

## ‘Tipai Uam’: *el recorrido indio.* *Kumeyaay courses astride la línea*

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*Resumen.* En demanda de sus derechos territoriales, de lenguaje y de autonomía política y cultural, los kumiai han comenzado a buscar marcos institucionales de trabajo y de distribución de sus recursos con sus respectivos Estados-nación. Este característico fenómeno de elaboración de redes multinstitucionales y gubernamentales, orientado hacia la ejecución de proyectos de desarrollo en beneficio de los indígenas, puede observarse a lo largo de todo el territorio americano. En el caso de los kumiai, este artículo define lo “transnacional”, no como un “nivel” de acción, sino como actores, acciones e interacciones que atraviesan distintos niveles y delimitaciones, acentuando de esta forma la naturaleza transgresiva e igualmente abarcadora del transnacionalismo. En este artículo se examinan las formaciones sociales elaboradas en y a través de las conexiones transnacionales, nacionales y comunitarias, que llaman la atención sobre las acciones políticas como procesos y como acciones materializadas.

*Palabras clave:* 1. frontera, 2. yumanos,  
3. transnacionalismo, 4. indígenas, 5. kumiai.

*Abstract.* In demanding rights to territory, language, and political and cultural autonomy, the Kumeyaay have engaged with their respective nation-states, seeing the possibility of institutional frameworks and resource distribution. This characteristic phenomenon of multi- and state institutional networking toward specific pro-indigenous development projects can be observed now throughout all of the Americas. In the case of the Kumeyaay, I define “transnational” not as a “level” of action, but as actors, actions, and interactions that cross over levels and boundaries, accentuating, in this manner, the transgressive and similarly encompassing nature of transnationalism. In this article, I examined the social formations made in and through transnational, national and community connections in drawing attention to political actions as processual and embodied.

*Keywords:* 1. borderline, 2. Yuman,  
3. transnationalism, 4. indigenous people, 5. Kumiai.

*culturales*

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*Introduction*

Social, political and economic structural formations have never existed *per se*. They have been the result of a structuring beforehand. A change from one structural formation (though never truly stable) to the next is called a *trans-formation*, an “in-between state of being,” a significant and important process of lasting effect. The currently happening Globalization, likewise, is such a process that bears the risk to untie and destabilize existing coordinates and securities. But it also bears new possibilities and orientations and, accordingly, opens up ways to yet “unborn” agencies and identities. The ongoing process has an important effect on confirmed systems and national configurations that took form as result of individual and collective pursuit.

One might ask now, what, of all academic disciplines, anthropology has to say in times of world-spanning, radical changes? And I would like to answer this question with a quotation by Dieter Haller that underlines the specific potential of socio-cultural anthropology, its potential to make out and reflect on practices of social re-organization: “[...] I understand ethnology not as science of the cultural other, but as a science that reflects on processes of the drawing of borders between the self and the other.” (Haller, 2001:4).

The following work challenges the discern of such practices in an attempt to develop a research on borders, that means, on borders of identity conception, of self and other, borders of hierarchical relations, of “national belonging,” borders of authority. And I define borders, in this sense, as inherent components and underlying structural pattern of relationships and, respectively, as imperative precondition for a communication between positions.

I anticipate that description, characterization and meaning would not exist, if one could not differentiate and organize a given knowledge by the use of imaginary and abstract borders. The organization of knowledge is subsequently the organization of power in a socio-political sphere arranged by an overall legitimacy and authoritative principles. Any disagree-

### *Culturales*

ment on a dominant power structure, therefore, might lead to a narrative and symbolic, often forcefully implemented, change in the structure of knowledge, a change in the organization of borders and limits of agreement.

The existence of borders, to name some aspects of a possible framing, hints toward an imbalance of meaning between “center” and “periphery,” between an authorized or somewhat dominant and agreed-upon status quo and its border, whose subject matters are more “out of scope” and of a different intensity and influence in meaning.<sup>1</sup> But the border, vice versa, is not necessarily delineated by, or from, the “center,” but is a partly dependent entity that might generate marginal meanings that *become* central. The border, therefore, would not be without the center and the center would not be without the border.

This close-up perspective leads up to the more outstanding part of the problem, that of “defined” and “uniform” entities *bordering* on each other. In reference to the above-mentioned, one might conclude that the borders of these entities were of a notably distinct fiber due to the continuous contact with *their* centers. In contemporary research on borders, assumptions often follow two perspectives of a metaphorical understanding of the border.<sup>2</sup> First, there is a *specific quality* of the border that belongs to a given entity. Second, in contacting another particularly defined entity, the specific borders form

<sup>1</sup> “The centre traditionally stands for the place of the symbolic concentration of values and power. Following the tradition of Western metaphysics, the centre symbolizes that *whole* in which the founding meaning of origin and truth is concentrated. The centre articulates the representation of space by delineating outlines (fixing limits) and simultaneously graduating the degrees of intensity between the *middle* (point of greatest saturation of meaning) and the *borders* or *edges*: zones in which the loss of clarity issues in a lack of definition.” Cited from Nelly Richard, “The Cultural Periphery and Postmodern Decentering: Latin America’s Reconversion of Borders,” *Rethinking Borders*, ed. John C. Welchman (Hampshire/London: Macmillan Press, 1996) 72.

<sup>2</sup> Here, I refer to related thoughts on theoretical aspects of the border in Claire Fox, *The Fence and the River: culture and politics at the U.S.-Mexico border* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999) and David E. Johnson, and Scott Michaelsen, *Border Theory: the limits of cultural politics* (Minneapolis/London: U of Minnesota Press, 1997).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

a kind of third category, a sum of two borders, a borderland,<sup>3</sup> or “third space.”<sup>4</sup>

But who defines this “third space?” Where are the borders of the borderland? And, are there borders in the central part of an entity? Questions like these were the thematic focus of my master thesis, which dealt with cinematic forms of representation of the U.S.-Mexican border.<sup>5</sup>

For my dissertation project, I decided to make the border my own experience and thus visited the setting of the previously used filmic material: the border between San Diego and Tijuana. The stories that I came across revealed bits and pieces of the stories that I was looking for: stories that *lived* in the border region.

The border between San Diego and Tijuana, between the United States and Mexico, has invoked academic interest of scholars not only from the field of (socio-cultural) anthropology, but also from the field of literature, film studies, linguistics, social sciences and, increasingly, environmental studies.

