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Les peuples indigènes face au reste du monde

Introduction

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Introduction

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- 1 As we have expressed in the foreword to the first issue of *Elohi*, anyone—not only the peoples commonly referred to as “indigenous,” with all the derogatory connotations of “primitiveness” with which this term is often loaded—can be indigenous to some place, the place that they consider essential to their identity. Moments of crisis can crystallize a feeling of indigeneity, revealing it not only to the onlooker but sometimes even to the people animated by it.
- 2 Recently, such a moment seems to have occurred at Notre-Dame-des Landes, France, where local farmers occupied a parcel where the building of an international airport was planned. These local “indigenous” farmers, defending the land to which they belong as much as it belongs to them, were helped in their struggle by environmentalists of all stripes, arising from the whole nation. Although many differences separated the two groups, they seemed to understand that they could be useful to each other’s causes putting aside their differences while confronted with the globalized logic of what Aldo Leopold called “the economic use” of the land, at the expense of its “social use.”
- 3 The contributors to this issue of *Elohi* explore some of these collaborations, the occasional conflicts aroused by the differences between Indigenous people and environmental organizations, and the envelopment of the local interests into the global ones that often seems to make these collaborations necessary.
- 4 In an increasingly globalized world, it seems that Indigenous peoples living on their ancestral lands find it more and more difficult to protect them, and the resources they hold, from the greed of non-indigenous exploiters. Therefore, indigenous lands and riches are regularly jeopardized. In Brazil, in Mato Grosso, the Guarani are threatened with eviction from their land and are fighting against wealthy sugar cane or soy planters. They have petitioned the Brazilian government, asking to be killed and buried in their land rather than be dispossessed again (Leroy Cerqueira). Similarly, in Ecuador, the Kichwa people of Sarayaku have fought for ten years against an oil project that would destroy their habitat (Amnesty International).

- 5 Conversely, sometimes, the non-indigenous globalized actors are environmental organizations which find themselves at odds with indigenous exploitations of resources.
- 6 The situation is not always as clear-cut and Manichean, however, and can even prove to be quite intricate when the Natives themselves conform to, or at least seem to endorse, the clichés of natural-born ecologists imposed on them by the colonizers. In the terms of Fabienne Bayet, an Australian Aboriginal activist, the perspectives adopted by some non-Aboriginal environmentalists can be seen as “a continuation of paternalism and colonialism,” and of the “noble savage” myth.
- 7 This issue of *Elohi* explores the ways in which indigenous peoples are faced with a dual predicament: trying to reach a balance between economic development and protection of an often sacred environment in which resources are found and occasionally working side by side with non-indigenous environmentalist groups, and “recycling” the stereotype of the ecological Native.
- 8 In the first contribution, Andrew Fisher shows how Indians, non-Indian environmentalists, sea lions and salmon all play antagonistic roles in a conundrum over managing the salmon in the Columbia River and how it should be protected. Should salmon recovery be reached by the supplementation of hatchery salmon, as advocated by some Indians? Or should only wild salmon be used, a course supported by non-Indian environmentalists? As Fisher argues, the process of salmon protection against greedy sea lions as well as salmon recovery “furnishes a lens through which” the sometimes difficult relationship between Indians and environmentalists in the United States can be examined.
- 9 In another case study, Marie-Claude Strigler focuses on the Anishinaabeg’s wild rice (*Manoomin*), harvested in the traditional, sacred ways In a globalized economy where, paradoxically, an increasing number of consumers are sensitive to marketing arguments emphasizing sustainable production, Anishinaabe wild rice has to compete with corporations which use Indian imagery but produce their rice far from what the Anishinaabeg consider the indigenous waters of *Manoomin*. On Anishinaabe land, the very existence of *Manoomin* is also threatened by the mining industry whose activities, if allowed, would endanger it by deteriorating its natural environment. Faced with this latter kind of competition, the Indians see environmentalist groups as allies.
- 10 Gonzalo Bustamante continues the exploration of the relations between Indigenous people and environmentalist organizations by focusing on the case of the Mapuche in Chile, in the midst of the economic development of three regions of that country. In this study, Bustamante observes that the territory, particularly what he calls “ethno-territory,” is a complex cultural construct, with symbolic, territorial and environmental dimensions. Thus, what the Natives and the ecological activists construct can be somewhat different, in spite of common objectives. Bustamante’s study illustrate these points of divergence and convergence between the two groups.
- 11 In her article, Lindsey Claire Smith deconstructs the Indian imagery used by supposedly environment-friendly corporations for marketing strategy purposes. What was one aspect of Strigler’s contribution is here systematically examined, focusing specifically on the Whole Foods chain of supermarkets. Smith not only shows how consumers are manipulated into believing they are doing good when they buy products marketed as “organic, natural, slow, local, non-GM,” but she also examines how none of this benefits

the Indigenous people in any way, most of whom do not even have access to these products.

- 12 Susanne Berthier-Foglar examines the case of Mount Taylor, New Mexico, considered as sacred land by the local tribes of Indians but where uranium was mined for decades, eventually leaving the mountain soiled both literally and symbolically. Berthier-Foglar shows how complicated the clichéd dichotomy between the “Ecological Indian” and the “Nonecological White Man” can become when the tribes themselves have opposing views regarding mining. Some see mining as a welcome economic opportunity in communities devastated by unemployment. In the case of Mount Taylor, things are even more complex because “it is not even clear who is Indigenous” since the local Hispanics claim their indigeneity as vehemently as the Navajo, the Acoma, or the Hopi.
- 13 Thomas Burelli focuses on France’s overseas territories where the Indigenous peoples are confronted with another type of dispossession, less tangible but just as significant as land dispossession: their ancestral local knowledge of genetic and medicinal resources has become more and more interesting to biotechnology researchers. Burelli explores the judicial means Indigenous people are using to try to retain control of that knowledge and the actual power and responsibility they have in managing these resources.
- 14 Adopting global tools and using social networks, the indigenous peoples are fighting back. After a string of online petitions, the Guarani’s eviction was recently suspended by the Brazilian government and the Kichwa people of Sarayaku brought their case before the inter-American Court and won against the company that was planning to probe their land for oil. These fragile and perhaps transitory victories, however, do not disprove the fact that indigenous knowledge, resources and land are under threat, as all the papers of this *Elohi* issue demonstrate.

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