concur with the importance of this question. But, as we shall see in the later discussion of elements of transcommunitality such as autonomy, mutual respect, and transformation, I believe it is possible for those possessing quite different standpoints to work together for freedom and justice, defined not from one center, but from many angles of perspective.¹²

This gap between, on one side, many essentially secular progressive organizations whose affiliations are with an ideology of

socialism and, on the other side, many spiritually infused and self-determination-oriented Indigenous communities is an important distinction that requires a respectful understanding of the differently rooted sites involved.¹³ If any relationship is to exist across these very different arenas, this gap must be bridged in ways that allow for mutual respect of the different positions. To paraphrase Nilo Cayuqueo, we can all be against tyranny, but with a high degree of variation that can include some coming from Marxist and others from traditional outlooks. Respect is vital if the generally urbanized left is to link itself with the energetic grassroots networks of Indigenous activism that are, as Guillermo Delgado and Susan O'Donnell point out, "rekindling" the extensive "communication and trade links that existed in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans" (1995, 35).

Interminglings of activists with roots in diverse emplacements can take place. But such interactions necessitate mutual respect among their participants. In turn, mutual respect requires that predominately white progressive forces discard their own colonial outlooks that often continue the marginalization of precisely those populations that face subjugation targeting their race/ethnicity/gender. Assuming such transformation, some degree of interaction among those opposed to tyranny is possible and can be significant. For example, in the late-twentieth century, the James Bay Cree nation mounted a highly successful campaign to fight the HydroQuébec dam project that would destroy their lands. The Grand Council of the Cree of Québec effectively enlisted an array of environmentalist organizations and other non-Indigenous allies in Canada and the United States. Simultaneously, the Cree people maintained their central position of shaping the content and direction of their struggle. The allies played useful but supporting and secondary roles under the direction of the Cree people (Tokar, 1995, 50).¹⁴

Another major example of an Indigenous movement that can address progressive allies through its critical analysis of the global economic system, while also being rooted in ancient culture and tradition, is the Mayan "Zapatista" liberation army or EZLN in

Chiapas, Mexico. The EZLN staunchly opposes the damaging impacts of global capitalism and its agencies of legitimization such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the International Monetary Fund. Simultaneously, the EZLN is rooted in centuries of Mayan distinctiveness and resistance to oppression. Consequently, the EZLN cannot be reductively described as a "leftist movement." It is an Indigenous movement. Yet, in its resistance to global capitalism, the EZLN is an important example of how a political-economic analysis of the global economy that is congruent with basic left tenets can entwine with an Indigenous emphasis on sovereignty, culture, and the spiritual. The movement in Chiapas, as Carlos Fuentes suggests, "speaks a language that is fresh, direct, post-Communist" even as it draws from Indigenous communities that for centuries "have shown themselves to be true 'people of reason' who know how to govern themselves" (1997, 91).

Significantly from a transcommunal angle, the EZLN with its intermingled traditional/forward-looking orientation shows itself willing to reach out to supporters around the world, while doing so on its own terms. Such reaching out allows for "outsider" support that does not interfere with the internal developments of movements such as the EZLN. In true transcommunal form, the EZLN draws from its Mayan roots, while also embracing a widely inclusionary and outgoing constellation of supporters. As spokesperson Subcommandante Marcos pointed out about the Zapatista outreach, "We have helped create, at the side of men and women in the five continents, a great network . . . that is fighting to build a better world" (DePalma, 1998, 14).

Similarly, the Mapuche people of Chile in their important statement, the "Temuco-WallMapuche Declaration on the North American Free Trade Agreement, Indigenous Peoples, and Their Rights," analytically critique the "free trade" format as "serving to accumulate wealth for a small minority and to create poverty and exclusion for the great majority of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples." Moreover, the Mapuche activists see such so-called "free" trade as "a new form of expansion of colonialism and

