



Brief Report on Indigenous Rights Situations in Loreto

In October 2015, the research institution Structural Analysis of Cultural Systems (S.A.C.S.) carried out an excursion to three indigenous peoples in Loreto in the Peruvian Amazon basin.

This excursion included two visits to a Bora community, two visits to a Yagua community and one visit to a Cocama community. During these visits, workshops took place to inform about indigenous rights, as well as general assessments of the situations and, with full, free, prior and informed consent of the respective persons, investigations such as our cross-cultural study on olfactory perception.

Due to prior contacts and correspondences, an initial meeting took place in Iquitos. Representatives of these three communities participated in the initial meeting, as well as a local representative of CONAP, an indigenous NGO based in Lima, the capital of Peru. This meeting was carried out as a workshop, during which the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was presented and options of implementing it were discussed. As the representatives of the three indigenous peoples were interested that these topics to be carried into their communities, it was agreed that these workshops were to be held in the respective villages. - According to the chiefs, the Yagua number 3000, and the Bora number 5000 persons. The Shipiva guide, who joined part of the visits, said that his people numbered 35000 persons.

It turned out, that the Bora community did not share the concerns of their chief regarding the maintenance of their culture. The village was, in fact, very globalised in the sense that any difference from non-indigenous villages was not visible at first sight. Although the workshop took place in the Bora village, the chief's efforts to raise the interest of his people were not quite fruitful. They participated, but without even showing much respect to their chief. This behaviour contrasted with the Bora's marketing of their culture in tourism, where they present themselves in quasi-traditional style towards visitors.

The situation was very different in the Yagua (also spelled Yahua) community. The Yagua continue their traditional life. Influence from outside takes somewhat bizarre forms, the mechanisms of which are explained in an informational text in the Museum of Indigenous Cultures in Iquitos. South American indigenous peoples generally did not cover their bodies prior to external pressure to do so. In several of these cultural groups, anthropologists had looked for at least partial coverages of the body that were worn during certain festivals. The respective indigenous peoples were then told to consider that as their traditional dress and to wear it permanently. The indigenous peoples obey these prescriptions at least during the presence of visitors. In the case of the Yagua, this cultural group was told to cover the loins, and the women were told to put additionally in front of their breasts, bunches of bleached

twigs. When the Yagua saw that we followed the principle of minimised invasiveness (according to Art. 8.2a UNDRIP) by orienting our appearance towards the traditional visual culture prior to the external influence (in order to ensure the observance of Art. 11), the Yagua women took those twigs off with some relief. This was very understandable, particularly with regard to the scratchy nature of those twigs. Then, the Yagua also painted our skin with their traditional red designs, the colour of which is taken from particular tree seeds. The workshop was carried out during both visits to the Yagua village, the first time in the presence of the Bora chief, who had guided us through the forest to the Yagua village, and then again in the presence of a Shipiva guide, who also helped by translating into the regional Spanish, which is used by the different indigenous peoples as vernacular.

The Yagua reported that two years before, a Spanish man had turned up, presenting a document, which was apparently fake, and which allegedly defined him as the owner of the land on which the village stands. That Spanish person had brought Peruvian policemen with him, and with the help of the police, some huts of the village had been burnt down. The Yagua, were, understandably, very upset about this incident, and they showed us photographs of the burnt huts.

We were shown some of the forest near the Yagua settlement, and plants were explained to us. When considering strategies of sustainable tourism, it became clear that it would make much sense to make such explanations of the local flora part of the tourists' visits. The Yagua, like other communities in that area, maintain a tourists maloca, a traditional hut, where visitors are received. It was also concluded that anyone, who wanted to go any further than this hut, i.e. into the village or, with an indigenous guide, into the forest, should integrate into the indigenous culture in terms of adapting to the traditional visual appearance prior to the external influences. This should be made compulsory in order to respect indigenous culture and to prevent the destabilisation of indigenous cultural identity. Such a counterbalance to the globalising influences appears very necessary with regard to enabling the indigenous peoples' observance of Art. 11 UNDRIP, which pertains to the revitalisation of indigenous culture.

The situation with the Cocama was different again. The interest of the middle-aged village population in the issue of indigenous rights and their implementation seemed to be almost non-existent. Like the Bora village, their settlement also made an impression like any non-indigenous village. However, not only the chief, but the group of elders was interested, as well as children. The chief reported about recent success regarding legal recognition of their indigenous territory, as they were able to present a document, which proved former acknowledgement by the authorities, and which had been acknowledged again in a case against the navy that operates a base nearby, and can now no longer claim the Cocama ground.

To summarise, it has become clear that the observance of indigenous rights is very unevenly distributed in Loreto. Those, who still have the strongest indigenous identity by practising their traditional way of life, are not only disrespected, but are particularly threatened by direct actions against the mere existence of their dwelling. In contrast to their situation, the life of those, who have arranged themselves with globalisation, is somewhat easier, but this is so at the cost of giving up their indigeneity. Their collective and subjective behaviour can be understood as reactions to the pressure that the dominant non-indigenous culture exerts on them. To improve the situation, immediate measures would be necessary. It would be helpful if policies would, on the one hand, ensure that further actions that directly and physically threaten indigenous peoples be prevented. On the other hand, regarding the right of indigenous peoples not only to maintain, but likewise to revitalise their culture (Art. 11) it is necessary to install effective measures that support indigenous peoples' self-esteem and prevent any influences that could destabilise their culture.

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