The post-colonial debate on “hybridity”<sup>6</sup> indicates the symbolic importance of the U.S.-Mexican border as “the birthplace, [...], of border studies, and its methods of analysis,” (Johnson, 1997:1) while approaches like Transnationalism and a wide range of Globalization theories came into being *because of* the international border’s changing function.

<sup>3</sup> Term used by Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: the new mestiza = La frontera* (1987; San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Term used by Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Here, I used fictional film for the purpose of examining the border region. The filmic material was my way to enter, my way to cross it and perceive it. Alexandra von Barsewisch, “Bordering on Images. A Cinematic Encounter at the US-Mexican Border,” unpublished Master Thesis, Berlin Humboldt University, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> The term “hybridity” goes back to colonial times. Contemporary discussions on the term, nevertheless, are preoccupied with its potential for inclusion although the different definitions by Hall, Bhaba and Spivak show that it is not to be seen as stable concept in postcolonial theory. I will try to mediate between the diverging definitions in referring to a more general concept as to be found in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998) 118.

### *Culturales*

In this way, the border has become an academic subject, and more importantly, a theoretic approach and “analytic tool” in the observation, categorization and understanding of different types of demarcated territories, localities and nation-states, social groupings, cultures, and identity conceptions in various disciplines. Working from the viewpoint of an anthropologist, “Border Anthropology” serves as an adequate theoretic stance, because the border is far more than a dividing line being imposed on people: it has to be maintained. It should be, as a result, associated more as yet with active thinking and conduct.<sup>7</sup> Establishing a “Border Anthropology” necessarily means to switch back and forth between positions and to relate diverging structural patterns to an announced set of references.

To look closely at the border region means to look closely at different ideas and concepts. In the course of my writing, I will draw attention to diverse processes and re-affirmations of (national) belonging. My main focus will lie on the changing and situational “positionings”<sup>8</sup> of people, groups of people and communities, on their active participation and tolerance within relevant fields of interaction, migratory movement and communication at and around the California border. In this sense, I understand the individual as *acteur* within greater social, political and economic contexts.

As I will observe phenomena in the area of an international border, I deal with concepts of the nation and the nation-state. For this context, I agree with Kearney’s definition of the nation-state.<sup>9</sup> Here, the nation can be understood as a community

<sup>7</sup> Here, I relate my understanding of “Border Anthropology” to Haller’s “Entwurf einer Ethnologie der Grenze” as extracted from Dieter Haller, *Gelebte Grenze Gibraltar – Transnationalismus, Lokalität und Identität in kulturanthropologischer Perspektive* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Term used by Trinh T. Minh-ha for the purpose of combining identities and differences in “An Acoustic Journey,” Welchman 7.

<sup>9</sup> “[...] in this modern differing it is the nation-state that emerges as the supreme unit of order, a social, cultural and political form which, as Anderson (1983) shows, is distinctive in having absolute geopolitical and social boundaries inscribed in territory and on persons, demarcating space and those who are members from those who are not.” Michael Kearney, “Transnationalism in California and Mexico at the end of Empire,” *Border identities: nation and state at international frontiers*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson, and Hastings Donnan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998)118.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

of people tied together by a common culture, a set of political goals and an attainment of some form of independence.<sup>10</sup> Its geopolitical space is the sovereign nation-state, although only a small amount of cultural and economic formations is contained by national boundaries. Numerous minority nations, like the Kumeyaay, live *within* and *across* national borders that are dominated by one or several majority nation(s). The nation, as I principally understand it, is not only a political, economic and geographic entity as such, but is its idea at the same time.<sup>11</sup> Imagined and factual manifestations of the nation inter-weave, correspond and link to each other in a cycle of cultural reproduction.

The United States-Mexican border shall be the shared axis serving as starting and reference point. It is the space, in the factual as in the metaphoric sense, for mediation on personal and collective identities. Here, I will delineate “culture” to be a concept of a continuously shifting set of meanings that is being mediated by different sets of representational practices.

Inside and outside, familiar and unfamiliar, self and other cannot be constructed without an imaginary divided space. The focus of my work, though, lies on lived realities in a jointly divided, but more so *shared* space: the cross-border community of the Kumeyaay.

The Mission Indians<sup>12</sup> are divided into various Bands and onto reservation lands, for whom title is held by the United States of America through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. San Diego County is home to four ethnic groups called the Luiseno, the Cupeno, the Cahuilla (all Shoshonen-speaking) and the Kumeyaay (Yuman-speaking) about whom the anthropologist Florence Shippek informs us: “Although the evidence for it is controversial, a national level of organization appears to have functioned above the band territorial unit until its gradual, de-

<sup>10</sup> Homi K. Bhaba, “Introduction: narrating the nation,” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhaba (London/New York: Routledge, 1990) 1-7.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (1983; London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> The name refers to times of the Spanish era where many of the indigenous ethnic groups were subject to Christianization.

### *Culturales*

liberate destruction under Spanish, Mexican and American political controls.” (Shipek, 1987:4).

The community of the Kumeyaay tribe whose “territory extended from the coast to the Colorado River and far about fifty miles on each side of the Mexican border,” (Shipek, 1987:8) finally drew my attention.

The Kumeyaay are in continuous contact with sister tribes on the Mexican side. Their interaction serves, besides the maintenance of familial relations, an increasing exchange of linguistic and traditional as well as spiritual knowledge that was and continues to be unevenly preserved due to the different national environments. The significant difference, though, is the economic basis with a predominantly rural economy in the south and a predominantly gambling-related economy in the north.

The Kumeyaay’s specific involvedness in the crossroads of identity, nationality and cultural belonging generates, by my account, a view on different *kinds* of separation and signification within the field of identity formation and identity politics.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, I studied the existing diversity of borders, boundaries, limits and frontiers in their respective characteristic features and meanings to communities and organized interest groups. Questions are assembled around my hypothesis that the current U.S.-Mexican border situation actually fortifies Kumeyaay “nation-building” agency and individual as well as community consciousness. To see the different sites and mechanisms of these processes and to be able to qualify the established *kinds* of borders, it was especially important to include interest groups from the “outside” such as the Academia, local politicians and NGO members.

Ultimately, the voices of my “informants,” and my own, the author’s voice, will come to a shared conversation. This conversation, as mutual process, consists of discourses and narratives that transcend the *borders* of my particular field of research.

