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Indigenous Economies and the Social and Solidarity Economy

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Abstract

Despite cultural specificities with regard to what enlivens economic exchanges, SSE and indigenous economies have many commonalities within the community economy framework. This entry focuses on three of them, namely: (1) the way in which the SSE and indigenous economies foster the re-embeddedness of the economy through redistribution and reciprocity mechanisms; (2) the constitution of community-based aesthetics, presenting alternative ways of sense-making and valuing; and (3) the role that indigenous women and women in SSE have played in the political embeddedness of householding.

Keywords: minorities' agency; indigenous economies; principles of economic integration; community-based aesthetics; economy of reciprocity; grassroots knowledge; community economies

Introduction

This entry addresses some common points and particularities between the social and solidarity economy (SSE) and indigenous economies, aiming to highlight how the SSE framework can contribute to a deeper comprehension of communities' resilience and agency within a community economy framework. This entry, distancing from neoliberal policies grounded on the reduction of state involvement in welfare matters, refers to resilience as being the capacity of the communities to deal with adversity, and simultaneously reinforce social ties through grassroots knowledge and creative solutions based on self-organisation and popular technologies.

Based on the premise that popular resilience and other rationales regarding material life are key aspects of SSE initiatives and indigenous economies, this entry presents a three-fold contribution: (1) a discussion on the principles of economic integration and the everyday economy embeddedness; (2) a reflection upon community-based aesthetics and its connection with these economies; (3) the political dimension that the domestic domain might assume in both economies.

1. Some key aspects in the indigenous economies

Important differences with regard to rationales might be found between indigenous peoples living in forests and rural indigenous communities (*campesinos-originarios*). However, some characteristics of these two constitute a common set of concerns within the heterogeneous indigenous economies. Some of them are listed as follows: the way territoriality is experienced; the entanglements between the spiritual dimension and the material life production; and the connection with the surrounding nature, which is understood as shared with more-than-human beings. These three aspects are intertwined with each other.

Different from market societies and their exchange strategies, indigenous economies are shaped in line with a sense of sacredness. It means that the material culture both forges and expresses the interplay with non-human worlds (Santos-Granero 2009, Viveiros de Castro 2014, Van Velthem 2014). Materiality will thus be attached to cosmovisions in such a way that the production of food and artefacts relies on an ongoing covenant with the supernatural dimension (Zannoni 1999). Broadly speaking, there are underlying meanings with regard to what is produced or circulated that cannot be accounted for by an economic explanation. Communities' ways of living, producing, sense-making, and constituting their territoriality are grounded on a social and spiritual dimension, being thus embedded from the very beginning.

The embeddedness of the economy has been reinforced by a prevalence of reciprocity over trade, despite the fact that both are expected to play a role regarding the needs of provisioning. However, it is noteworthy that indigenous groups take their dynamics from an ongoing feeding process of rites and covenants. Departing from Marcel Mauss, and attempting to move a step further, Temple (2003) argues that indigenous societies are essentially economies of reciprocity, in the sense that a relational structure prevails over the trade itself. Analysing the Andean indigenous economies, he argues that reciprocity is at the heart of the matter. According to Temple, "if it is necessary to give for being, it

is likewise necessary to produce to make gift-giving possible” (translated by author) (Temple 2003, 81-93).

Although there are some epistemological differences between the ways of understanding reciprocity, gift-giving, and trade/exchange as driving forces in the indigenous economies - which could be seen in anthropological readings by Lévi-Strauss, Marcel Mauss, Éric Sabourin and Dominique Temple -, it can be said that reciprocity gains a prominence associated with the need of both strengthening the social fabric and maintaining strategic political alliances (also see the entry “Moral economy, human economy, and social and solidarity economy”). In this sense, even when money is present, the indigenous communities’ trade is more related to a sociability structuring factor rather than the Western sense of self-interested, individual-based perspective disseminated by market societies.

Reciprocity has also left a footprint on the way the space is organised. The Andean territoriality is a good example as it relies on the very concept of complementarity. The spatial complementarity that characterises the territorial occupation mode - named by Murra (1984) as a “vertical archipelago” - has revealed the economic relevance of a collective dimension within the communities (*ayllus*) and the value of popular knowledge that allows local people to cope with inhospitable environments. Additionally, this knowledge constitutes popular technologies of production - and should be properly recognised as such - not only because they shape innovative crop production methods at extremely high altitudes, but also because of the local wise elders’ capacity of unveiling some biological markers, such as the fox howl change as a sign of the proximity of the sowing time. As is also the case of the SSE regarding its creative potential to forge popular technologies and solutions to deal with material constraints, indigenous and other popular knowledge have not been properly recognised as an innovation in themselves, regardless of their contribution to providing different looks and frameworks towards old challenges (Banerjee, Lucas dos Santos and Hulgård 2021).

