

The future involved: communities as a problem, process, and relational system

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Abstract

Community is a key idea in social science, especially in anthropology. But at the same time the concept of community is one of the most elusive. We don't really have a unanimous and compelling definition of community. In empirical perspective eventually communities are ambiguous or controversial. Thus, some communities seem to be there from always. They are, we can say, unquestionable. This is the case of the several rural indigenous communities in Latin America. But others seem to be artificial or uncertain. In ethnographic terms my presentation today refers to the emerging indigenous communities in two cities over the Negro river in Argentinean North Patagonia. They are the second kind of communities and emerge from 1980's to present. In ethnic words, they are mapuche and mapuche-tehuelche urban communities.

To explore them I use an analysis model that I developed in a recent article (Serrano, 2020: *La comunidad en la visión de los antropólogos*). First, my approach considers communities as a problem that researchers elaborate in attention to empiric phenomena. It is a dialectic relation. Second, to do that, it is necessary analyse them specifically like process and relationships systems. In this case, the central issue to discuss in the problem is the time.

Communities are usually understood as a product of the past. The meaning of the historical process in the social construction of communities is undeniable. Nevertheless, I argue here that the future is also involved. Indeed, my working hypothesis is that the indigenous urban communities are symbolic constructions future oriented. Without ancestral origin, only with an uncertain present, communities exist above all like projects of common future. In other words, the thru is on the future horizon.

Indigenous communities in north Patagonia are often shaped through shared ancestral territory and dense kinship relationships. But in the examined cases in north Patagonian cities, both elements are absent. It is a direct consequence of the violent occupation of the vast Patagonian space in the last quarter of the 19th century. At that time, the military campaign so-called "conquest of the desert" -a brutal euphemism because there were indigenous people living in the desert- a true genocide that dismantled (or disassembled) the previous indigenous way of life. Families and other social forms of indigenous aggrupation were intentionally separated and devastated. It was a specific dispositive of the National State to deal with the indigenous people in the last 19th century.

Keywords: future – indigenous communities – urban contexts - North Patagonia

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