

El contenido de esta obra es una contribución del autor al repositorio digital de la Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Sede Ecuador, por tanto el autor tiene exclusiva responsabilidad sobre el mismo y no necesariamente refleja los puntos de vista de la UASB.

Este trabajo se almacena bajo una licencia de distribución no exclusiva otorgada por el autor al repositorio, y con licencia Creative Commons – Reconocimiento de créditos-No comercial-Sin obras derivadas 3.0 Ecuador



---

## **The Assault on Human Rights and the Resilience of The Andean Dream: Health Inequities in Ecuador**

**Jaime Breilh**

**2002**

Fragments of lecture delivered at the School of Public Health (University of Michigan, Ann Harbor - April 4th, 2002), presented at Harvard School of Public Health's Conference on "*Health Impact Assessment & Human Rights: Promises & Pitfalls of Measuring Effects of Policy & Politics on Public Health*"; August 16th, 2002

**HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
CONFERENCE ON HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**“THE ASSAULT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RESILIENCE OF THE ANDEAN  
DREAM: Health Inequities In Ecuador”<sup>1</sup>**

IV Annual Distinguished Lecture sponsored by the Center for Research on Ethnicity, Culture and Health; School of Public Health; University of Michigan

**Jaime Breilh, Md. PhD<sup>2</sup>**

The point of departure for these reflections is life, since its protection is the central purpose encouraging the defense of human rights and of public health. Life in the Andes has an exceptional diversity. Particularly in Ecuador, my country, this diversity constitutes a characteristic sign that is expressed in two main forms: *natural megadiversity* and *multiculturalism*. Indeed, Ecuador's small territory synthesizes practically all types of life-zones that exist on Earth, having received the gift of high average rates of solar energy and abundant nutritional sources, which have facilitated the natural reproduction of countless species that show their beautiful vitality in the variety of ecosystems that compose the Andean mountain range, the tropical plains, the Amazon humid forests, and the Galapagos Islands. But besides being a highly biodiverse country, it is also a pluri-national and multi-cultural society, in which the activity of human beings, organized into social conglomerates of different historical and cultural backgrounds, have formed more than a dozen nations and peoples.

Regrettably this natural and human wealth has not been able to bear its best fruits due to the violent operation of a deep social inequity – unfortunately also one of the highest in the Americas—which conspires against life and is reproduced in national and international inequitable relations. This structural inequity has changed its form throughout the centuries and currently has reached its highest and most perverse level of development.

And regrettably it is in the so-called "democracies" of the North and South where globalization has become an absurd race to the bottom, in which countries of the North and South compete, in fact, for which will end up first being the worst in human terms; democracies that deny themselves, consecrating a systematic violation of the codes that guarantee standards of life and conditions of dignity. Our societies have institutionalized a combination of subtle and cruel mechanisms to deprive people of means to develop their own identity and the best in their culture, turning, as such into oppressive and violent societies, with apparently democratic but essentially authoritarian governments.

It is this serious and global unhinging that fills us with pain and surely impedes a purely academic construction in our speech.

In the following pages, I attempt to discuss the essence of this type of contrast and paradox that speaks loudly of a history of social degradation and the pillaging of human

---

<sup>1</sup> Fragments of lecture delivered at the School of Public Health (U. of Michigan, Ann Harbor - April 4th, 2002), presented at Harvard School of Public Health's Conference on "Health Impact Assessment & Human Rights: Promises & Pitfalls of Measuring Effects of Policy & Politics on Public Health; August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Director of CEAS (Health Research and Advisory Center); President of the Development Research Center; jbreilh@ceas.med.ec

rights; a history that, for those of us who monitor collective health, has implied a long process of constructing a society structurally contrary to life and to health.

It is for this reason that good quality research into health topics has to consider the epistemological confrontations that are presently occurring in the Natural and Social Sciences, especially when analyzing a particularly controversial topic such as human rights, whose analysis is closely bound to questions of inequality. An outstandingly clarifying reminder of this argument is provided by the epistemologist Edgar Morin who notes that at present, regrettably, "... the human sciences do not have an awareness of the physical and biological characteristics of the human being and the natural sciences do not have an awareness of their inscription in a culture, in a society, in a history"<sup>3</sup>; a statement which alerts us to present difficulties, and reminds us of the epistemological obstacles that exist in building an integral vision of health.