One example is the system of ecological floors - that is, the vertical archipelago - that implies a set of crop-growing grounds dedicated to different cultures according to specific heights (Murra 1984). The families and the community as a whole are committed to this collective dimension by both cultivating in different ecological floors and by adopting a community crop rotation (*aynuqa*) where the system, involving practical decisions and rites, is closely scrutinised by the community to guarantee good harvests. Complementarity might be thus witnessed in different aspects of the comuneros’ (communards’ or community members’) economy, such as the interdependence between the ecological floors with regard to provisioning, the commitment of the community to cultivate land parcels in different ecological floors, and the collective monitoring of the *aynuqa* system, to name but a few (also see the entry “Ecological economics and SSE”).

However, this complementarity does not simply exist in aspects concerning the use of the land and the organisation of the production. Reciprocity practices, trade, and consumption of goods from different ecological floors in local fairs (*qhatu*) and annual festivals, as well as the caravans along with these ecological floors, have reinforced this sense of complementarity, with mobility being the lever that shapes and strengthens

complementarity as the major driver of indigenous economies in the highlands (Lucas dos Santos 2017).

Whether it be in rural areas or in the forest, a balance between the humans' presence and the surrounding environment is assumed as a tacit rule. However, as remarked by Viveiros de Castro (2014), this conviviality is not to be idealised or stifled in time but understood as the result of social processes, where the agency is not recognised as being a monopoly of the human being. There has been a vivid circulation of symbolic meanings between humans and other beings (Viveiros de Castro 2014), in such a way that indigenous communities might be said to depart from a much more complex idea of surroundedness. They do not follow suit with the dual codes of Western modernity - where the split between nature and culture makes the former the hostage of the decisions with regard to the latter.

2. Reciprocity and redistribution

Common features and political alliances between diverse indigenous economies and the SSE as a movement towards social emancipation are not unlikely to be located in different countries and contexts. The borders between the two might be blurred, not only because some principles animating solidarity initiatives may coincide with ancestral forms of organising material life, but also because this dialogue can reinforce the political dimension of non-capitalist economies, highlighting some issues of public interest such as food and water sovereignty, the right to seeds, and the commons' agenda, to name but a few.

With respect to matters of public interest, the proximity between the agendas of the indigenous economies and of the SSE has increased, and, despite eventual mismatching, the fact is that the SSE and indigenous economies have been put together in different agreements documents, particularly in Latin America. In this sense, the Popular and Solidarity Economy (henceforth PSE) Law in Ecuador, created in 2011, refers to the need for the PSE to be aligned with the indigenous concept of *Buen Vivir*. Similarly, indigenous communities are constantly assumed as part of the solidarity economy movement in the 1st Brazilian National Plan on Solidarity Economy (2015-2019). Specific educational programs were also outlined, targeting indigenous peoples and other traditional communities (such as quilombos, fishing, resource-extraction communities etc).

Although there are some common features, such as self-organisation, community property, shared management of resources, and community-based production, it is noteworthy that some indigenous communities might prefer not to be labelled as part of the solidarity economy or the SSE. Likewise, the solidarity economy may appreciate the non-capitalist dimension within indigenous economies without necessarily waiving the usual classifications/formats that characterise its own arrangements. Regardless of this possible mismatching, there is indeed a set of features related to production, consumption, trade and popular savings that consist of spaces for dialogue and political alliance. Five of them are listed below in order to reveal these feasible bridges for political alliance or channels for dialogue.

The first one has to do with the Polanyian principles of economic integration - exchange, reciprocity, redistribution, and householding - the latter being less disseminated both in

the literature on the SSE and in Polanyi's work (Hillenkamp 2013). Despite the solidarity economy literature being inspired by these principles, and the different ways in which they might be combined in popular economic initiatives (Hillenkamp 2013), many projects on local development have still been focused on trade and the initiatives' capacity of fitting into the market. A representative number of SSE initiatives, however, have promoted ground-breaking experiences in terms of social and economic justice, challenging the way scholars have theorised thus far about issues such as everyday economy, poverty, resilience and inclusion policies, or innovation.

