

# Oil Politics in the Amazon: From Ethnocide to Resistance and Survival

María Teresa Martínez-Domínguez (University of Strathclyde)

## **Introduction**

This paper is based on my doctoral research, which seeks to identify the 'survival mechanisms' used by indigenous people, consciously or unconsciously, in order to face the impacts of multinationals and national oil companies on their lives and environment.

The focus of this paper is on how indigenous people are resisting and surviving the threat represented by oil developments in their territory. The concept of survival emerges from my fieldwork conversations and interviews, between September 2006 and April 2008, with indigenous people living in areas affected by the oil industry in Ecuador and Peru. The interviews were carried out under a methodological framework, which aimed to reconceptualise some of the terms and definitions imposed upon indigenous people. The research participants include groups and communities that have used various ways of resisting, negotiating or liaising with the industry; within this variety of groups and relationships indigenous people do not perceive themselves as mere victims, oppressed, or dispossessed but as people who dissent, this resistance being one of their survival and coping mechanisms.

This theoretical position informs the central argument of the paper, which shows how the oil industry has become a vector of genocide and 'culturicide' for indigenous people and at the same time a vector of resistance. The resistance is classified as short and long

term, framing it in the current context of corporate globalization. The presence of the oil industry in indigenous territory has triggered an oil conflict, which involves a complex net of actors and power relations. By analysing these dynamics of power and resistance, oppression is unmasked and power is challenged.

The contribution of the oil industry to the disappearance of entire human groups and ecosystems is an indication of the deficiency in accountability of corporations and States in the current neoliberal world system, in which foreign investment contracts tend to replace national law and discourage States from meeting environmental and human rights responsibilities (Pacific Environment Report 2006, pp. 1). The survival of indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and their struggle against the impacts of corporate globalization and neoliberal interests are also a constant reminder that alternative ways of development and market relationships between countries are possible.

This research follows critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches (Brown & Strega 2005; Tuhiwai Smith 1999), aimed at promoting and producing research that is political in essence and committed to the decolonization of knowledge. This implies respecting and welcoming what have been called 'other ways of knowing, being and doing' as indigenous knowledge, which has been marginalised by traditional social science (Brown & Strega 2005, p.5).

### **Celebrating resistance as a survival mechanism**

When looking at the relationship and coexistence of indigenous peoples and the extractive industries, and the impacts of the latter on these societies, relatively few authors have included the concept of

survival in their analysis (Wilmer 1993; Aiello 2002; Hall & Fenelon 2004). This relationship has been described as ‘the neo-colonization era’ and once more the resistance and survival of indigenous peoples to this threat is something to celebrate. As the indigenous researcher Tuhiwai Smith (2004, p.77) explains:

Celebrating survival is a particular sort of approach. While non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous people, celebrating survival accentuates not so much our demise but the degree to which indigenous people and communities have successfully retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity.

On the other hand, some authors such as Williams (1998) prefer to use the term ‘victims’; he argues that if we can pin down who are the victims and the cause of victimization, we will be better able to access and change the perceptions of policy makers than with more subjective terms such as ‘environmental justice’, which could lead to difficulties in the identification of victims, who may not so define themselves. For example, he asks (1998, p.4):

What of the Indian who attributes lead poisoning to *Karma*, not to the illegal smelter next door? [...] What of the individuals among the Mescalero Apaches in New Mexico who will eventually suffer health problems because their leaders encourage the importation of hazardous toxic waste to reap the short-term cash rewards?

The use of the term ‘victim’ could bring legal benefits to some of the communities affected, especially in the case of human rights violations and in cases of compensation and reparation. It is also a way of humanizing the existing environmental law, which mainly focuses on damage caused to the environment but lacks a justice

approach. However, in the case of indigenous groups many of them identify themselves not as victims but as survivors or as people who struggle and resist. They have become agents of change, influencing politics and decision-making that affects them as a group, and challenging the dominant model of development. This does not mean that they are unaware of the abuses to which they have been subjected, or that they are not also claiming for justice.

Looking at the dynamics between the oil industry and indigenous people, the term 'survivors' is more powerful than 'victims' for the construction of identities and highlights the role of the industry as a vector of ethnocide. As non-oppressive academics, development workers or policy makers we should be careful of the terms we impose on people, especially those with historical baggage of exclusion. In the same way that the term 'Indian' or 'native' can be pejorative for some groups, as it reveals a colonial background, the terms 'victim' or 'oppressed' can be alien and debilitating for politically-organised groups who resist the oil industry, since it portrays them as powerless.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, indigenous people could become reliant on their condition as victims to receive benefits, increasing the culture of dependence already created by industry and some development organisations and aid agencies, thereby undermining their own process of resistance and survival.