We are pushing for building an understanding along these lines because, while the impact of social inequity upon human rights and upon health are massive problems difficult to conceal, and however abundant the data and analyses are that have accumulated around them, they continue to be very in-illustrious problems. Research focused on human rights throws up for debate the bases of an unjust social order – sustained through the extensive destruction of nature, and that now presents as one of its unequivocal signs the global loss of access to well-being and health-, as well as the interpretation of the abundant demographic and epidemiological evidences of this disaster, evidences which, unfortunately, are often mutilated and decontextualized.

What's more is that the polemic on social and human rights acquires a special importance in the midst of globalization. Here we encounter a topic in which the discrepancies are so wide, expressed as such in the abyss that exists between the theses of Davos and Porto Alegre, along with the strategic interests that these two opposed consensuses represent: on the one hand, Davos expresses the voice and the point of view of the opulent consortia and monopolies that govern the world economy; on the other, Porto Alegre represents the necessities and yearnings of subordinated minorities and peoples, the needy of the whole world.

Indeed, for the large powers that control the world economy, the paths to expanding social and human rights, would be achieved through the globalization of managerial nets of high efficiency and competitiveness which would unchain without restriction all the technological possibilities to consolidate an accumulation of wealth and to elevate productivity; theirs is a productive model that is supposed to bring about the well-being of the people, but that, in practice, is transforming them into a mass of uncritical consumers that carry out, with their limited remunerations, the cycles of economic accumulation for the monopolies. On the other hand, common people from North and South of the Rio Grande have manifested scenes of social dissent such as those we have seen in Seattle, in Washington, in Ecuador, and in Argentina, as well as in the most important academic centers in the continent. That is to say, for workers, professionals, employees, scientists, etc., men and women who, in practical terms, sustain this global empire with their hands and with their intellectual work, the promise of a humane and peaceful World, the demonstration that "another world is possible" and that human beings are able to construct a true sense of freedom, of well-being and health, resides rather in solidary justice, in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Morin, Edgar (1996). *Ciência com Consciência*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil (tradução, María e Doria, Maria).

humanization of the economy, and in the construction of a community-driven-society, as in substitutable roads for the achievement of rights and true democracy.

### TRIPLE INEQUITY AND THE PROCESS OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFEAT

Research into the development of science has demonstrated that in different periods so-called *cardinal problems* appear, around which the attention of scientists of a certain discipline concentrates, and to which they can direct work and resources to constitute a point of growth or develop a quick accumulation of studies and publications. These cardinal problems constitute nodes or keys to the application of a paradigm and they usually express the influence of groups of power and the interests of distinct social currents.

In the field of public health it seems to be that in recent years the category of *inequity* has become one of those cardinal problems that stirs up different forces. And it is at this point that an apparent paradox arises: although it was to be expected that an investigation of inequity would be recaptured by the affected social sectors and progressive academics, it is noteworthy, rather, that a considerable part of that fervor comes surprisingly from institutions that have impelled the project of neoliberal reform of health systems or that have opted for a conciliatory position regarding this issue. This is the case, for example, of the World Bank whose politics of privatization and cuts to social spending have fomented the inequity that we see all across Latin America. Coincidentally, this same entity has encouraged many works on the topic of health reform, stimulating the appearance of deregulation strategies, and transforming health from a non-negotiable human right to a merchandise to be distributed by the market; and all this, in the name of a supposed justness and universalization of rights. In the face of this apparent incongruity we have presented an interpretive hypothesis that the facts are beginning to corroborate - at least in Latin America-: that in the framework of this counter-reform and dismantlement of the social welfare and health systems, the concern of the power groups with social inequality does not constitute an incongruity; on the contrary, it is rather a resource for the legitimating of this counter-reform. Manipulation of studies and data of an inequality that is now impossible to hide, it is a strategic necessity and is part of the so-called process of "governability". What is of definite interest is to produce a type of study and set of statistics about inequality, yet disconnecting them from their structural determinations and only stressing some selected empirical associations. In this way it is possible to create a way of treating the information that empties the data on inequity of its explosive potential, while concealing its social roots.