neocolonialism expressed in the economic sphere" (Aukin Wallmapu Ngulam, 1994, 1). Accordingly, the Mapuche reach out to a variety of groupings around the world, including predominantly white environmentalists, nongovernmental organizations, and other social movements, as well as other Indigenous peoples. Their emphasis on the need for defense against globalizing capitalism and their reaching out to potential allies are simultaneously rooted in Indigenous foundations of Mapuche culture, history, land, and religion, and in the overall context of Indigenous realities. As Stefano Varese points out, such Indigenous emphases on land and freedom are directly related to resistance to globalized systems of power (1997, 19–35). Such relationships show the kinship of much Indigenous activism to what Gilles Deleuze calls modes of action/thought that can be both "archaic" and "up-to-date revolutionary" as they call into question "both the global economy of the machine and the assemblages of national states" (1993a, 256).

Indigenous Rooted Cosmopolitans

Cross-border outreachings by rooted Indigenous communities perform a transcommunal solution to the dualistic dilemma between local and global activism outlooks, described by Jonathan Friedman in his excellent overview of Indigenous organizing. Friedman accurately distinguishes between social justice-oriented, "cosmopolitan" leadership groups that seek to "reorganize the world," and more locally grounded Indigenous communities that resist the global power structure where it hits them. As Friedman notes, even such locally rooted places of resistance are being "globalized in channels of international political organization that have amplified their voice" (2001, 68). But given the world orientation and outreaching approach of many Indigenous activists such as the Cree, Mapuche, and EZLN, to name but a few, I would go farther than my colleague. These Indigenous organizations, with their confederacy-formatted intertwining of many different locations and levels, are capable of being cognizant of the world

structure and the necessity of transforming it, not simply resisting it where they are. They can be rooted and cosmopolitan at the same time.

The EZLN statement quoted above makes clear that they see their Indigenous struggle not just as local but rather as also creating "a great network . . . that is fighting for a better world." This kind of intermingling, as Arif Dirlik points out, entwines "globalization" and "localization." Such intertwining by community-based movements is clearly an indication of complex transcommunal capabilities to interweave centuries-old Indigenous Mayan self-determination struggles with today's globalized "cosmopolitan" issues (Dirlik, 2001).

Similarly, the 1992 Mapuche "Temuco-Wallmapuche Declaration" speaks to the threat to the world of "free trade" while also being deeply concerned with Indigenous issues. This declaration clearly takes the cosmopolitan concern with world restructuring into the local and the local into the cosmopolitan in a supple and significant way. The declaration states in part: "We invite the organizations, movements, groups and ecological parties and other political parties to continue strengthening their relations with the Indigenous Peoples, in facing the continental and global assault of neoliberalism, based on productive accumulation of material, putting the future of humanity and the planet at risk" (Aukin Wallmapu Ngulam, 1992, 4).

The Cree, Mapuche, and EZLN also illustrate one of the most effective assets provided by reflective outside allies who recognize the limitations and baggage of their position: they can make the hidden visible. Such a productive opening up of the externally enforced and debilitating isolation of community activists engaged in direct localized (town, region, hamlet, forest) struggles can be an important resource. To be forcibly isolated is to be ever more vulnerable to an oppression that hides itself from the rest of the world, thus increasing its strength.

From the Cree and the Mayan movements to the original peoples of Australia, contacts with outside allies can blunt the impact of at least some of the direct oppressive forces that they

face. Minimally they can make the news of killings, torture, and other atrocities visible beyond national borders and so place local elites in the uncomfortable position of responding to pressure from around the world. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa of necessity took its main form there. But that main struggle was clearly assisted, as Nelson Mandela noted after his release from prison, by secondary support around the world. Similarly, during some work I did in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in Alabama in 1965, I was struck by the fact that the black people there did not need to be "organized." They already had organization of various kinds. What they did need were links to the outside world that could end their isolation, which left them at the mercy of an entire political/legal system that supported white terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan. By bringing the South, especially the rural areas, into the viewing range of the people of United States and the world, the Civil Rights Movement was able to make a local struggle into a globally linked one, which in turn made that local struggle much more potent.