### **Ethnocide: the killing of the soul**

This paper highlights resistance and survival in opposition to approaches that focus on extinction and assimilation (Jaulin 1970;

---

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Indian' was used by Columbus to name the people of the 'new world' as he thought he was travelling to India. The term 'native' was used by the English colonisers and also carries the pejorative connotation of 'primitive' in English language and has been associated with 'ignorance' or 'backwardness'.

Witzig 1996). Nevertheless, this section explores how the development of the oil industry in the Amazon area has been and still is one of the factors responsible for the cultural and biological extinction of indigenous people, which could also be called ‘vectors of genocide and ethnocide’, and potentially turn into ‘vectors of resistance and survival’.

The main difference between genocide and ethnocide is that while the former refers to the murder of large numbers of an identifiable group, the latter involves attempts to destroy a group’s identity, which may or may not result in the killing of its members. Both share the notion of intentional destruction of a group (Hall & Fenelon 2004, p.164). Jaulin (1970) argues that while genocide is destruction of the body, ethnocide is destruction of the thought and spirit of a specific group.

Genocide has more weight in international law than ethnocide; for example the UN’s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide does not include ethnocide in its text. However, the term has gained legitimacy and importance in UNESCO, Council of Europe Activities in the Field of Protection of National Minorities, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples among others. The latter was adopted on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007 and Article 8 of the declaration states:

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:
  - (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities

- (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources
- (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights
- (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration
- (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

‘Ethnocide’ and ‘cultural genocide’ are terms increasingly used in legal cases of indigenous communities against oil corporations and other extractive industries, where not only environmental but also cultural crimes are considered. In the Aguinda case (Cofan nation vs. TEXACO), the plaintiffs’ lawyers claim that while developing its extraction activities in the Ecuadorian Amazon the company ‘committed acts rising to the level of cultural genocide and discrimination against indigenous peoples on ethnic and racial grounds’ (Abelowitz 2001, p.151).

Witzig (1996, p.2) also explains how the extractive industries, and colonists attracted by the prospect of jobs are among the factors that have threatened the survival of the Urarina people in Peru:

Incursions of “foreigners” [...] into Urarina traditional lands are currently from river traders, loggers, colonists, oil exploration teams, and recently, “drug-voyeur” tourists. All of these groups have brought significant disease pressure on the Urarina that threatens their way of life and survival.

Witzig argues that while in the past physical extinction of indigenous people by external diseases was more common, this has been replaced in the modern era by cultural loss. In my opinion, the cultural loss that Witzig describes could be considered an ethnocide

if it is systematic and intentional. Oil operations in Ecuador and Peru have often been carried out without consultation and using fraudulent environmental impact assessments. The oil companies and States underestimate the negative social impacts of their operations, knowing entire groups and cultures may be at risk, especially in areas inhabited by non-contacted indigenous groups, and nevertheless economic development is put before the survival of indigenous groups. Although one could argue whether genocides are less common in the modern era, they may have simply shape-shifted into different forms which are not directly classified as genocide, such as what can be called ‘corporate genocide’ or genocide assisted by a biased mainstream media.

One example of corporate genocide is the case of TEXACO, today known as Chevron, during its operations in Ecuador from 1964 until 1992. In my translation of the words of Alberto Acosta (2003), former Ecuadorian minister of energy and mines in 2006/2007, he states:

TEXACO bears as much responsibility for the extinction of original peoples such as the Tetete and Sansahuari as it does for the economic, social and cultural damage to indigenous persons of the Siona, Secoya, Cofán, Quichua and Huaorani peoples, and also to settlers.

The chief executive of a company operating in an oilfield previously operated by TEXACO and then by the State company Petroecuador, which inherited the technology used by TEXACO,

told me in an interview (José Montesinos, personal communication, 25 January 2007):<sup>2</sup>

The Bermejo is an operation which TEXACO undertook earlier and which Petroecuador then undertook for very many years, and developed that operation in the way the industry was developed before, that is, destroying whatever had to be destroyed. That's how the industry was; I'm not criticizing Petroecuador; this is how we worked 35 years ago.