Resultantly, we have insisted in several occasions on the necessity of distinguishing between the notion of *inequality* and that of *inequity*. Since, to impel the construction of a different world, it is not enough to describe the deep social inequalities and those of health, but rather it is indispensable to put up for discovery the roots of those inequalities. *Inequity* is an analytic category that takes account of the essence of the problem, while *inequality* denotes the empirical evidence that becomes statistically observable.<sup>4</sup> Inequity is the lack of equity that arises from power concentration; it is a product of asymmetrical relations between social classes, ethnic or gender groups; that is to say, it is an inherent

---

<sup>4</sup> In fact the category "inequity" is an anglicism. The Spanish term "iniquity" corresponds more properly to injustice or inequality. The anglicism is adopted here because it is a widely-used term and is central in the contemporary debate under discussion.

characteristic in a society that impedes the common good, and institutes the impossibility of an allotment among humans that grants to each according to their need, and that allows each person to contribute fully according to her or his capacity; for this reason the study of inequity is a crucial point in the analysis of human rights. *Inequality*, on the other hand, is a typically observable and group-defined expression of inequity; it conveys a contrast -of a characteristic or measurement— produced by inequity. This is the case, for example, in the inequality of wages between social classes or between genders, which corresponds to inequity in the economic processes of production and distribution; this is also the case of inequality of access to an appropriate service of health, among said classes, among ethno-national groups, or between men and women, which corresponds to the inequity of the market and the distributive behavior of the State, as it is also the case with the sexist relationships that reproduce a structure of patriarchal power. This distinction is thus very important for the topic that we are concerned with here, because if we were to remain at the level of inequality we would be reducing or deviating our view to the effects provoked, instead of focusing on its determinants.

We are starting, then, with the recognition that there are marked contrasts in the enjoyment of human rights within societies, and that these contrasts correspond to the relations of power that characterize and separate social groups, each with their proper *modes of life*, which play a decisive role in the enjoyment of those rights. In equal fashion, embedded within these ways of life of groups, are singular or individual *lifestyles*. It is the *relations of power* that discriminate significant contrasts between the modes of the lives of groups and persons located on opposed social poles of a society, as well as the capacities that these groups have for producing and negotiating the reproduction of their lives under given conditions. Inequitable societies are those in which a process of unequal distribution of power exists: not only of the power that controls property and the use of material wealth, but also of the power that is required to define and to expand identity, projects and aspirations. In our societies a triple inequity is generally produced: of class, gender, and ethnicity, in multiple combinations according to each social and historical scenario, which together form a single structure of power. It is at this point that we will now pass to review the historical process of the defeat of human rights.

### **The Historical Defeat of Solidarity and Human Rights**

The solidary character of social conglomerates and the equal enjoyment of the tangible and cultural assets are a potentiality that could not always be expressed or be concretized. They were developed without structural barriers for several centuries, while societies were communally organized, they were guided toward the satisfaction of collectively-defined necessities and toward an equal allotment of collectively-generated goods. These were times in which social subjects operated in the function of use-values, that satisfied their necessities according to collective convenience: neither the sexual division of labor, nor gender differences or ethnic contrasts caused important inequalities then; not because they were ideal societies, but because the level of development demanded a certain equality for survival and social reproduction; private enrichment was neither thinkable nor possible and conditions did not exist for the concentration of power and extreme inequalities. At that time, Mother Nature, the "Pachamama" of our Indians, who worshipped her and took care of her as a source of identity and of life, came under the new logic of plunder and was seen as a source of power that should be restrained and exploited without attention to human or, further removed, ecological values. Then, once this communitarian subject was broken, private subjects, guided by the desire of

mercantile hoarding, arose, broke away from notions of equitable right and with justness and, alongside this process, a harmonic conception of the management of the Nature's goods was defeated. In the case of Andean societies those fractures were imposed at the time of Conquest and the installation of colonial society in the XVI Century. The expropriation of gold and of the land, and the feudal exploitation of the labor force formed the bases of the colonial mercantile economy in the Andean society; this caused the first defeat of human rights and of 'necessity' being the axis of the social construction. From then on, interest was centered in the production of profit and a system of domination was imposed, for which the construction of an *uni-national State* and the institutionalization of *uni-culturality* in the official apparatus was fundamental.

And clearly, the processes of political conquest and economic dominance that were at the center of the colonial society, impeded an equal and symmetrical relationship between "white," "mestizo", "indigenous" and Afro-American-Ecuadorian" subjects, as actors in this historical stage. And also, inside the social classes and ethnical groups that appeared, a gender hierarchy was formed, conveying altogether a highly inequitable power structure. In this way the subordinate groups saw themselves from then on wrapped in a tenacious social and cultural contradiction: on one hand the *de-institutionalization* or *marginalization* of these subjects and their cultures, with respect to the institutional apparatus and to the imaginary official;<sup>5</sup> and on the other hand, the necessity to build their own resistance and to save the possible reproduction of their culture, by means of the most varied mechanisms of strategic negotiation and survival.