<sup>13</sup> Here, the newer accounts of subjectivity, ontology and understanding of solidarity and relationships in the contemporary scholarship of *Identity Politics* are useful : Hilde L. Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press, 2001) and Iris M. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

Important discourses, in this respect, are discourses on and by Native Americans. Indigenous narratives, for instance, might be less dependable records of the past than reconnections of fragmented realities and re-framings of current political issues of cultural heritage and public display. Indigenous politics, like politics in general, articulate multiple concerns such as resistance, separation, community affiliation or tribal governance. By this conceptual perspective on the politics of identity, I mean that the idea of identity is neither singular nor monolithic but has many dimensions that may be usually separated for purpose of analysis. Here, I am principally interested in the development of external images, as well as self-reflection and in the experience of “Indianness” through time and circumstance.

Community affiliation, then, brings in another key element that Raymond D. Fogelson contends with in his chapter *Perspectives on Native American Identity*:

To a large extent one is identified as a Native American because one lives in or has close connections to an Indian community. The idea of communities is preferable to the idea of tribes, since tribes are politico-legal entities rather than direct face-to-face interactive social groups. Furthermore, in aboriginal and neo-aboriginal times there were very few true tribes, in the sense of institutions with clear lines of political authority, chiefs, councils, and strict membership criteria. Rather, [...], tribes as discernable units arose out of the contact with Europeans. [...] Belief in the existence of tribes is of operational value in that it postulates a political entity with which to treat and to enter into binding agreements on a government-to-government basis (Fogelson, 1998:40-56).

My research on the cross-border indigenous community of the Kumeyaay in the Californias, now, focused mainly on the impact of the international border situation on the multiplicity of community-related agencies conducted. The body of this article aims to give some insight into the different aspects of agency I encountered, aspects of “Kumeyaay courses,” as I name them here, at and around the U.S.-Mexican border.



### *Culturales*

In regard to the very different historical backgrounds and political environments that had influenced the Mexican as well as the U.S. community of the Kumeyaay, I anticipated divergent entries to the field. On the U.S. side, I predominantly approached informants on an institutional level as in museums, tribal councils or at conferences, whereas field contacts on the Mexican side also included the private sphere. My research was thus strongly determined by prevailing and nationally differing frameworks of power and specific community interests in the foreground of unequal political and economic settings.

#### *Kumeyaay Freeway 8*

I held one of my first interviews with Patricia Fuller, the (non-Indian) director of the Barona Kumeyaay reservation's Cultural Center and museum. Driving to the reservation took about 3/4 of an hour following the newly renamed "Kumeyaay Freeway"<sup>14</sup> from S.D. eastward.

While discussing my research interest, she made clear that I was not expected to seek private contact with residents of the reservation as this was seen as a disturbance. The Cultural Center, she continued, was also established to provide information to the interested public and, at the same time, to protect members of the Barona tribe from (scientific) inquiries. This commentation didn't surprise me much as I had expected such reactions imagining the herds of anthropologists, historians, linguists and archeologists from the numerous surrounding universities that were eager to do their investigations on Native American subjects. In this situation, I was tempted to recall a passage from Vine Deloria Jr.'s famous 1969-manifest that I had read as part of my general literary preparation:

Into each life, it is said, some rain must fall. Some people have bad horoscopes others have tips on the stock market. [...] Churches

<sup>14</sup>Very recently, this name was chosen to publically pay tribute to the historical passage route of the Kumeyaay from the desert to the sea.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

possess the real world. But Indians have been cursed above all other people in history. Indians have anthropologists (Deloria, 1969:78).

The range of Fuller’s activities was fairly large, including not only curatorial work, but also the organization of educational workshops, thematic research as well as the teaching of archeology and anthropology at two San Diego colleges. Most interesting to me were two upcoming events that month: a meeting of the *Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival* and the opening of the *National Museum of the American Indian* in Washington where the history and current living circumstances of the “Campo Indian Reservation,” the southernmost of the twelve Kumeyaay tribes in San Diego county, was to be displayed.

The “language survival” meeting a few days later gave me an idea of the practices of cultural resistance and identity formation by means of language revitalization.

Part of our resistance is our language that is so important to our people. I thought I tell a little story about our language. My reservation, when my parents were young, they were taken away, in the 1950s they were coming around and were taking away Indian children off the reservations and put them into “foster homes,” they were saying that their parents were unfit. During these times, our reservation almost lost its language completely, cause that whole generation was taken away.<sup>15</sup>

The meeting was a workshop in advanced teacher training. The participants came from all over California and represented about fifteen native languages out of fifty still spoken. In 1992, the “Native California Network” sponsored a meeting of a small group of tribal scholars to deal with the question of California’s endangered languages. Here, the “Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival” (AICLS) was formed, with native people on its board representing most parts of the state. And, since not all tribes have living speakers, I was notified,

<sup>15</sup> Paul Cuero Jr., Chairman of the Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians, speech at the “Symposium on American Indian Sovereignty.”

### *Culturales*

there had to be found other ways to bring those languages back to life. One way was to use linguistic and anthropological materials collected at U.C. Berkeley housing thousands of field notes, rare tape recordings, songs, and stories. Participants of the meeting were solely native Californian, while there were three white women in the hall: the administrator, an academic linguist, and a camerawoman of a local TV station that assured, at the beginning of the gathering, that the filmed material would only be used by AICLS.

The conference room is spacious and fully technically equipped. Air condition is running. Tables are organized in long rows, so that the 60 to 70 people present find enough space. Strikingly, the majority of today's participants are women in their 40s and older. The administrator, Marina Drummer, opens up the conference and makes some announcements. A Barona Kumeyaay lady subsequently opens up the meeting with a prayer in her native tongue and in English. Everyone is asked to stand up for the prayer. She thanks God, all participants and involved communities for their efforts in supporting a revival of their native languages. She also draws attention to efforts that had been made in the past, meetings that people joined after having been walking or riding on horses, to exchange experiences and merge forces. The next speaker is Javier Rivera. His talk is concerned with the vanishing of the Kumeyaay language also in Mexico. He tells that he had been born in California, but was brought up on the Mexican side. His daughters were still living in Mexico, he said. Since about 16 years now, he had moved back to the U.S. where he currently lived in San Diego. After finishing his talk, he unwraps a gourd rattle and starts singing in Kumeyaay while accompanying his song with the rattle.<sup>16</sup>

There were about ten different native language teachers during the six-hour convention that day that shared their particular achievements, findings and difficulties in teaching, as well as practical techniques and concepts. The above-mentioned Javier Rivera was the first person I met that had regular contact to family members on both sides of the border and who practi-