Like Montesinos, all the CEOs of private oil companies interviewed claimed that the technology used in the 1970s in Latin America is obsolete and has been replaced by high technology, which tries to maximize production and minimize the environmental impacts. Although this may be the case for some companies, spills and accidents are still very frequent in private and State-run oil fields located in the Amazon basin. Most of these oil fields are located in indigenous territories or surrounding them. As Martínez (2006, p. 190) points out:

Ecuador has an oil production rate of 400,000 barrels per day, each year more than 32,000 barrels are spilt into the river systems. This means that every 2 -3 years, a spill as big as the "Exxon Valdez" takes place in the Amazon.

State and transnational oil companies claim that peasants and colonists living close to the oil fields provoke many of these spills in order to get compensation. Other voices within and outside the industry think the remediation companies are also involved in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Following the ethical guidelines of the BSA all the names of the interviewees used in this article are fictitious. The original language of all the personal communications that appear in this article is Spanish.



spills, as they are contracted by the oil companies to clean the affected areas. Regardless of potential motives behind the spills, this shows that the oil industry brings a whole range of environmental, health and social problems that are not tackled simply by using high technology.

In September 2007, Chevron launched its global \$15,000,000 'Human Energy' advertising campaign. Rhonda Zygocky, Chevron vice-president of Policy, Government and Public Affairs, is quoted on the Chevron website as saying: 'We believe that viable answers are out there to meet future demand, but that people must work together to find them'.

The campaign also addresses what the company is doing in such areas as climate change, energy efficiency and supply and demand. Through campaigns of this kind, and corporate responsibility programmes, corporations are trying to show their human side, inviting the rest of society to work together towards the energy challenges we may face. Ironically the Human Energy campaign does not address how TEXACO has built its capital at the expense of human lives and cultures.

Through corporate responsibility programmes, or community relations programmes as they are called in Ecuador and Peru, companies say they are trying to mitigate the social impacts they may cause in the communities and at the same time improve their members' conditions of health and education.

The oil companies claim to have spent millions in developing their community relations programmes, but representatives of State agencies as well as oil interests indicated in interviews that the States are often required to cover most of the costs (Mata et. al., personal communications, 2007). The remit of the programmes may vary

from basic infrastructure for the community, transport for emergency cases, and medicines, to paying the salaries of the indigenous representatives, cultural activities, cars or mobile phones. Almost every company that embraces the principles of social responsibility uses these programmes but they are also a negotiating strategy, as company men and indigenous leaders have admitted in the interviews. Through these programmes the companies gain the consent of communities and avoid resistance. If the resistance grows stronger, they often use other tactics such as employing professional PR consultants, sometimes undercover as anthropologists or sociologists, who will incite division or blackmail leaders to achieve the final goal, which is to operate in an easy environment.

Companies in these countries work very closely with the army; the oilfields are in many cases militarized, and military repression is a common practice. Interviewees from all the different sectors involved in the oil conflict (indigenous people, company workers, representatives of the national environmental agency, the Church, development workers and environmentalists) have acknowledged that these corruptive practices are common. However, in February 2007 during the extraordinary congress of Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), a new leadership that opposed the development of extractive industries in indigenous territories was elected. The movement was very self-critical in an attempt to tackle corruption and analyze what needs to be done to assure the legitimacy of indigenous organizations.

Overall, these programmes create enormous dependence on the company, which is seen as a substitute for the absent State. The companies are aware of the undesirability of this dependence and

believe greater involvement of the State at the local level is needed in order to assure the peaceful development of oil activities, by providing the communities with better access to health and education and a fair redistribution of the oil rent.

In an interview with David Luján (personal communication, 15 March 2007), chief executive of an Ecuadorian PR company hired by an oil company to liaise with communities in an area where the company found strong opposition to their activities, he states:

This case was especially challenging for us, so I decided to invest my own money and told the company that if I did not manage to sign agreements with all the communities in the oil block they would not have to pay me. They had tried before with other consultants and they achieved nothing, but we managed to sign a contract with 26 of the 28 communities.

The CEO told me that the practices of his company are based on high levels of transparency, taking into account the perspectives of all the actors and working with the local authorities. This information contrasts with interviews carried out with indigenous leaders from different areas in Ecuador who accused this particular PR Company of favouring the interest of the oil companies, blackmailing leaders and working under cover (Javier Maldonado, personal communication, 10 January 2007; Americo Salazar, personal communication, 22 March 2007).

