



Memory and Science and Indigenous Knowledge

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For centuries, almost as invisible as the sound of the wind, the indigenous voice was silent to the ears of the colonizer. Even today, it still travels from person to person orally and simply, only visible to those who have a gift: the gift of listening.

Throughout every continent, river, forest and vegetation there was a sacred and material knowledge. A knowledge within an ecosystem or traditional habitat. A knowledge that would hold a life system beyond belief: the balance between culture and spirituality - the land of indigenous peoples. And what represented for so many years the line of equilibrium and connection between the ancestors and the future? Only one bridge: the word.

In these new times it is important to remember that in each of the colonization processes the voice from the indigenous people and their life system has never been considered as part of the construction of a new world.

Many people disappeared and died either physically or culturally in order to generate today's world. This has created an historical and moral debt that still exists, and a true indigenous holocaust that cannot be paid with coins.

Now that five centuries have passed within a new millennium, the indigenous voice which comes out

of the mountains, rivers, with the wind, is born again and is looking for a different kind of relationship with the new times. The dignified right to live.

Modernity recognizes at all levels that in order to generate quality of life the indigenous voice and their traditional knowledge are important. It recognizes that their teachings are essential to build a new development model. A kind of development where the mountains, the water and nature are not considered as a commodity currency but a source of balance before the huge and severe social, economic and environmental crisis of the Earth.

While several sectors of modern society itself and its institutions are creating affirmative forms of alliances of respect between the indigenous parties and the non-indigenous interests, the economic ambition that survives continues with the poor and rich concept and looks at the indigenous land as a source of natural resources and minerals that they need to better exploit.

The challenge of modernity is how to listen and practice the indigenous traditional and spiritual teachings within a complex network of technologies and religions. The challenge of the indigenous peoples that are still alive is how to teach modernity. Because for the indigenous peoples that have or have kept their sacred territories, the water, biodiversity, culture and physical strength is related

to the depth of Earth's Great Spirit. It is impossible for a native to have physical strength or material resources without considering spiritual strength.

Indigenous Spirituality is not a religious or institutional concept but the capacity to live and celebrate life with the strength of the Great Spirit. For centuries traditional indigenous peoples would not make petitions to the Creator. Traditional education taught only to express gratitude.

Because the indigenous society had everything in its hands to attain quality of life and live well, everything came from the Earth such as health, spirituality, family, kids, women, elders and the animals, birds, everything. Then, why ask for more?

The invisible native from yesterday looks at modernity with concern.

What kind of world are we preparing for the future? What kind of development do we want to guarantee to our children and grandchildren?

The indigenous community has made a commitment to Mother Earth: keep maintaining the rights of all, sharing in the development of a new world that respects life on Earth. This teaching comes from an oral tradition, from women, and from children's education.

Is there time? Yes there is.
But are they going to listen?

Therefore we think that the best solution is a new development education system, but development with sustainability and indigenous spirituality. How to stop new epidemics that are born from the research at the laboratories? How to justify the existence of men, women and children who do not have anything to eat? It is proven that development cannot be only economic. It has to be sustainable and capable of generating quality of life.

Indigenous Knowledge: a Bridge between Tradition and Modernity

If we take traditional indigenous education as a foundation, what happens with life and nature in modernity, indigenous peoples have to keep the commitment of promoting this almost impossible encounter: Tradition and Modernity.

At the indigenous community which lives and always lived in its original land, teaching begins when a child is born. This model of traditional education begins with a Woman, a mother who sings a song for her child, a song that talks about childhood, birds, small animals, rivers and the Creator. A song that is sang in the native language. Then you learn to listen, think, decide and share life.

The child who listens lives each moment. The child wakes up, goes to sleep, and is respected in his/her time of childhood. Learns in order to be strong and practice respect for Mother Earth, the Creator as well as for people and his people. It is the consciousness of life and humanity. The child learns to develop his/her leadership or community membership role. It is the time when he prepares to start his free determination as child, youngster, man or woman, chief or spiritual leader. Then he also has the commitment to transmit to his child, to the next generation, the sacred right to live as a dignified and sovereign people. People with knowledge, education, courage, health and spiritual strength. It is the main exercise of a people: cultural and spiritual strength, human sovereignty.