Already by the Republican Era we witness the *second great defeat of human rights* and of 'necessity' as a *principle of social definition*, when the poor lost the right to claim property of the fundamental goods of industrial society. Of course, poor women, Indians and Afro-Ecuadorians suffered the worst part of the deprivation process. Although industrial workers –above all in industrialized regions- achieved through their struggle the right to maintain some basic labor, social, and cultural rights, at that time pursued via a politics of full employment that allowed for social security coverage through tax collection, the new economic order would not allow, however, the expansion of full employment policies to the subordinate nations, and the even spread of benefits along the market economy system. Under the baton of neocolonialist relationships, these nations were turned into exporters of primary goods and were thus blocked from thoroughly assuming industrialization, with the effect that only modest percentages of their populations conquered the human and social rights of the so-called Second Post-War Pact.<sup>6</sup> Under these conditions the subordination of ethnic subjects-- indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian-- and of the feminine gender became consolidated, by way of the installation of a Euro-centric and andro-centric educational and cultural apparatus. Furthermore, in the realm of science and technology, the primacy of the positivist paradigm, with its ruling principles of progress through control and dominance, and the subjection of nature to economic interests, instituted the bases for an aggressive logic of exploitation and appropriation of water, land, forests, seeds, and other natural goods; from then on, ecology also became marked with human signs of inequity.

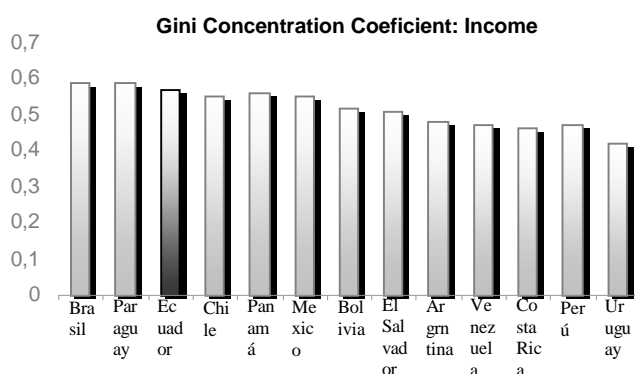
Finally, since the mid-1980s, the concentric and monopolistic character of the economy was accentuated, opening a new period of global mercantilism. In subordinate societies, such as Ecuador, a radical politics of dismantlement of the public services and social

---

<sup>5</sup> Here we are referring basically to the state apparatus, yet without ignoring the problems of discrimination and subordination that exist within popular organizations and progressive party structures.

<sup>6</sup> Betto, Frei (2002). *Economía y Ciudadanía*. Sao Paulo: Servicio Informativo de Alai-amlatina, Febrero 28.

security was imposed, along with an aggressive legal counter-reform, geared toward deregulating the rights of labor organizations and the legitimization of precarious modalities of work that were unacceptable in previous years. This is the beginning point for *the third and more profound defeat of human rights* and extreme social polarization. This is a perverse social model, because theoretically it appears to be a solution to the distributive errors of keynesianism, and a project to direct the wealth accumulated by companies to public service; and yet what truly has been built is a machinery for the demolition of rights, an institutional and juridical mechanism to impose regressive policies that minimize basic family earnings to levels of starvation. It is for this reason, that Galeano has wisely recognized that "workers' rights seems to be a topic for archaeologists".<sup>7</sup> All the while, the fraudulent appropriation of strategic resources has been institutionalized, and also the appropriation of savings accounts and citizens' retirement funds. From the last decade onward, in our countries we have seen a proliferation of cases of false crashes of big



Fuente: BID, Progreso económico y social en América Latina. Informe 1998-99, Washington D.C., 1999.

companies, cases which made obvious the marriage of political power with a fraudulent and opportunist handling of the economy. During previous years the crisis was buffered by federal reserve funds, some debt renegotiations and the money coming from privatizations, but when those mechanisms became exhausted and the funds were when the State was no more a public server but a payer of external debt, the full irrationality of the

new model was exposed.

Logically, in a context of social setbacks of such magnitude, there was simultaneously an almost unchained exponential growth in the indicators of massive impoverishment. But additionally to the material damage caused, the possibilities for cultural development and the strengthening of identity were seriously rampaged.