It has proved very difficult to take an oil company to court on the basis of genocide and ethnocide. First is the issue of proving intentionality; second is the collective responsibility of the different 'vectors of genocide' involved in the oil conflict. Nevertheless, the use of these terms in legal cases against the oil industry can create awareness of the human cost of an industry that uses double standards

in the West and in developing countries, contributing to the disappearance of entire livelihoods and cultures.

### **Towards survival: short and long-term resistance**

As can be expected, direct or indirect attempts against the survival of indigenous groups do not come without resistance. Indigenous movements are dynamic and diverse in approach and organization, and it is outside the scope of this paper to analyse this complex network of actors and power relations.

Hall & Fenelon (2004, p.166) distinguish between active and passive resistance of indigenous people against ethnocide and culturicide. Passive resistance refers to the fact that indigenous groups, by remaining small in size, living in isolated places and being organized in land-based communities, have managed to resist incorporation into the dominant culture and system. In contrast they give an array of examples of active resistance, from the participation of indigenous people in the United Nations system to the Miskito resistance against the Nicaraguan State.

Nevertheless, one has to be cautious in describing resistance as passive, especially when referring to organised communities. The mere act of securing the land-base and territory is an act of resistance and one of the main mechanisms of survival. A community is a dynamic unit, and most of the actions of its members are aimed at their survival as a group. Among other possible classifications, in the case of the oil conflict I prefer to talk about conscious and unconscious mechanisms of survival and short- and long-term resistance, although this can surely also be applied to other political scenarios.

Direct actions such as marches, demonstrations, occupation of oilfields or even globally-coordinated campaigns to halt oil developments in indigenous territories could be considered short-term resistance mechanisms. But there are also long-term and sometimes unconscious mechanisms. For example, in my interviews with politicians and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in indigenous politics many of them agreed that the indigenous movement and resistance would benefit from being united to achieve the goals they pursue in terms of land ownership and human rights, which would make it easier for the State and external aid agencies to canalize their resources and support. Indeed, this could be a good strategy for getting specific policies and demands into the national agenda, but indigenous people insist on keeping regional offices and organizations for each indigenous group since they are all distinctive and unique, having their own languages and traditions. Keeping their diversity and protecting their cultural patterns and language from homogenization is a long-term survival strategy.

Other examples of resistance are the use of their spiritual knowledge and cosmovision to make sense of the threats they face and the possible solutions. In this regard, when the Cofan people in Ecuador were asked why they are against oil activities in their territory, many of the community elders stated they believe that there are 'beings' in the subsoil, called CoanCoan, who protect the community; the oil is the blood of the CoanCoan, which is one of the main reasons why they opposed oil exploitation, as the community could lose its protection. They used this argument in 1998 when they managed to close an oil well in operation in their territory, which still remains closed (Olmos 2003; Elvira Etsam,

personal communication, 12 March 2007). Participation in international politics, the construction of identities that can better represent their positions in the globalised world, and the growing field of indigenous research and its influence in the decolonization of knowledge are among other long-term resistance mechanisms.

Survival of indigenous peoples has also been linked with the current globalization era, especially when we talk about corporate globalization. Views on the topic of globalization tend to be polarized, and this is also the case when one analyses its impacts on indigenous populations. On the one hand authors such as the anthropologist Lucy Ruiz, who is currently Sub-secretary for Environmental Protection of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Energy and Mines, do not oppose the concept of globalization as such, since it has opened a new world of communication possibilities which is useful for bringing the demands of indigenous people to the public eye. However, Ruiz opposes a model of globalization sustained by economic accumulation and concentration of power, where homogeneity prevails over diversity and where the whole world is presented as having similar values and aims, which are supposed to be the right ones for a life in peace and harmony (2004, p.182). On the other hand Moisés Naím (2003) sees no danger in the homogenization of culture and believes the impacts of globalization on indigenous peoples are generally positive.<sup>3</sup>

But the fact remains that globalization has also brought indigenous peoples powerful allies, a louder voice that can be heard internationally, and increased political influence at home. More fundamentally, globalization's positive impact on indigenous peoples is also a surprising

---

<sup>3</sup> Moisés Naím, Venezuela's former minister of industry and trade, is editor and publisher of *Foreign Policy* magazine and chairman of the Group of Fifty, an organization of the CEOs of Latin America's largest corporations.

and welcome rejoinder to its role as a homogenizer of cultures and habits. When members of the Igorot indigenous tribe in northern Philippines and the Brunca tribe from Costa Rica gather in Geneva, their collaboration helps to extend the survival of their respective ways of life—even if they choose to compare notes over a Quarter Pounder in one of that city's many McDonalds.