Simultaneously, the particular realities and needs of the people there remained central. As the local activist Fannie Lou Hamer said of the necessity for local community self-determination of social/political objectives, "'Cause you see, if we are free people as Negroes, if we are free then I don't think you're supposed to tell me how much of my freedom I am supposed to have" (1981, 47). Directly involved activists and supporting allies all need to be on guard against the tendency of allies from the "core" regions, and those in domestically dominant social positions, to automatically assume superior attitudes even while they try to be useful. Criticism and self-criticism as well as alertness to one's own position in society are all essential if mutual respect is to be developed and maintained. Also, it is worth noting that the links should not always be one way from "north to south." Those fighting for justice in countries such as the United States can use the same type of alliance support from "outside" for the same reasons.

Many Indigenous activists, such as those among the Mayans of Guatemala and Chiapas, and the Cree of Canada, show that they

can treat leftist and "progressive" analyses of the nation-state and global capitalism with respect, while drawing from and maintaining their own historical and spiritual/cultural roots. Are white, secular, cosmopolitan progressives willing to work respectfully with such developments around the world?

Shantytown Organization

Similar cleavages can be seen between urban cosmopolitan progressives and those millions of people laboring in the emplacements of underground or "informal" economies outside the mainstream of capitalism's institutions. Although they work long hours and at often dangerous jobs, most of these people are usually excluded from the category of "worker." Not "officially" employed, and not receiving paychecks, they are marginalized analytically. For example, not usually included as workers are those whose labor is that of systematic picking at the mountains of "trash" cast off by the affluent in cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Lagos, and New York. Much of this "trash" can be retrieved, used, and traded by those with the skills and the organization to do it. As Jorge G. Castañeda points out, the left in Latin America generally found that its singular class focus ran up against much more multifaceted social situations: "The left has always been troubled by a central theoretical paradox: its Marxist origins and inclinations have led it to accentuate *class*, while the incipient configuration of a class structure in Latin America, and the numerical weakness of the working class in particular have led it to place a great emphasis on *the people*. . . . The proliferation of grass roots movements compounded this difficulty: the 'new' social protest was not class-based" (1994, 235).

In recognizing such multiplicities, even the rearrangement of the categories "work" and "workers" must take place. As André Gorz argues, "The struggles that lead along the lines of work maintain their importance but the workers movement cannot ignore other struggles, taking place on other terrains, that have a growing importance in society, in the reconquest by men and

women of power in their life. . . . The union movement cannot be indifferent to the women's movement . . . and it must take into account its own orientations[;] . . . the union movement cannot be indifferent any longer to the struggle of populations against the invasion of their neighborhoods by megatechnologies" (1988, 271 [my translation]). Moreover, Gorz states, "The right of people to govern themselves with sovereignty and their mode of cooperation with others is everything. It cannot be accomplished on the terrain of work . . . to the detriment of other struggles on other terrains" (1988, 271 [my translation]).

Clearly many "working people" are part of complex organizational structures that permeate the dense marginalized metropolitan areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and parts of the United States (for example, on the El Paso/Juarez junction of the U.S.-Mexico border). Inside these sprawling zones are intricate, multidimensional grassroots networks. In the midst of the chronic crisis of the dispossessed that marks these settlements, there is a vitality that defies exact labeling and certainly does not fit exactly into the category of working class, although many of the shantytown inhabitants are or were in that class. As David Hecht and Maliqalim Simone observe about such areas in parts of metropolitan Africa:

Impoverished communities often settle and build on government or private land without the clear legal right to do so. These are so called "popular neighborhoods" They produce informal, and often illegal, associations, alliances, strategies and practice that provide an infrastructure for the community and a measure of functional autonomy. . . . While inept and unstable governments come and go these popular neighborhoods mostly endure. Their so called "frontline technologies" are particularly effective in gathering and disseminating information, they expand networks beyond the neighborhood, and channel resources back into it, facilitating most of the community's exchange and distribution of goods and services. (1994, 15-16)

Similarly, Thomas Angotti reminds us that in many Latin American cities, "Large community-based movements arose to stop dis-

placement and secure basic urban services. These movements have forged coalitions that play a significant role in local and national politics" (1995, 17).¹⁵