Across the great river where there are educational systems organized in a different technological and scientific way, there are many youngsters studying out of fear. Fear of not obtaining good grades on the tests. Fear of the family, fathers, mothers, teachers and even of their own society.

This is when the educational system promotes an evaluation level to have the student promoted, encouraging distinction and discrimination as if they were achievements.

The indigenous educational system is different because it is traditional, rich, productive, and sustainable and shared by the family, in society and from generation to generation.

The Western educational system is rich, selective, promoting in children and youth the spirit of the person, particular, exclusive, productive but not shared, that always generates discrimination because of the lack of opportunities between one or the other.

For formal and Western education everything ends when studies end. For indigenous education everything ends when life ends.

That is, if we wish to build a better future, how do we prepare our children, youth and society?

Indigenous Rights, Sustainability and the Future

Indigenous elders who tried to share ancestral, cultural, environmental and spiritual knowledge with the arriving colonizing society were deceived and treated as poor, sinful and persons with no perspective towards the future.

Leaders with spiritual vision decided, as a matter of survival of their community and from the heart of Mother Earth, to listen and learn about the life of the colonizer. They decided to enter into the linguistic, educational and cultural concepts of modernity knowing the great risk for their own survival.

Considering that in many indigenous communities development of modernity came with the physical and economic strength as well as political and cultural domination, we discovered that in reality

the process was only looking for the resources of the new land without respect or any consideration toward the human spirit of natives.

For each advance, for each act of destruction of nature, there was a political and legal justification. The construction of a hydroelectric plant, a waterway, mining activity or a new city, the economic power was justified treating us as disabled people toward development. Parallel to this, before the social and environmental destruction, legal norms as well as human and environmental compensation programmes were created.

Indigenous leaders perceive that they must find a path based on their spiritual tradition for a new treaty with the colonizer using the non-indigenous educational, political and legal codes but for the indigenous people and their land rights. They notice that the colonizer is near their region but also in distant places, that is, at national and international levels.

On one hand, it is important to know and learn with the occidental educational system. It is important to train young lawyers and anthropologists, and to have political representation, but the most important thing is to look urgently for a way of educating the colonizer's system.

It is worthless to only guarantee the indigenous rights if we do not promote a new concept of human, scientific and environmental protection education. As a result of the indigenous struggle, after twenty years the Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights was born at the United Nations, from which we highlight the following:

Article 31

"The indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural patrimony, their traditional knowledge, their traditional cultural expressions and the manifestation of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, the seeds, the medicines, the knowledge about the flora and fauna, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games, as well as virtual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property of said cultural patrimony, their traditional knowledge and their traditional cultural expressions.

The States will adopt effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights together with the indigenous peoples."

During the Rio-92 Summit the Indigenous Peoples of all continents of Mother Earth met to talk about and write more than 109 recommendations based on the Kari-Oca Declaration, as it was called: "*We the Indigenous Peoples look at the future in the footprints of our ancestors.*"

What can we say when Mother Earth warns us with the wind, the water and the sun that it is time to stop destruction?

We the indigenous peoples believe that if we want a better future it is important to know where the best is. Transgenic technology? Business agriculture that do not feeds us? Seeds made in laboratories? An education that does not generate sustainable development? An education that does not know how to listen to the voice of the wind and share with the balance?

We the indigenous peoples cannot yet disesteem the capacity of technology and modern education but we affirm: That said modernity cannot survive as it is formed. That it will not survive without the participation of traditional indigenous knowledge.

How can we contribute? Back in indigenous lands we can still hear the song from the heart of the Earth. A song that comes from the heart of the indigenous people. A song taught to educate about our way of life and the spiritual respect for the Great Creator.

We the indigenous peoples are still listening and singing with new generations, because we believe that someday, that will certainly come, we will share with black, white and yellow children.

We trust that the voice of the future is the voice of the children that cry and sing. A childhood that is not poor or rich and has no color, because it is the spirit of nature that wants to live for the well being of all of us.