Chase-Dunn & Hall (1997, p.172-173) explain that while in tributary world systems ethnic change was a long-term process that took centuries, in globalizing capitalist systems ethnic change is much faster. They proceed by saying that all ethnic change comes with conflict and resistance. As the pressure for ethnic change accelerates, resistance to being incorporated into the dominant culture will be more extreme and obvious. Adding to this argument Aiello (2002, p. 29) states:

The effects of globalization have been one of, if not the most, influential factors of mobilization among the indigenous peoples in their social movement for reform.

However, she thinks that while some groups understand adaptation to globalization as a necessary step for their cultural survival, others resist total subordination but make some concessions to global ideals and identity, and the more radical indigenous groups criticize any kind of concession.

It can be argued that even the more radical indigenous groups make concessions to globalization, especially if they can benefit from it in their own struggles. In fact, indigenous groups are also global and may use both local and global strategies for their resistance, contributing to what has been called the 'glocalization of environmental governance' (Bebbington 2005, p.7). For example,

the Kichwa people of Sarayaku, considered as one of the more dissident indigenous groups in Ecuador opposing the intervention of the oil industry, have won their battle against the Argentinian oil company CGC by waging what they call an ‘information war’, using all the new communication technologies such as internet-radio, websites and digital film-making to build up their peaceful resistance campaign (Geertsen 2007).

### **Learning to live with the oil industry**

Most indigenous families in oil production areas have had a member working for the industry, normally in temporary and non-skilled jobs. Many communities saw the oil boom in the 1970s as an opportunity to survive in the market economy. After more than 60 years of oil exploitation in Ecuador, the indigenous people of the central region of Pastaza have witnessed the frenetic oil development in the eastern region of Oriente since the 1970s, its impacts on such populations as the Secoya and Cofan, which are on the brink of extinction, and the disappearance of entire groups such as the Tetetes, and this has made the Pastaza people reluctant to follow this path of development.

In this hostile environment, communities learned to negotiate with the industry. Sabin (1998, p.2) reduces this negotiation and decision-making process to a westernized cost-benefit analysis, where the communities have to negotiate the economic and cultural costs in an exploitative environment. Sabin’s argument lacks a holistic view of the conflict and the negotiation strategies. The data collected during interviews and as a participant observer in community meetings shows that although communities may have to evaluate how many concessions they give to the market/capitalist system their



decision is not only based on cost-benefit analysis but on a dialogue between all the community members, the opinion of the elders and their cosmovision; their self-determination and survival being the ultimate goal. By putting the emphasis on survival, cosmovision and non-commensurable aspects of development (Martínez-Alier 2002), rather than on cost-benefit approaches, the views and actions of the communities are better represented and understood.

There is also a tendency among environmental activists and some academics to polarise the views of indigenous groups, classifying them as the ones that are sold to the industry and those that resist the industry. This ‘with or against me’ classification can be misleading, as it overlooks the complexity of oil politics and relations. Negotiation and dialogue with the oil industry and other actors is also part of the indigenous culture, not implying either a desire to adapt to the global identity or ignorance of the impacts and risks for their own survival. In other cases lack of information, extreme poverty and the corruption of the leaders described above leave them with few options.

One example of misinformation and misinterpretation of international agreements is the application of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169, in relation to the obligation of the State to provide free and informed consent to indigenous people regarding any legislative or administrative measure that may affect them, oil developments included. In the case of resource exploration, the State is the owner of the subsoil (this is based on the Roman Law, introduced in Latin America during colonization). This means that indigenous people do not have integral ownership of their territory.

The lack of previous and informed consultation is one of the main complaints of indigenous organizations (Melo 2006, p19). Convention 169 is not a binding document, and its text is not clear in many aspects. Signatory States therefore create their own regulations with their own views of the process of consultation. The State grants concessions of indigenous territories to oil transnationals and only informs the indigenous people once the contract with the company is signed. This is what the State calls 'consultation', which in fact is merely an informative process where indigenous people have no veto control. While attending some of these consultation processes in Peru and Ecuador I observed the high level of coordination between the State and the oil transnationals, the State representatives acting as a public relations company for the oil transnational, proclaiming the goodness of the industry and reminding the communities of their responsibilities and role in the economic development of their country.