<sup>16</sup> Fieldnotes, September 10th, 2004, AICLS meeting, Barona Events Center.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

cally spanned the border space in applying his cultural knowledge, chanting or “Bird singing” and language, on various Kumeyaay reservations and in Mexican villages. He thus became a central person for my research later on. Another person I met was a non-native linguist who was working on an English-Kumeyaay dictionary for the Barona tribe. Later on, after our first interview, she wrote in an email:

When we were talking about the Barona dictionary a few weeks ago, I might have neglected to mention one of the compelling reasons for presenting the dictionary in a comparative format and for NOT standardizing the language [many Kumeyaay tribes do not agree to have the same dialect and thus work, if at all, on their *own* Kumeyaay dictionaries though some tribes agree, as in this case, on a comparative lexicon]. You’ve probably heard that many of the elders were punished, when they were children at school, for speaking their own language. And for much of their adult lives, their language has been looked down upon. Standardizing the language would mean recognizing one dialect as standard or “correct.” It would imply that any other way of speaking is substandard or wrong. (...) I think, it’s much better to recognize the legitimacy of different ways of speaking, and that’s what I’m trying to do with the Barona dictionary.<sup>17</sup>

I found out that of twelve Kumeyaay reservations in San Diego county four different dictionaries were either already published or temporarily in the making. This reflected on an important element of identity for each single reservation and shed light on current strategies of tribal politics and means of representation.

Representation, or rather self-representation, had a specific significance also in regard to the National Museum of the American Indian’s (NMAI) first opening exhibitions<sup>18</sup> in the country’s capital:

<sup>17</sup> Email from Alice Thompson, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, for the majority of interested Indian and non-Indian people that could not attend the ceremony in Washington, the Cross-Cultural Studies department at Grossmont College, the local “American Indian Movement” (AIM) chapter and the “Council of American Indian Organizations” proclaimed an official invitation to a so-called *Native People’s Day of Healing*. An event that was to coincide the opening with the reading of the official apology from the U.S. government, the Senate Joint Resolution 37 and the House Joint Resolution 98.

### *Culturales*

I just recently got back from Washington D.C. and participated in the procession that helped open the NMAI. And it was probably one of the most affecting events I've ever been involved in with American Indians since I've been an anthropologist! Just to be there in such an immense crowd! It was the largest, everyone was saying, largest intertribal gathering of Indian nations in the country's history and possibly in all of the Americas ever! The museum is quite remarkable, it's different from many museums and it's also the same. And the difference is: there is a gathering space. There was a critique the very next day in the *Washington Post*, after the preview. The very first article we read in the morning was very negative actually! Sort of shocking to my husband and I, because we had such a positive feeling about it, and what it made me realize is that people had an expectation, being the colonizers, being the people who controlled the information for so long, they actually said: 'Where are *we*? Where are *we* in this museum?' [...] You know, you have got thousands of years of history to talk about in these cultures and 500 years of degradation may not be the most important thing on their mind when they were going to talk about what was important to *them*! And truly, the exhibits reflected spirituality, they reflected family, community and very little, you know, about being massacred and devastated."<sup>19</sup>

I was surely interested in the emphasis that the Campo Kumeyaay put into *their* exhibition and found out that they used digital video material, photography and audio recordings among modern and traditional items ranging from willow baskets and grinding stones to pictures of the international border fence. The curatorial concept of the all-Indian NMAI board was to facilitate, support and show community-based and community-led public displays in the very last open space on the Washington Mall and to create, above all, room for national and international gatherings and conferences. The institution is thus the product of a historical development crucial for understanding the framework of conditions of social life and the political and socio-economic situation of Native Americans today.

By the mid- and late 1960s, indigenous minority activism

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Patricia Fuller, Sept. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

and writing proliferated within and outside dominant cultural formations a growing number of politically viable institutions and discourses.<sup>20</sup> This period, known as the *Indigenous Renaissance*, witnessed the foundation of the AIM in 1967, which later sponsored the first large-scale meeting of Indian representatives bestowed with the right to establish the first “International Indian Treaty Council” in office in 1974. A little before that, in 1970, the “North American Indian Woman’s Association” (NAIWA) was formed while, a few years later, in 1974, the “World Council of Indigenous People” (WCIP) had its first assembly. The imperative necessity for the WCIP was the building of an activist indigenous minority politics within the paradigm of a nation-to-nation status encoded in the discourse of treaties. As a council of “indigenous people,” they most importantly needed a designated stance of who belonged and who didn’t belong into the criterion. Here, the most striking feature of its 1975 definition of “Indigenous People” is that it was forged not as a list of „objective“ criteria but rather as a narrative. It thus created an auto-ethnography or collective re-possession of definitional control. Defining and defending indigenous (minority) identities unavoidably led to disagreement over whether biological kinship, language, culture, group consciousness, community endorsement, personal declaration, or some combinations of these “objective” and “subjective” criteria should be used to recognize “authentic” indigenous status and whose conception of history, memory and methods of historiography were to be considered as “legitimate” and “authentic.” As acts of indigenous minority or rather identity recuperation, these attempts tried to seize control over symbolic and metaphorical meanings of the most fundamental concepts such as “blood”, “land”, and “memory.” These terms and their potential meanings then form a different and complex set of interactions, a juxtaposition and integration, at the same time, of “real” and “imagined” genealogies, physical and metaphorical ancestral land bases, and narratives of “factual” and “invented” histories. Notably since the *Renaissance*, indigenous

<sup>20</sup> The following paragraph is inspired by Chadwick, Allen: *Blood Narrative*, 2002.

### *Culturales*

activists, artists and writers contributed to define their sense of an indigeneity principally by the means of creating an interdependent and essentially inseparable triad of the redefined concepts of “blood,” “land” and “memory.”

One of the outcomes of the changing (self-) conception and political standing of Native Americans was the “Native Grave Protection and Repatriation Act” (NAGPRA) from 1990, whose realization was the central responsibility of Cheryl Hinton for years. NAGPRA puts Native American human remains, funeral objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony under a special regulation, so that these items, if found on federal land, are legally protected. Any institution receiving federal funds, in this case museums, are consequently obligated to report these objects to associated tribes.

The treaty paradigm requires a level of essentialism, a clear border between nations or sovereign treaty partners. Such formal relationships existed before and after the adoption of the Constitution in 1789 and the election of a president responsible for treaty making. There were little changes in the recognition of the status of the Indian tribes as nations throughout the last centuries. It is important to note, however, that the constitutional fathers accepted the English view of the national status of an Indian tribe. The revolution, then, resolved the question of political independence only for the Americans. It did not affect the posture of other European nations toward Indian tribes. Following the Mexican war in 1820, for example, the Mexican government immediately began making treaties with tribes who resided in the area later settled by the U.S. California, and continued to do so until the 1870s.

