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**Lois Meyer and Benjamín Maldonado Alvarado (eds):
New World of Indigenous Resistance: Noam Chomsky
and Voices from North, South and Central America**

**City Lights Books, San Francisco, 2010, 416 pp, Pb \$18.95,
ISBN 978 0 87286 533 4**

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This book is not only about indigenous resistance; it is about indigenous re-creation of the world order. The reader gains extraordinary insights into indigenous struggles, survival strategies, and educational and political proposals under the pressures of global capitalism where national elites continue violent attempts at cultural and linguistic homogenization in Latin America.

The book is a “dialogue among equals” (as explained in the introduction) where Noam Chomsky’s words have the same weight as the 26 commentators, indigenous and non-indigenous education practitioners, political activists and scholars from nine different countries of the Americas. Most of them are well-known throughout Latin America but have not been widely accessible to an English-speaking public until now. Translating their concepts and notions into English, the language of global power, is in itself an attempt to support the indigenous struggles.

The first part of the book contains three interviews (2004, 2007, 2009) with Chomsky, in which he is asked to comment on the educational experiences of Oaxacan indigenous educationalists. He specifically comments on educational homogenization through uniform sets of national and international education standards (which are also seen in the debates on increasing testing), within a framework of his understanding of two central concepts, *comunalidad* and *interculturalidad*. In all interviews, Chomsky places education within a

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deconstruction of neoliberalism and neocolonialism which “use state power for the benefit of the concentration of economic power” (p. 66). He is, as always, brilliant in analyzing state and corporate power misuse and violence, and shows respect towards indigenous ideologies, but his understanding of language and culture in education profits from the voices in the second part of the book.

For example, as Meyer (p. 23) explains *comunalidad* (with as many definitions as there are writers) “reaches far beyond Western ideas of cooperation, collectivization, or social concern for the other”. Martínez Luna defines it “as a way of understanding life as being permeated with spirituality, symbolism, and a greater integration with nature. It is one way of understanding that Man [sic.] is not the center, but simply a part of this great natural world” (pp. 93–94). If the implications of this for indigenous and community-based contextualized ways of learning and teaching were taken seriously, “they would outstrip anything we have yet conceived of as progressive, alternative education” (Meyer, p. 24). As an important guiding principle, *comunalidad* has historically enabled Latin American indigenous peoples to maintain and achieve some territorial, political and even legal rights.

Simply translating *interculturalidad* as “interculturalism” (as in “intercultural education”) is misleading, as Tovar (pp.182–184) explains. Different commentators criticize “multiculturalism” and “interculturalism” as appreciation-oriented celebrations of other cultures and diversity as commodities, supporting the status quo, and rendering invisible the disparities of power and status between languages and cultures; as such, interculturalism is part of the effort “to preserve the privileges of the colonizer language” (Mamani, p. 287). The commentators also add other important dimensions to the discussion, e.g., the concept of “living well” (Moya), or the encounters between Western and indigenous epistemologies in schools (Rengifo). As a cultural, linguistic, social, economic, legal and political project, *interculturalidad* involves everybody (everybody is a teacher). It is a way of restructuring society, offering equity and respecting Mother Earth (*Pachamama*). Indeed, at the request of Bolivia, backed by nine other Latin American countries, the UN approved a resolution in December 2009 to develop a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.

Today’s silent ethnocide—a low-intensity warfare through formal education—is part of a 500-year-old Western nation-state logic and Western cosmology. When the elites in “Latin America” created states independent from their European colonial bases, they did not liberate themselves from the colonial cosmologies. Ideas about the white man’s superiority over dark persons, about well-being understood as only human well-being, about the necessity of a culturally and linguistically homogeneous nation-state, and about development, all became the founding principles of the new Republics. Schooling was, and is, the tool *par excellence* for perpetuating this cosmology: it was also “the principal instrument of the state for exterminating Indian peoples” (Esteva, p. 116). Today, the “political function of the school is ethnocidal domination, the eradication of languages and customs of indigenous peoples by means of an interventionist army—teachers and schools” (Maldonado, p. 375). The President of Bolivia, Evo Morales Ayma, is a classic example of this submersion education: he is Aymara but is not (completely) fluent in Aymara (Quispe, p. 292) or in Quechua. School “dispossesses [Indians] of their way of

seeing and experiencing the world, of their cosmovision, in order to ‘Westernize’ them” (Esteva, p. 116). “Education is a strictly Western enterprise and it cannot be separated from the capitalist project” (ibid, p. 122). Much of what passes as “indigenous education” conforms to the dominant educational paradigm, reproducing a stratified system where “post-modernity, artificial life-styles and urban attractions [...] are erected on top of peasant rural life, which is perceived as inferior and backward” (Bertely, p. 148).

In addition to self-criticism and reflection, all articles contain “decolonial options” (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2009: 130). Contributors advocate neither isolation nor purism; rather education based on *comunalidad* and *interculturalidad* should focus “on the need to equip their people to circulate in the world, confident of their identity and with a strong sense of belonging to their community [so that they can] strive to overcome the vulnerability and dependence generated by postmodern nomadism” (Maldonado, p. 368).

The contributors’ vision of creating a “plurinational state” strikes a chord with many struggles in a world abounding with “culture-killing” schools (Maldonado, p. 375). In India, if indigenous children attend school at all, the medium of instruction is the dominant regional language; not the child’s mother-tongue. Together with other infrastructural barriers this ensures that in India, of the 22.35 million indigenous children enrolled, more than a third are pushed out before grade 5. In *The Greater Common Good*, Arundhati Roy (1999) estimates that 33 million people (“development refugees”) have been displaced in India alone during the construction of big dams since 1950. Mishra and Majumdar’s *The Elsewhere People* (2003) describes several other groups, for whom, like in the book under review, “the battle for the school was part of the battle for land” (Zibechi, p. 317).

Writing of the massacre of Sikhs (Delhi 1984), Amitav Ghosh (*The Imam and the Indian*, 2002) asks:

When I now read descriptions of troubled parts of the world, in which violence appears primordial and inevitable, a fate to which masses of people are largely resigned, I find myself asking, Is that all there was to it? Or was it possible that the authors of these descriptions failed to find a form—or a style or a voice or a plot—that could accommodate both violence and the civilized willed response to it?

New World of Indigenous Resistance offers an excellent and inspiring response to Ghosh by documenting a multiplicity of narratives of solidarity and struggle by “those born in the basement of our societies” (Zibechi, p. 317), and encourages everybody to follow the paths of indigenous peoples, the world’s “moral reserve” (p. 72), towards a just global society.

Reference

- Tlostanova, M. V., & Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Global coloniality and the decolonial option. *Epistemologies of transformation: The Latin American decolonial option and its ramifications*. (Kult 6, special issue). Department of Culture and Identity, Roskilde University. <http://www.postkolonial.dk/artikler/MIGNOLO-TLOSTANOVA.pdf>.

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