By putting into action community redistribution strategies, minority women in peripheral and indigenous communities, for example, have demonstrated that practical knowledge is as valuable as scientific theories with regard to social change (see the entry "Food & agricultural sector and SSE"). Inspiring new theoretical frameworks without being lenient with respect to the welfare state's progressive erosion, they have disrupted the assumption that redistribution is always a state issue. Similarly, the SSE and indigenous economies have proven that popular and community-led solutions can play a pivotal role in the re-embeddedness of the economy, by reconnecting the economic and the social dimensions.

Reciprocity has also been a common element of the SSE and indigenous economies, contributing to social ties and giving support to people dealing with material constraints. Going against the grain, reciprocity practices and community redistribution have not been properly valued as assets within local development guidelines and innovation projects. This is a challenge that the SSE as a field needs to overcome, debating to what extent community knowledge and activities have been repeatedly neglected on behalf of outside-modelled technical solutions.

Reciprocity and redistribution do not replace trade/exchange in market societies, but they can support people by enhancing their capacity for provisioning. In SSE arrangements, individual scarcity may be rebalanced by a collective supply that results from gathering sparse but diversified community resources. This engine can be found in different SSE initiatives, such as exchange fairs (using complementary currencies or otherwise), community repair shops, and popular rotating savings, to name but a few. Despite the difference between an indigenous economy of reciprocity (where equivalence does exist but may be replaced at any time by generalised reciprocity) and an SSE exchange economy (where gift-giving and generalised reciprocity are common, but balanced reciprocity is expected), generalised and balanced forms of reciprocity are part of an invisible economy that makes everyday material life more feasible.

3. Subaltern and insurgent community-based aesthetics

Consumption in capitalist societies cannot be uncoupled from social distinction (Bourdieu 1984). What is more, the social distinction has laid the cornerstone on which the circulation of material and symbolic goods relies. By promoting other logics of sense-making, the SSE and indigenous economies have contributed to causing a disruptive effect on the way these social asymmetries are reified in market societies. Although each of them does so in its own way, new theoretical and epistemological issues have resulted, thus generating empirical and political implications for how subaltern aesthetics will be addressed thereafter.

A multifaceted indigenous aesthetic rationale has unveiled non-western systems of perception (Santos-Granero 2009). What is at stake is the epistemological potential for indigenous aesthetics to challenge some certainties claimed by modern, western aesthetic rationality. Indigenous aesthetics, for example, argues for the plasticity of the beautiful, elucidating different patterns of sensibility, plural semantics of the taste, and non-western criteria with regard to aesthetic judgement. Questioning what could be taken as beautiful and what is worthy in aesthetic terms rattles the value criteria that underlies and strengthens markets.

Within their economies, indigenous communities might foster forms and codes of expression that cannot be explained by western-based theories. Given indigenous practices such as ritual basketry, body painting, weaving techniques, and native pottery designs, it might be said that their crafts constitute a means to communicate a system of values and representations in which material culture and supernatural dimensions appear intertwined. Some remarks below reveal how untranslatable this sense-making might be for western societies:

... the Yanesha theory of materiality is multi-centric, based on the notion that there are multiple ways of being a thing ... The Yanesha claim that objects possess different degrees of animacy and agentivity is tantamount to saying that they have different degrees of power. This power depends on, and can only be ascertained by, their particular ontological trajectories, social histories, and/or personal biographies... The Yanesha believe that things that are in permanent close contact with a person become gradually infused with that person's vitality (yecamquem)... The most important among these objects are tunics...which in Yanesha thought are equivalent to a person's body. Because of the process of ensoulment, the relationship between bodies and tunics is not metaphorical but rather literal: bodies are tunics, as tunics are bodies...The Yanesha and other Amerindian peoples conceive of bodies as including the objects more closely linked to a person through frequent use (Santos-Granero 2009, 106-122).

The formal aspect of the tipiti [an artefact made of braided straw to have cassava roots drained] reproduces a supernatural serpent, Kutupxi, although it does not faithfully correspond to its appearance, as it lacks the extremities, the head and the tail, as mentioned. What properly associates the artefact with the supernatural is the reproduction of its constricting movements and the presentation of its "body painting", or rather, its epithelial structure, which is possible through extensible braiding techniques (translated by author) (Van Velthem 2014, 8).

With regard to a community economy theory, indigenous peoples' artefacts are of great importance because they stress a three-fold contribution: (1) they unveil other modes of producing the material culture as well as different forms of sense-making, whose meanings extrapolate the modern western thought; (2) they forge other perspectives on social belonging attached to the material culture that contradict the western-based connection between consumption and distinction, and (3) they stress other possible aesthetic criteria that give rise to other patterns of sensibility and politics of taste (see the entry "Community economics and SSE").