The tribes’ status today, as defined by federal courts, Congress, and the chief executive, has created a confusing body of federal Indian law which is constituted, again, of “a loosely related collection of past and present acts of Congress, treaties and agreements, executive orders, administrative ruling and judicial options.”<sup>21</sup>

The sign *Sovereign Band of Barona Mission Indians – all*

<sup>21</sup> Commentary by Vine Deloria Jr. to Deloria, Vine Jr., and David E. Wilkens. *Tribes, Treaties, and Constitutional Tribulations*, U of Texas Press, 1999.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

*visitors check in at the tribal office* at the entrance of the reservation was a first tangible proof of the distinct legal and political status of U.S. tribes.

Interested in what this status actually meant, I chose to follow an invitation from the chair of the “America Indian Studies Department” at San Diego’s state university (SDSU) to a conference on Native American sovereignty. The panelists were mostly representatives from the surrounding Kumeyaay reservations and their presentations discussed the impact of tribal sovereignty on politics, law, health or environmental management. Before entering the field of such practical impacts, it firstly seemed to be essential to underscore the specific meaning of sovereignty to the speakers and the respective tribes:

[...] The U.S. and the state are delegated powers. Our sovereignty, that is inherent tribal sovereignty, is original and it is natural and it was not crafted by human made laws or actions [...], it comes from the creator, that’s how the people talk about how they came to be. The U.S. as a government wields legal sovereignty and it’s vested in the institutions and in the agents of government and there is also something called political sovereignty! And this rests in the American population, in such expressions that again the U.S. Constitution has: *to the people of the U.S.!* So, from an American perspective, sovereignty is more about legal competence, rather than absolute power, and it means the power of the people to make governmental arrangements, to protect and limit personal liberty by social control. Tribal sovereignty, as it is now exercised, has certain similarities with the way western law defines it, that is, is has, first of all, a legal political dimension, sovereignty can be defined as a relative independence of a First nation and their people combined with the right and power of regulating their internal affairs without undue foreign dictation, that includes forming their own government, [...] the power to exclude non-Indians from their lands, the power to administer justice, the power to tax, and the list goes on and on and on. And only governments can wield that kind of power and tribes are fundamentally that, they are governments, but we are more than just that, aren’t we?! We are also cultural and spiritual communities and I define sovereignty in a cultural-spiritual sense like this: I say that tribal sovereignty is the spiritual, moral and dynamic cultural force



### *Culturales*

that's inherent in a given native community. And that force empowers the community people and the community's leaders toward political, economic and cultural integrity.<sup>22</sup>

And, concerning the symbolic dimension of the concept, he adds:

It's about that sense of "we know who we are" that we have the right to fulfill our community's needs. Tribal sovereignty, or, put it another way, Lumbeness or Dakotanness, is, in my mind, the most important of the concepts that I've been discussing tonight, because it is, it doesn't really represent, but it is, the collective and integrated soul of each indigenous community! It is, in fact, the dignified essence of each tribal community as evidenced by the actions of the people themselves, not the economic elites, not the most educated among us, and not even the elected leaders either, but you, the people! And all you parents and grandparents at home who are working and laboring to maintain our homelands, our communities, because it is you, the people who are most directly affected by the communities decisions and those of the elected or unelected political leaders.

#### *Example of a "gaming Kumeyaay tribe"*

The economy of Barona Indian is completely based on the profits from the tribally owned casino. In 1984, after years of trying to find a way to improve their economic state, the Barona Band decided to enter into public gaming and offered bingo. During the following decade, bingo paid the bills and established a credible financial foundation. Today, Barona is one of the most successful Indian casinos in the country. The band is entirely self-sufficient and a very significant contributor to the local economy and charities in the surrounding area. This new casino, resort and golf course complex opened in January 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Symposium on "American indian sovereignty and self-determination in the 21. century," SDSU, October, 7th, 2004: David E. Wilkens (associate professor of American Indian Studies, Political Science, and Law at the university of Minnesota) in his keynote presentation "Manifest Sovereignty: The origin, evolution, and contemporary status of indigenous nations."

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

It is a \$260 million dollar resort designed by Bergmann, Walls & Associates, acclaimed Las Vegas architects that announced at its completion: “The concept is not of a ramshackle farm, but rather a themed, carefully integrated facility such as the master himself, Walt Disney, would have created. Ranch life has never been this good.”<sup>23</sup>

Policy toward gambling on American Indian reservations is made collectively by three sovereign entities: federal, state, and tribal governments. Eleven states now allow commercial casinos to operate. Twenty-four of them have casinos owned by American Indian tribes. Tribal gambling is the fastest-growing form of legal betting in the U.S. From 1988, when tribes earned \$212 million from seventy gambling facilities in 16 states, to 1998, when they earned \$8.2 billion from 260 facilities in thirty-one states, tribal gambling revenues grew enormously.

California’s passage of Proposition 1A in March 2000 will further accelerate this growth: Indian tribes now have exclusive authority to own casinos in the state. The role of the federal government, which holds American Indian lands in trust, has been of greatest consequence.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Copy of a news release, Barona Indians, May 22, 2002 (2).

<sup>24</sup> A tribe is sovereign in the same way the federal and state governments are sovereign. On the other hand, this relationship is one of fiduciary trust in which the federal government is empowered to make decisions for the tribe with the understanding that those decisions will be in the tribe’s best interest. So, in a more recent formulation by the Supreme Court in *United States vs. Sioux Nations of Indians* (1980) Congress has the power “to control and manage Indian affairs” as long as that power is used for “appropriate measures for protecting and advancing the tribe.” Over the years, the federal government has been an incompetent guardian at best, and a venal one at worst. Politically, however, attempts by Native Americans to expand tribal influence began to bear fruit in the late 60s and early 70s with the American Indian Movement and the Native American Rights Fund, who, together with other groups sought a greater measure of self-determination on tribal political and economic affairs. In 1975, Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, which gave tribal governments considerable discretion concerning how federal programs would be administered on their reservations. During the 80s, the Reagan administration concentrated its efforts on economic self-determination for American Indian tribes, partly in the hope that flourishing tribal economies would reduce their dependence on federal funds, which the administration severely reduced in 1981. In the late 70s, some tribes began to invest in gambling operations. The Depart-

## *Culturales*

In most cases,<sup>25</sup> states and casino-seeking tribes have been able to fulfill responsibility under IGRA to negotiate mutually acceptable compacts. The states have concerns about casino related matters such as traffic congestion, crime and gambling disorders, and tribes need state and local cooperation in meeting the increased demand for roads and bridges, water and sewage, fire protection and electrical service that casino ownership creates.