Thanks to the imposition of a régime of wages below the cost of the labor force, to this monopolistic structure that excludes the mass of underemployed and unemployed, reinforced by the politics of salary contention, in 1998 Ecuador became one of the countries with the highest levels of income inequality, as is shown by the high Gini index of income concentration.<sup>8</sup> This is an indicator that we have watched grow quickly from 1995 (0.539) to 1999 (0.58), while in that same lapse the average per-capita income in dropped from \$112 to \$77 (USD).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Galeano, Eduardo (2001). Montevideo: El Nacional, 23.04, p. A-6.

<sup>8</sup> BID (1999). Progreso Económico y Social en América Latina. Washington: Informe 1998-99.

<sup>9</sup> INEC (1999). Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida. Quito: Informe del SIISE.

An aggressive politics of wage reduction determined that average revenues were below the value of basic family needs and the poverty line, exactly in a country that acquired the highest rate of inflation in Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

But this internal pattern of growing inequity and demolition of human rights would not have been possible if there had not already existed a system of international relationships, equally inequitable and degrading with the imposition of an unequal core-periphery model, governed by a double discourse of openness for the outlying countries and protectiveness for the core countries. A privileged place is occupied within this process by the strategic expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] and, toward Latin America, Free Trade Area of the Americas [FTAA]. They have spread mechanisms of labor de-protection, mined labor rights, and internationalized the devaluation of wages, incorporating mechanisms of blackmail against organizations. These politics also imply a threat against the right to enjoy the goods of nature, since it gives pre-eminence to an economic pattern geared towards exportations, with the added expense of promoting destructive agrarian technologies. This is a strategy that multiplies the monopoly of patents favoring the looting of genetic resources and the appropriation of the intellectual rights. In 2001 the public debt of Ecuador occupied more than 40% of the general budget of the State, while education reached less than 10%, and health less than 3%. The payment of debt is a growing cycle of continual acquisition of new debt to pay old debt, and that forces the generation of surpluses to pay debt, with the corresponding fiscal consequences (that subtract revenues to vital programs), social consequences (consecrating inequity in the distribution of the budget), and environmental consequences (because it requires the increase of oil exploitation, mono-cultivation, etc. that cause environmental destruction and imply the drainage of resources for development). It has been used as an instrument for enforcing the non-payment of, first, the ecological debt that the transnational companies have with our countries to compensate for the ecological deterioration that they caused when privatizing the earnings gained through the exploitation of our raw materials, while socializing the costs of ecological repair; second, the debt to public health, accumulated in incorporating productive modalities and dangerous technological packages that knowingly constitute pathogenic processes which have elevated the epidemiological indices of various illnesses with expensive cures; and finally the historical debt that corresponds to payment for the gold and other materials plundered in the Colonial Era and that were good for the original accumulation processes of the European Empires.

All said, we can conclude that the analysis of human rights is not solely an ethical problem, but rather it is the convergence of the ethical with the economic and the political. In this sense, our first argument would be the that it is not feasible to construct the ethics of such rights without an equitable economic base and a truly democratic political structure.

Under these circumstances the analysis of inequity in the enjoyment of the human rights and health acquires a considerable complexity and it demands of us who work in the academic sector, an approach that allows the recognition and overcoming of reductionisms.

## **THE RACE TO THE BOTTOM AND THE HEALTH PROCESS**

---

<sup>10</sup> Acosta, A; López, Susana; Villamar, David (2002). Análisis de Coyuntura Económica. Quito: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales/Fundación Friedrich Ebert.



In recent years conventional health knowledge has been questioned for *reductionism* in three ways: 1) reduction of health to disease; 2) reduction of health reality to the empirical plane of directly observable phenomena; and 3) reduction of the health process to an one-dimensional order of mechanical or deterministic laws. These flaws are mainly due to a positivistic perspective that separates time from space and disconnects the multiple dimensions of complexity. The main methodological consequence of this approach is working health as made of pieces or variables, whose relations can only be understood by an associational formal scheme, constructed with those empirical phenomena.