It is noteworthy that crafts have not only played a pivotal role within indigenous economies but also constitute one of the major income sources in the SSE. Notwithstanding the differences they might present regarding value criteria or the association with consumption issues, crafts consist of the majority of commercialised goods both by indigenous women and the women in the SSE initiatives. In this sense, demands regarding spaces for commercialisation are shared by women in indigenous communities and SSE arrangements.

Such as in indigenous economies, different patterns of valuing have been fostered by the SSE. However, belonging and identity-building processes are aspects that remain in need of further analysis. If it is appropriate for the literature on the SSE to address issues such as overconsumption, climate-neutral and circular economy, and fair trade systems, it is worrying that some underlying aspects of the everyday consumption engine remain practically unspoilt. Amongst the subjects in need of further discussion, one must consider: (1) the way different social asymmetries (of gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality) might be reinforced by a distinction-based discourse, regardless of effective attitudes towards consumerism reduction; (2) the need of a collective approach regarding solidarity consumption, by building-up different logics of sense-making and alternative sociabilities; (3) the need to propose less often controlled impacts associated with productive consumption, given the prevailing individual accountability in the responsible consumption discourse; and (4) new imaginaries on consumption beyond the capitalist market, by exploring reciprocity and redistribution mechanisms.

Although there is still so much lacking in terms of theoretical advances on solidarity consumption, it might be said that the practices themselves have provided clues on what to do. Solidarity exchange circuits in many countries, for example, have stimulated different logics of belonging to the group, with goods in circulation being less valued for a class-based idea of the beautiful than for the perspective of being in connection with the Otherness. More than the goods themselves, artisans' and peasants' life stories behind the goods seem to be the key to animating local purchases and exchanges.

It is also worth recalling that, by evoking community-based ideas on the beautiful and the useful, SSE initiatives have contributed to promoting other forms of valuing laid down and fed by community-based bargaining processes (see also the entry "Heterodox economics and SSE"). This happens, for example, when a collectivity decides to apply the same price to all available services (in a number of local currency units) to make them affordable to some people within an exchange group. It also happens when products are chosen due to other value criteria than compliance with class-based market standards.

4. The domestic domain as a political arena

A third feature to be stressed regarding commonalities between the SSE and indigenous economies has to do with the domestic domain and its political dimension. Being socially gendered, the domestic domain has been repeatedly neglected as a potential seedbed for a political arena. Notwithstanding this misinterpretation, the domestic domain has accounted for the provisioning, which is one of the key concepts in a community-based economy framework (also see the entry "Care and Home Support Services and SSE").

Even underestimated when compared to other principles of economic integration, householding was not forgotten in Polanyi's work (Hillenkamp 2013). His concern with the re-embeddedness of the economy in market societies has made room for feminists in the fields of economic sociology and the solidarity economy to stress the role played by women in preventing the everyday economy from being uncoupled from the social dimension (Hillenkamp 2013, Hillenkamp and Lucas dos Santos 2019).

Both indigenous and peripheral women have contributed to this ongoing re-embeddedness process, having departed from their private provisioning concerns to raise alliances with other women towards issues of public interest, such as food and water sovereignty, the right to the land and to the seeds, and the struggle against transgenic food and pesticides (also see the entries "Black Social Economy and SSE" and "African American SSE and Distributive Justice"). What is taken as an issue of the private sphere is brought to the public one, intertwining economic, social, and political domains through provisioning concerns.

Going against the grain, since the householding is usually associated with gender imbalance, women from indigenous communities and the SSE movement (but not restricted to) have reframed the positioning of householding within the set of economic integration principles. Being at the forefront of many struggles for land, food, and territory, heterogeneous women all over the world have not only forged alliances to guarantee their ways of living and producing, but also creatively reshaped and upscaled reciprocity and redistribution in their communities. What is at stake is the prominence that women from indigenous communities and the SSE movement have assumed with regard to the re-embeddedness of the economy (also see the entry "Activism, social movements and SSE").

It is also worth recalling that this reframing of the domestic domain, thereafter considered as a potential political zone, has allowed feminist economies to question the split between the economic and the domestic domains as a possibly universal issue (also see the entry "Feminist economics and SSE"). However, since this split does not make sense when applied to indigenous communities - the domestic and the economic being coupled from the very beginning -, it might be said that this epistemological surveillance has provided a more accurate picture of minority women's agency over time.

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