The state of California has decided to grant tribes, whose lands are within its borders, a monopoly on casino gambling. In 1998, an Indian casino initiative (Proposition 5) was placed on the

ment of the Interior, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development all provided loans and other financial assistance to help tribes develop gambling facilities.

Although the relationship between federal sovereignty and tribal sovereignty may be complex the relationship between the state and tribal sovereignty is not. As the Supreme Court ruled in the 1980-case *Washington vs. Confederated Colville Tribes*, “unless the federal government chooses to allow states to apply their laws to Native Americans on reservations, tribal sovereignty is dependent on, and subordinate to, only the Federal government, not the States.” In 1980, citing Public Law 280, a federal statute that empowers the states to enforce their criminal laws on tribal land, the state of California tried to shut down two bingo parlors and a card room operated by the Cabazon and Morongo Bands of Mission Indians on their reservations near Palm Springs. Rebuffed by the lower courts, California took its case to the Supreme Court. But in 1987, in a six-to-three decision that crossed ideological lines, the court ruled in favor of the tribes (*California vs. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians*). In essence, the Court held that unless a state consistently treats gambling as either a crime or a violation of its constitution, it cannot forbid gambling on tribal lands. Responding to concern expressed by many states about organized crime as well as about efforts by some tribes to acquire land near cities to serve as new gambling enclaves, Congress had begun to consider legislation to regulate tribal gambling in the mid-80s. In 1988, Congress voted overwhelmingly to enact the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA). The law requires that any gambling facilities on tribal land should be owned by the tribe as a whole, and that the revenues generated be used primarily to fund tribal government operations and programs. IGRA defines tribal land as consisting for the most part of land the tribe owned at the time the act was passed. But it allows tribes to purchase and open gambling facilities on new land if the secretary of the interior and the governor of the state agree (Mason, John Lyman, and Nelson, Michael: *Governing Gambling*, N.Y.: The Century Foundation Press, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> The following two paragraphs are informed by Mason, John L., and Michael Nelson: *Governing Gambling*, The Century Foundation Press: 2001.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

ballot by tribal organizations. Nevada casino interests which heavily depended on California gamblers, spent \$26 million opposing the initiative, but proponents spent \$68 million, making the battle the most expensive initiative campaign in history. Proposition 5 passed by a margin of 68 to 37 percent, it was overturned the following year by the California Supreme Court. In addition to their efforts on behalf of Proposition 5, California’s tribes had poured \$7million into the state’s 1998 gubernatorial and legislative campaigns, including more than \$650,000 to the winning candidate for governor, Gray Davis. After the election, they spent \$2 million lobbying the legislature. In September 1999, a month after the state Supreme Court ruling, Davis and the legislature agreed to place a constitutional amendment on the March 2000 ballot, Proposition IA, which would lift the constitutions ban on tribal casinos.

Now, two more casinos are planned, Jamul and La Posta, and the battle continues:

Former Governor Gray Davis, a Democrat, similarly urged federal officials to reject the tribes’ bid to annex the land [these reservations are comparatively small and thus dependent on expanding their territory], but Schwarzenegger’s appeal is expected to carry much greater weight with fellow Republicans in the Bush administration.<sup>26</sup>

The next weeks, I was able to visit all four Kumeyaay-owned casinos: Barona, Sycuan, Viejas and “The Golden Acorn” on Campo reservation, a newcomer, financially much less equipped than the former three. At the “Golden Acorn,” most of the personnel were from Campo, while the other three casinos employed non-Indian and Mexican American members of staff.

*The “Kumeyaay Border Task Force”*

The “Kumeyaay Border Task Force” is a solely Kumeyaay-led organization that was founded in 1998/99. Up until the first

<sup>26</sup> From [www.kumeyaay.com](http://www.kumeyaay.com), “Latest News,” Sweeney, James: “Governor opposes a casino in Jamul” 09/30/2004.

### *Culturales*

half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S.-Mexican border was a geopolitical line that separated two nations, but this line wasn't explicitly controlled. Kumeyaay members had no difficulties crossing the border in order to visit family and friends or work in different and seasonally changing places. Since the 1960s, though, border control was tightened so that northern and southern tribal members started to negotiate with the U.S. and the Mexican governments in order to solve the situation. The result was an "identification card" issued by the "Instituto Nacional Indigenista" (INI) in Mexico. The cross-border contact was secured for about 15 years until the late 1970s and 80s when this card was getting used by a growing number of non-legitimized Mexican citizens seeking short-term employment in California. The "Operation Gatekeeper," beginning in 1988, then, complicated the border transfer to a formerly unknown and solemn degree, because the new law made it extremely difficult for Baja Kumeyaay to qualify for the application process to acquire a "Border-Crossing Card." The requested qualification was a utility bill, some kind of proof of service like electricity bills, water bills or Military service, which hardly anyone could demonstrate. Ten years later, in 1998, the Kickapoo tribe of Texas and the Tonoho Od'ham nation of Arizona attempted to pass two bills to the U.S. Congress to enable dual citizenship for their Mexican tribal members. Before acting on those two bills, the responsible Congressman Lamar Smith of Texas asked in an official letter if there were any more tribes along the border that had border-crossing or citizenship issues and subsequently triggered the Kumeyaay efforts to initiate the "Border Task Force." Through these efforts and despite the difficult border condition after "09/11," half of the 1200 Baja Kumeyaay have been able to get a "B1/B2 laser visa" or "Cultural Exchange Visa" by this time. Luis Guassac, executive director of the "Border Task Force," underlines the goal of the organization as follows:

We explained to them [the Baja Kumeyaay] what we were going attempt to do on the U.S. side, because we are the ones that can sponsor this effort: because of our special unique relationship with our federal government. We explained that we are not going to seek

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

citizenship, we are only going to seek “pass and re-pass” privileges, because, frankly, in analyzing to go for citizenship we felt that it would take a lot more time and that we might perhaps even lose knowledge and relationship. We need a program right now for that our elders can get over here, and they agreed to that. Upon their grace, upon their blessings, we went on and started our initiation process with the “Immigration and Naturalization Service.”<sup>27</sup>