Scientifically speaking, we must view health intertwiningly as an *object*, as a *concept* and as *field* of action. In all three dimensions it is a process explained both by generative or determining conditions and by empirical outcomes; those conditions and outcomes are neither mainly an individual problem, nor a medical care problem; they are primarily socially determined processes deeply enrooted in the quality of life of the population a part of which is the access to human rights satisfaction. So those rights are not carried out by decree, nor are they reinforced essentially by norms and codes, even if they appear as theoretically good. The economic system in totality, and not only the market, distributes the quotas of well-being to the different groups, according to their possible ways of life and in agreement with their quota of power. A triple structure of power exists -socio-economic, ethnic, and gendered- which molds working conditions, the quality and enjoyment of consumption goods, the capacity to create and to reproduce cultural values and identity, the capacity to empowerment and to organize actions in benefit of a group and, finally, the quality of our ecological relationships.

To give space to this integral conception of science about rights and health, we have pushed for several years from different corners of Latin America the innovation of public health, and it was amidst this movement that my arguments appeared in promotion of a new Epidemiology that placed life and not illness in the center of the analysis of health. This is a focus that places the movement of the economic, of the political, of the cultural, and of the ecological to the service of life and that doesn't accept that life should depend on, or adapt to, the economic and political interests of those in power.

Public Health, or *Collective Health* as we call it in Latin America, brings together a powerful arsenal of instruments for the understanding of the decisive processes of health in all these environments. Our contribution from *Latin American Critical Epidemiology* has been in the development, since the 70s, of a system of categories and a methodological proposal that allows us to understand all these dimensions involved in the determination of health inscribed in the typical ways of life of each group. We have been able to demonstrate that the *epidemiological profile* of a group is defined in the movements of the contradictions between the protective and destructive processes that operate in its characteristic ways of life and that, at the same time, puts possible limits upon the *individual lifestyles* of people. A social system that institutes the proliferation and deepening of inequity and that increasingly deteriorates human rights within those ways of life, will thus institutionalize mechanisms for the of deterioration of health; these systematically affect the physiological patterns, norms of genetic reaction, morbidity and mortality patterns of that population's organisms, and produce signs of over-aging. In contrary circumstances, when they open up possibilities for the enjoyment of an equity that allows for the satisfaction of rights, such as those in which personal and family supports and the physiological defenses and possibilities are potentialized, then the quality of physiological and genetic life increases, we witness the appearance of patterns of mental and physical health, as well as improved survival indexes. Life and health depend on this

movements between the processes that protect us and those that deteriorate us, and the development of all of these depend on the capacity of enjoyment of human rights which relies, certainly, upon the level of equity or inequity that characterizes the structure of power in which life is unfolding.

It is for this reason that Public Health is now more than ever at a crossroads facing a social system of great inequity that has become a bulldozer of human rights.

Unfortunately the official statistics about social welfare and health are not designed to register deterioration but to mask it. There is a clear lack of objectiveness that is masked by supposedly rigorous calculations that reduce health assessment to certain indicators that are more sensible to minor epidemiological changes, and place excessive faith in their econometric and statistical models. Under these operations one can construct an image of human improvement in countries with clear social deterioration. Public Health has to accompany that process because a docile and insensitive public health does nothing for us, it has to advance the construction of a new paradigm that places us next to our people in the inter-cultural construction of health that also sustains the dignity of life.

### **WHAT IS OUR ANDEAN DREAM MADE OF?**

Some of the best human dreams have arisen in difficult hours, but the difficult hours demand us to draw with clarity our dreams. For this reason we not only must know reality as an *object*, but also know our identity, as responsible *subjects* in the face of that reality. It is very important to convince ourselves that another world is possible, and to define it; but what will allow us to achieve it is to constitute a subject of that transformation. In scientific terms, we should be concerned with the objectivity of our method, but it will serve us little to penetrate into the best explanations if we don't truly achieve liberating ideas, a critical thought and a symbolic efficacy to establish inter-cultural relationships with the other subjects.

In the history of the Modern thought the Cartesian inheritance of the rupture of the subject and object of knowledge, and later the notion of the subject as an individual entity that calculates its material interests to the function of the accumulation of property, constitute the characteristic sign of hegemonic thought throughout the last centuries. By way of this vision, that has been imposed as well in the world of Science, a vision is cast to others and to nature from the angle of interest and utility calculation.

The current crisis of the system, more than a crisis of profit rates—one that even continues rising in several contexts -, is a crisis of the global conditions of social reproduction. Having incorporated human life into productive desires, and production around the calculation of interests of the private monopolies, productive activities minimize the impacts of such an activity upon life (humanity and nature), in a way that economic growth is deprived of being a road of human development.