Since 2004 some Latin American countries have created regulations that force the companies to carry out pre-bidding consultations with the affected communities. However, many communities have decided not to attend these consultation processes as their last resource to stop oil activities. They claim that there is no point in being consulted if they do not have veto control, and that by attending the consultation and filling in the attendance form they would help the companies and the State to fulfil the needed requisites to operate in their territories (ACIA 2004). In this case indigenous people are resisting the hegemony of the State by not using an instrument, such as ILO Convention 169, which was created in the first place for their own interest.

## **Towards a post-neoliberal civilization**

Chase-Dunn & Hall (1997, p.29) explain how increasing ethnic identity, contemporary nationalisms and alternative lifestyles are all indicators of the decline of the current hegemonic state-based system mainly represented by the core of Europe and the United States. They continue:

The question here is whether or not it makes sense to try to construct a better world around these decentralization forces, or whether we should instead build a more humane, balanced, and sustainable global system.

The key question here seems to be whether these alternatives can contribute to forging a fairer and more egalitarian world without necessarily having a global or unique world system with a single recipe that will supposedly work for all. Hall & Fenelon (2004, p. 186) contribute to this argument by highlighting the potential contribution of indigenous societies to the shaping of a new world:

If one [...] recognises modern capitalism is an amalgam of older forms and newer forms, then one might expect that whatever the world-system transforms into will be built on the various models that already exist. And here, clearly, indigenous people represent the wider range of alternatives, and continuously adapting forms from/with which to build a more inclusive new world.

They also state that the communal ownership of resources which characterizes indigenous societies represents the biggest threat to capitalism, as it shows an alternative option to private property rights.

Blaser et al. (2004, p.26) discuss the importance of indigenous life projects versus development projects and how the former proclaim the need for unity in diversity as an alternative to the universal ideas of the latter. One thing to be cautious of when talking

about life projects is that although they may have been designed with an indigenous perspective, they have to be carried out in a system that does not recognize the singularities of these projects. Additionally, these life projects are often elaborated in co-ordination with aid agencies, which also have their own development agendas, promoting the idea that the purpose of the life project is the achievement of goals and activities. This approach creates false expectations in the communities and takes away the real meaning of the life projects. On this topic Kenrick (2007) argues that life projects can threaten the status quo because:

They highlight the ongoing histories of violent appropriation on which the power of the wealthy is built, and they have the ever-precarious but powerful potential of demonstrating that other more egalitarian forms are perfectly possible.

Although indigenous groups and societies are not necessarily egalitarian, some of these groups have evolved and transformed over the centuries into societies that represent an alternative to the current dominant system based on concentration of power and accumulation. The example of the oil industry as a catalyst of resistance and survival shows how the contemporary indigenous way of life represents a troublesome alternative to the neoliberal model. In the indigenous model the collective interest prevails over individual profit, sustainable management of the forest prevails over the exploitation of non-renewable resources, and self-subsistence prevails over consumerism.

## **Conclusion**

Indigenous people in the Amazon region have resisted and survived the impacts of the oil industry since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this is something to celebrate. The industry has undeniably contributed to the disappearance of entire groups and has left social and environmental devastation and destruction in its path. States and transnationals often work hand in hand imposing a model of development alien to indigenous people. But such policies and practices do not come without resistance, and indigenous people have woven a complex net of short- and long-term resistance mechanisms, which leads us to look beyond the conception of these groups as 'powerless' and to consider them as people who struggle. Making some concessions to globalization, which can also be a threat for their survival, they have managed to make the oil transnationals more accountable and have at the same time made their way of life and model of development more obvious and explicit to the rest of the world. The indigenous life projects may be perceived as a threat to neoliberal interest, but they are also an opportunity to create a new model or models of development based on accountability, ethnic representation, diversity, redistribution, and sustainability.

## **Bibliography**

[n.a.]. Chevron announces new global 'Human Energy' advertising campaign.

<http://www.chevron.com/news/press/release/?id=2007-09-28> (28 September 2007).

Abelowitz, Debra. 2001. Discrimination and cultural genocide in the oil fields of Ecuador: The U.S. as a forum for international dispute. *New England International and Comparative Law Annual* [Online] 7. 145-153.