As one of the major interests is to preserve cultural knowledge, time seems to be the riskiest factor: “The elders are always first. All the people that are culturally connected, who still practice their lifestyle in some way: basket makers, language speakers. Those were priority! And age!” There is another aspect apart from these priorities factors, however, that still prevents many from the offered assistance:

Unfortunately, we don’t pay for the individual 100\$ fee for the laser visa. That’s what it costs, plus the 25\$ for the Mexican passport. [...] At this point today, the rest remaining are those that don’t have any resources. That’s making it very difficult to address for us, because I have no authorization of the tribes that financially support this to pay for any laser visas. They didn’t want to do that.<sup>28</sup>

*Language lesson at Sycuan – strategies  
in the use of language and cultural knowledge*

Shin, Hemouk, Hewack, Sepap, Serrap: Kevin hands out the numbers one to ten, each number on a different sheet embellished with a laughing comic figure and some additional sheets, as he says, to teach family members and friends. This afternoon, the class is barely visited, there are three teen-age students, then Javier Rivera, myself and another, female teacher. Melina and Adriana, two college staff members who normally attend the Kumeyaay language course on Wednesdays, have not been able to come this day. Counting the missing students,

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Juan Taboa, October 11th, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Cited interview.

### *Culturales*

the class was probably half-full. “When would you need numbers in everyday life?” Kevin asks and scans the persons sitting around the school desks organized in a greater circle. The answers refer to the counting of things and objects and to the precise description of time periods. One student says: “You would need it for playing peon!” “Right! Exactly, you would need it for playing peon!” The course continues with simple questions for the total number of shoes or sweaters worn in the room, the number of boys versus girls and other distinguishing and countable features. One by one, words and expressions are added. The door is being pushed open and a possibly fifteen-year old boy enters the class. Being asked if he was interested in participating, he indifferently removes his headphones and parks himself next to a boy with a similar looking T-shirt featuring some Hard Core band. The newcomer proves to be learning exceptionally fast and thus doesn’t take long to correct the carefully articulated phrases of his peers. Towards the end of the class, Kevin hands out plastic spoons, forks and straws for a simple version of the hand game peon. We play, starting with everyone in the class, guessing hidden straws in the hands of the opponent group, while the plastic forks and spoons are being used as makeshift counting points. Slowly, the number of players diminishes with the expulsion of more and more participants until there is only one person left, the winner. The sound level raises as notebooks are packed, tables and chairs are reordered. Concurrently, about half a dozen steaming casseroles are being brought into the class, the elegantly looking kitchen personnel coming, probably, from one of the casino restaurants. As we start to eat the enchiladas, rice and potato salad, I notice a rather thick hardcover book on the adjacent table: *The Mesa Grande Dictionary: “Let’s talk Iipai aa”* from the linguist Margaret Langdon. “The dictionary and its accompanying workbook are pretty useful,” Kevin says, “and I combine working with them to what I learn from Javier.” About an hour later, completely satiated and equipped with a self-burnt CD with vocabulary exercises, Javier and I head toward his car and drive off home. I ask why he didn’t lecture himself and he smiles and says: “It was a good lesson, wasn’t it?”

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

Originally, Kevin doesn't come from California so that he himself had to learn the Kumeyaay language from a local speaker. It was rather difficult to find an elder that still spoke the language and had instruction capacities.<sup>29</sup> About two years ago, Kevin decided to learn the language in order to help teaching it. His mentor is Javier Rivera, a man in his 60s from Baja California who had lived predominantly on the US side of the border during the last 30 years. Brought up in a small Mexican Kumeyaay community, the native language was his first tongue. And although his dialect is different from the dialect spoken by a handful of Sycuan elders, he claims to have learned some of the differing expressions of the “northern dialect.”

Notably at Sycuan College, the quarrels about different dialects are being solved in a rather supple way: “I know that Javier Rivera had been very available, we can always rely upon him to help a class. And if an elder like himself who knows the language and I willing to teach: then why not?”<sup>30</sup> Despite the college's flexible stance, the dialect issue remains a critical topic for Sycuan tribal members. Some time ago, the college also worked with Josefa Rodríguez and her son Felipe as language teachers:

It's kind of good and bad in the sense that sometimes people in the Kumeyaay Nation are a little sensitive with having someone from Baja. How do I say this? Sometimes a few Kumeyaay will get sensitive to the fact that [...] they have a slightly different dialect or accent. People from the north, some of them, get sensitive about that.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike in the neighboring country Mexico, Kumeyaay is virtually taught nowhere as primary language in households so

<sup>29</sup> The current *Native American Language Act* from October 1990, the result of an intertribal resolution first sent to the Senate Committee of Indian Affairs, deliberately encourages and supports the use and recognition of native languages in tribal educational institutions. The law defines language as integral part for the survival of native cultures and identities. The accorded special status of Native Americans thus includes the right to continue separate identities. In the following language act of 1992, funding is allocated by Congress to pay for grant programs.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Roger Meyers, director of the Kumeyaay Community College (KCC), October 21st, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Cited interview.



### *Culturales*

that the multiple efforts to revive the language, on occasion, happen to be strikingly curious. Jon, in this regard, just recently started to learn English, which makes an intermediate person like Kevin necessary. The outcomes of this endeavor are community-based, often inter-cultural collaborations aiming at saving what remains to be saved. Statewide, one can speak of a vast and ongoing language revival and general cultural renaissance. How Kevin ended up teaching Kumeyaay remains unclear to me so far. I was told, though, that Kalim wrote his dissertation at the UCSD Ethnic Studies Department and that he used to dance at the Viejas “cultural show,” a spectacular Native American dance performance staged on the torchlight-illuminated plaza that built the architectural heart between the casino entrance and the shopping area.

*Language provides a direct and powerful means of promoting international communication by people who share languages.*<sup>32</sup> The maintenance of the Kumeyaay language, certainly, serves not only the binding and (re)-building of distinct forms of identity perceptions: it is also a cultural link between the nationally divided Kumeyaay communities. At least among elders from both sides of the border, communication is restricted to their native tongue because knowledge of the respective national language doesn’t exist. But, as Leanne Hinton rightly states: “[...] languages are far more than words and arbitrary rules of grammar – they are windows to whole systems of beliefs and values.” (Hinton, 1994:69).

A very central element of Kumeyaay cultural life is the guessing game peon. Reference to this game in the language class was therefore no coincidence, but a statement of a coherent understanding of language.