Humanity clamors for the a different construction of the subject, and this aspiration is a fundamental part of the Andean dream. In popular culture and above all in indigenous notions, there is no definitive separation of the subject from other subjects, nor from nature, because the relationship is not one of subjection and utilitarian exploitation. And at this point indigenous culture enters in consonance with the critics of positivism and its Cartesian base. If the subject-object relationship is a utilitarian one, the integral-ness of reproduction and a collective human logic cannot be recognized; only when the subject is

understood as a mutually binding element of the global process of life reproduction, and when it is considered to be a part of nature, upon which it depends in turn, it is then that an authentic process of human development can be established.

In that measure, the affirmation of a subject, presupposes the affirmation of other subjects and it also presupposes the affirmation of nature. The condition of life for *us* is the condition of life of *others* and for *nature*.

The cultural resistance of dominated peoples has a special significance in these times and finds recreation in the Andean dream as a form of resilience. This is a dream that, in order to survive, also has to nourish itself with the dreams of others, and also has to be projected in a humanization of nature, so that this can mediate our betterment as a species with the capacity of dreaming and of building projects of emancipation.

In the Andes, as communities face the pressure of market fundamentalism they are learning that, although a part of the reproduction of life is private and corresponds to the arena of the family, as one's mediator of relations with the collective and the society in its combined form, resistance, on the other hand, can only be sustained by means of the community and of the nets of solidarity that are knitted among the oppressed groups; the Andean communities now have become diverse, not all are nurtured forms of ancestral communities but they are, at any rate, being rediscovered now as a protective shield in the face of this threat of de-structuration, and in front of the danger of facing life in an atomized way.<sup>11</sup>

Public health has to incorporate these elements in order to fully become a science of life, a science of hope, a tool of health by means of equity. And yet a truly profound knowledge of health and the construction of effective actions for it are not prerogatives of the Academy, worse still, of an academy centered around a single source of values. And all the while, contemporary experiences are demonstrating to us the capacity of another source of knowledge: the wisdom and knowledge of other subjects. Public health has to carry out a tremendous amount of work to recover the visions of historically deferred subjects and the cultures to which positivism turned its back on. This is a revalorization process and an inter-cultural construction that requires, but isn't simply reduced to or by, an interdisciplinary approach.

The persistence of the Andean dream now incorporates the dreams of others who refuse to be overwhelmed by a mercantile logic and a culture of egoism. It is for this reason that in North and South America we oppose ourselves to inequity in its three forms: economic monopoly, racism, and sexism. For this reason, coming from public health, we reject a social model that conditions destructive ways of life, modeled not on solidarity but on the exploitation of work and in the institutionalization of looting, based on corruption, force, and the fraudulent expropriation of our strategic wealth.

From all corners of the World the same voices are heard: we want to live in peace and to enjoy security, we want to ensure that human rights are not a code gathering dust on the shelves of experts, but a vital source of public health. With more force than ever we want to banish militarism and the all-out war as a strategy of control and a corrective to violence. And all this we want to build with the participation of all cultures, since we alone

---

<sup>11</sup> Martínez, Luciano (2002). *Economía Política de las Comunidades Indígenas*. Quito: ILDIS, Abya-Yala, OXFAM, FLACSO.

do not possess any absolute truth. We only believe in a real democracy, one that doesn't buy out people in electoral processes, but one, rather, that is forged interculturally so that a world can be built in which a single vision cannot be imposed unilaterally. As people of the World, we are neither passive, nor do we accept with resignation the suffering that they have imposed upon us; we are in the process of struggle, but we don't confuse critical thought in favor of a sustainable peace with abominable terrorism.

I began these words by referring to life, because I know that you in the North, and we in the South, work for life, and that we know that public health is a fundamental tool with which to defend it. I want to finish interrogating life, as it seems preferable to start upon new days of commitment to the pain of our people, and to do so I propose that we think about our scientific work along the lines that Walt Whitman thought about life; this friendly voice that echoed out from the bosom of this country, where there are people that are moved by similar forces that move us in the South, that dream, as we do, of the construction of *that other possible world*, and are willing to travel this road together and sing along, as Walt Whitman did, with deep human responsibility, full of solidarity, and with an open mind to rediscover ourselves every day:

*Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,  
I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go,  
I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,  
I am fill'd with them, and I will fill them in return....*

*You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here,  
I believe that much unseen is also here.*

“SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD” (Walt Whitman)