Rethinking Development from an Indigenous Perspective: a framework proposal

Wellbeing and Subjectivity in International Development Conference
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The Tarahumara region in Northern Mexico

The Raramuri indigenous group (Pop. est 75,545), shares an approximate area of 60,000 square kilometres with three other indigenous groups and with the largely dominant mestizo (mixed) non-indigenous population.

Contested region: natural resources and wellbeing conceptions, resistance mechanisms (subtle and visible)

Asymmetries in the Tarahumara region

• The Human Development Report for Indigenous Population (2006) shows the Tarahumara region as the indigenous region in Mexico with larger disparity on the Human Development Index in terms of the difference between its indigenous (0.5461) and non-indigenous population (0.7831).

• The municipality with lower Human Development Index for Indigenous People (HDI-IP) in Mexico is Batopilas in the Tarahumara region (0.3010). This index is lower than Niger (0.3300), the lowest HDI country in the world (De la Torre, Rodolfo 2010).

• The Raramuri infant mortality rate (95 per 1000 live births) is nearly double that of the national indigenous infant mortality rate and triple that of the overall national rate. Monarrez-Espino, Greiner and Martinez (2004)
Framework to understand the construction and perpetuation of power asymmetries

A) Document *emic* discourses of wellbeing among Raramuri in contrast to mestizo

B) Identify factors that hinder wellbeing for Raramuri

C) How Raramuri contest resisting hindering factors

- Social, economic and political interactions are charged with underlying asymmetric power distribution among and between Raramuri – mestizo (non-indigenous)

- To understand the formation of the asymmetries that exist between the Raramuri and the mestizo, power relations must be taken into account from the moment understandings and notions of wellbeing are defined.
A) \textit{Emic} discourses of wellbeing among Raramuri

Two normative discourses concerning the way Raramuri people conceptualize living well:

- Living in the correct path, \textit{Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich}
- Homogeneity of living conditions, preserve ethnic identity
- Prominent with traditional authorities within the Raramuri political structure, high status individuals.
- Live \textit{well}

\begin{itemize}
  \item [\textbullet] Securing a family income, open to material accumulation
  \item [\textbullet] Associated with young adults and teenagers (some of them with experience on migration)
  \item [\textbullet] Need to engaged to markets and benefit from social protection programs (\textit{Oportunidades, Procampo}, etc.)
  \item [\textbullet] Live \textit{better}
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
  \item a) The significance of being capable of farming
  \item b) The importance of strong sense of community
\end{itemize}
Raramuri wellbeing as two forces: a right and a need

Right to maintain a distinctive ethnic identity, way of living and a livelihood based on subsistence agriculture

Need to have relations with the market, the state and the wider society
B) Hindering structural factors of Raramuri wellbeing

• Land conflicts.
  - Large tourist, mining, forestry investments and narcotic cultivation that put pressure on availability of arable land in indigenous territories.
  - Land invasions of wealthy mestizo ranchers (cattle and land grabbing)

• Institutional arrangements (economic and political resources can be easily hoarded and manipulated by small, privileged groups.
  - *ejido* land management schemes
  - political elites in municipal government
C) Resistance mechanisms to hindering factors of wellbeing

- Resistance in terms of resilience based on ethnic identity as a way to face ethno-political oppression. That is, as the social, political and cultural processes the Raramuri population performed to face power asymmetries by the mestizo and non-indigenous world.

- An identifiable discourse of Raramuri resistance implies maintaining control of key practices and cultural features of their ethnic identity. These key practices and features defined and contained by their way of living (namely traditions such as the teswuino; solidarity networks; ability to engage in subsistence agriculture, among others) are culturally reproduced in the autonomous spaces.

- Resistance also tells us about wellbeing understandings, a normative discourse of how live should be lived.
Conclusion

- Need to recognize power relations produced and reproduced in everyday inter and intra interactions

- This framework acknowledge the objective, subjective and relational dimensions of wellbeing

- **Wellbeing in the margins**: On the one hand, Raramuri people on the margins of a web of political relations that is dominated by political elites and economic policies that orient themselves towards a free market and the commoditization of everyday life. On the other, control of certain self-defined spaces within the unique cultural practices that fortify ethnic identify are produced.