The category of "worker" is even complicated for those who appear at first glance to be inside the industrial mainstream (being union members and factory workers) while being marginalized in other significant ways that do not fit their apparent belonging to the working class. For example, Laura Corradi's work among immigrant North African workers in Italy informs us: "Almost all of the immigrants interviewed were factory workers, productive and disciplined with a regular job, a regular work permit, a regular position in the eyes of the State and of Capital. . . . They lived in housing arrangements somewhat anomalous, if they had housing at all. In fact, some of them slept in train stations, some in public gardens, in cars, in tents or in abandoned houses with no doors or windows, no electric power, water and heat" (1993, 3). Also, observes Corradi, those who lived in such housing "were the most vulnerable for bashing and other racist backlash." For these "productive and disciplined" full-time factory workers, issues of regular housing and racism are at least as significant as workplace labor conditions. Corradi points out that in this setting it is a mistake to "see work and housing as separate items" and to give "a sort of priority to work." Instead, she says, for immigrant workers those two dimensions are combined in ways that are the exact opposite of the mainstream pattern for native-born Italian workers. For immigrants, being "a productive worker" is a necessary but not sufficient condition, given their housing situations, which "are schizophrenic" (1993, 3).

Similar and even more intensive conditions exist for thousands of factory workers in cities such as Bombay. Their homes are on the streets. The need for water is a present and central concern. Factory workers can also be "street people." For them, shelter and water are ever-present concerns. They live in a very different zone from that of most of their class counterparts in "the North." Consequently, they are essentially invisible to many progressives for whom the categories "worker" and "street person" can seem

vast distances apart. In these situations, any action against the oppressive conditions of these workers will have to take into account housing and water as well as their workplace conditions.

The United States has few spatial equivalents to the extra-urban shantytown circles around most of its major cities, with the growing and notable exceptions of the important U.S.-Mexico border region. Nonetheless, similar patterns exist in the central "inner cities," where a variety of underground structures and grassroots groups thrive. It is in the inner cities that we see organizational responses to negative aspects of the "informal economy" such as youth violence, and to the unemployment and factory shutdowns that facilitate its development. In common with the often creative and potent shantytown organizations, there is great vitality among these inner-city groups. As James Jennings argues, in the midst of the marginalization of the ghetto there is "a capacity to alter radically the political landscape in favor of progressive social and economic policies" (1997, 13). So the creation of a coordinated, mutually supportive, social justice interaction inclusive of such shantytown emplacements requires awareness of the very existence of their distinct situations, along with a high degree of mutual respect for the particular agendas and objectives and the peoples within them. In sum, a transcommunal approach to distinctive emplacements of affiliation will be premised on some degree of self-transformation of participants as they learn to accept the fact that allies can have quite different concerns and outlooks. For the transcommunal activists, it may be pragmatically possible for at least some left, Indigenous, and shantytown organizations to work together, in some circumstances, assuming there is a fully equal participation of all those involved.

Such cooperation will require leftist partisans to accept that what they view as the significance of the urban working class may not be the conceptual center of gravity for the Indigenous organization, or that the very category of "worker" in shantytowns must be viewed from a different angle. The very language of resistance to global economic destruction that is employed in multiple, distinct emplacements will be quite different. So be it. They

can still potentially be of service to each other. Indigenous activists confronting giant corporations can incorporate salient elements from a broad range of what Arif Dirlik (1996a) calls Marxist "diagnosis." These elements can illuminate how capitalism increasingly becomes more global and more centralized (one thinks especially of Lenin's great work, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*). Simultaneously, the significance of ancestral land and of the spiritual forces that such land entails is also real for many Indigenous peoples, and this will have to be respected by the left activists if they want to engage in global cooperative organizing with those communities.¹⁶ As Dirlik suggests, a wide variety of movements focused on different problems such as class, gender, and ethnicity "may learn from, and cross-fertilize one another while respecting their different identities" (1996b, 25). Similarly, in this more open sense of mutual respect and interaction, the term "transcommunal activist" can potentially embrace a socialist partisan, a shantytown former gang-leader turned community peace maker, and an Indigenous elder.