- [http://www.nesl.edu/intljournal/vol7/vol72001\\_pg145.pdf](http://www.nesl.edu/intljournal/vol7/vol72001_pg145.pdf) (15 January 2008).
- ACIA. *Arajuno en contra de la explotación petrolera*. <http://ecuador.indymedia.org/es/2004/03/4931.shtml> (2 March 2004).
- Acosta, Alberto. 2003 (4 June). Desde abajo: ¡Texaco en el banquillo de los acusados! *Diario Hoy*.
- Aiello, Kate. 2002. *A struggle for rights: Reclaiming indigenous identity in Amazonian Ecuador*. Justice and Peace Studies [s.l.] Senior Thesis.
- Bebbington, Anthony. 2005 (16 December). La 'glocalización' de la gobernanza ambiental: Relaciones de escala en los movimientos socio-ambientales y sus implicaciones para la gobernanza ambiental en zonas de influencia minera en el Perú y el Ecuador (14 May 2008).
- Blaser, Mario, Harvey A. Feit & Glenn McRae (eds.). 2004. *In the way of development: Indigenous peoples, life projects and globalization*. London: Zed Books/IDRC.
- Brown, Leslie & Susan Strega (eds.). 2005. *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous, & anti-oppressive approaches*. Canada: Canadian Scholar's Press/Women Press.
- Chase-Dunn, Christopher & Thomas D. Hall. 1997. *Rise and demise: Comparing world systems*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Geertsen, Rune. 2007 (1 June). Information war in the jungle in [nacla.org](http://nacla.org).  
<http://nacla.org/node/1479> (17 June 2007).
- Hall, Thomas. D, & James V. Fenelon, J. 2004. The futures of indigenous peoples: 9-11 and the trajectory of indigenous

- survival and resistance. Special issue: Global social movements before and After 9-11. *Journal of World System Research*X(I). 153-97.
- Jaulin, Robert. 1970. *La paix blanche: Introduction à l'ethnocid*. Paris: Seuil.
- Kenrick, Justin. 2007 (28 November). Responding to the ecological crisis of inequality. Talk at the Geography and Sociology department, Strathclyde University.
- Martínez, Esperanza. 2006. Petróleo, pueblos indígenas y biodiversidad. In Guillaume Fontaine (ed.), *Petróleo y desarrollo sostenible en el Ecuador: Las ganancias y pérdidas*, 189-204. Quito: FLACSO.
- Martínez-Alier, Joan. 2002. *The environmentalism of the poor: A study of ecological conflicts and valuation*. Gloucester: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Melo, Mario. 2006. *Consulta previa: Ambiente y petróleo en la amazonía ecuatoriana*. Quito: CDES.
- Naím, Moisés. 2003. How native peoples can turn globalization to their advantage. *Foreign Policy*, November Issue.
- Olmos, José. 2003 (20 October). Cofanes defiende sus creencias sobre el petróleo. In *archivo.eluniverso.com*.  
<http://archivo.eluniverso.com/2003/10/20/0001/12/C637FC1A43E340BDA461E8DED361FC17.aspx> (13 February 2008).
- Pacific Environment Report. 2006. *The environmental, social and human rights impacts of foreign investment contracts*. <http://www.pacificenvironment.org/downloads/The%20Environmental%20Social%20and%20Human%20Rights%20Impacts%20of%20Foreign%20Investment>

%20Contracts\_4\_.pdf (15 May 2008).

- Ruíz, Lucy. 2004. La amazonía frente al actual modelo de globalización. In Yala, A. (ed.), *Globalización: la euforia llegó a su fin*, 179-95. Quito: Abya Yala.
- Sabin, Paul. 1998. Searching for middle ground: Native communities and oil extraction in the Northern and Central Ecuadorian Amazon, 1967-1993. *Environmental History*, April Issue.
- Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 1999. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous people*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 2004. Twenty-five indigenous projects. In William K. Carrol (ed.) *Critical strategies for social research*, 75-90. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Williams, Cristopher (ed.). 1998. *Environmental victims: New risks, new injustice*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Wilmer, Franke. 1993. *The indigenous voice in world politics: Since time immemorial*. London: Sage.
- Witzig, Ritchie. 1996. Old and new disease threats in the Peruvian Amazon: The case of the Urarina. *The Journal of the South and Meso American Indian Rights Centre* 10(2).