When I first attended a peon tournament at the Manzanita reservation, it had more to do with an aesthetic experience than a thorough comprehension of its rules and purposes. Participation in the game included all age groups, from teens to elders, although they principally seemed to play in separate teams. I noticed, though, that there were no players from Baja in the

<sup>32</sup> Public Law 101-477, Section 102 (10), as found in Hinton, Leanne: *Flutes of Fire. Essays on California Indian Languages*, Berkeley: Heydey Books, 1994 (184).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

teams. If the language was the province of the Mexican Kumeyaay, then peon was certainly one of the foremost domains of the U.S. tribes.

The aim of this very complex hand game peon is to cheat the opponent party by hiding several lots whose correct location is to be guessed by the challengers. In actual play during fiestas, four persons kneel down in a line, facing the opponent party, whereby each party is consecutively allowed to hide its respective actions behind a blanket. Playing with two lots in a team of four results in sixteen possible combinations. During the hiding phase of the game, the active party falls into a chanting designed to irritate and mock their counterparts. These chants alter from one turn to the next. As these chants are unique to each party, they contribute to the special performance character or tactical style of a team. The more experienced a certain team is and the better its actions are coordinated, the more successful it will play. Being a good peon player corresponds to a certain social standing and is therefore, besides achievements in conventional competitive sports, quite appealing to on-reservation kids. So is peon also offered at regular workshops in the after school program at Sycuan College.

It is also likely that betting contributes to the popularity of the game. In the descriptions of the American anthropologist Ralph Michelsen, this factor was essentially important. In the 1960s and 70s, he predominantly learned from a group of peon players on the U.S. side, the Salgado family, and one group from Santa Catarina, Mexico:

The wagers were large. I witnessed the counting of one wager for a combined total for both teams of one thousand dollars. [...] Each team had counted the money before the game when each individual contributed his share to the “kitty.” The final sum totaled an amount agreed to in pre-game negotiations. If the team members lacked sufficient funds to match the agreed upon amount, friends or relatives could gamble with them in order to bring the sum to the necessary total. This was never necessary for the Salgados, because they regularly saved betting money before the season started. Also their

### *Culturales*

losses were so few that they were soon able to play with their winnings. Sam [the leader of the Santa Catarina team] and his cronies frequently had to resort to accepting money from non-players in order to meet the minimum amounts that the Salgados would “kneel down for” (Michelsen, 1981:75).

The fact that gambling played a crucial role at fiestas is nowadays broadly publicized by the gaming tribes on flyers and in TV commercials arguing that the new businesses resumed ancient gaming traditions.

More interesting for a “promotion of international communication,” though, is the game’s binding potential in terms of (cross-border) encounters to which peon, according to Michelsen, has always been a benefit to: “Hand games and gambling in general were an important vehicle for the distribution of goods and ideas as the result of intertribal play” (Michelsen, 1981:19) And although the relationship is an inner-tribal one, mutual understanding, at present and for the majority of people, still is a very remote ideal and it has to be seen if peon could be one of the unifying components useful to a “new” Kumeyaay identity formation.

There are four team players and four times four possible hiding combinations of lots in the Kumeyaay version of peon.<sup>33</sup>

In reading about California language peculiarities, I came across two chapters in Hinton’s book that specifically dealt with native counting systems relevant for and constitutive of distinct structures of thought. In claiming that each language had its own peculiar way of constructing number systems, she concludes that numbers should be understood as markers of intellectual concepts and distinct systems of belief:

<sup>33</sup> Slightly differing variants of peon are played not only by the Kumeyaay: “The modern distribution of the peon version of the hand game is confined to Southern California, a narrow strip along the Mexican border, and both sides of the Colorado river extending into Sonora and Baja California, Mexico. The people who played peon during my years of observation were the Luiseño, Cahuilla, Cupeño, Diegueño [Kumeyaay], Mojave, Yuma and Cocopa. The most active teams are made up of Luiseño, Diegueño, and Cahuilla.” (from Michelsen, Ralph, 21).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

The “pattern number” of European and European-American lore is three: fairy tales have three brothers, or three sisters, or three good fairies; a hero makes three attempts before reaching his goal. “The third time’s the charm,” we say in English, or, “Bad things come in threes.” But in most of Native California, the pattern number is four. It is the fourth try that succeeds, characters and episodes come in fours.<sup>34</sup>

And apart from practical reasons for quaternary systems as for instance in a counting based on the spaces between the fingers instead of the fingers themselves, numeral systems or, more generally, the respective language should be seen as “accompaniment to the creation of the world” (Hinton, 1994:61). In the chapter *Language and the Structure of Thought*, she argues that language reflected and encouraged a certain worldview such as a concern with the whole rather than with isolable individualities. She gives the following example:

One of the most lyrical writers to apply this notion to specific aspects of language was Dorothy Lee, who described how the Wintu [a northern California tribe] language expresses Wintu philosophy: ‘Among the Wintu Indians of California, the principle of the inviolate integrity of the individual is basic to the very morphology of the language. Many of the verbs, which express coercion in our language – such as to take a baby to the shade, or to change the baby – are formed in such a way that they express a cooperative effort instead. For example, the Wintu would say: < I *went with* the baby,> instead of, <I took the baby.> And they say: <The chief *stood with* the people,> which they have to translate into English as <the chief ruled the people.> They never say, and in fact they cannot say, as we do, <I have a sister,> or a <Son,> or <husband.> Instead, they say: <I am *sistered*,> or <I live with my sister.><sup>35</sup>

The linguist currently working on the Barona dictionary also underlines the highly distinguishing and meticulous qualities

<sup>34</sup> Hinton, Leanne (37).

<sup>35</sup> Lee, Dorothy, *Freedom and Culture*, Prentice-Hall, 1959 (7) as cited in Leanne Hinton (62).

### *Culturales*

of the Kumeyaay language that revealed the speaker's point of view and relational position.

Interestingly, in a 1950s ethnography about the Baja California Kumeyaay I found the following remark on ceremonial numbers:

These [the ceremonial numbers] consist of 3 or 6 (a pair of threes); the number 4 has no special significance. Juan Mata "Payu" of Nejí ranchería asserted that 5 and 7 "were also good," the only such opinion recorded. The usual story among the Indians of the Southwest is that 4 is the ceremonial number (Hohenthal, 2001:285).

In a section on shaman vision, though, the number four appeared to have central significance: "Indication of power comes suddenly through a dream; maybe this is a false dream, so the dreamer must fast for three days, during which times he takes toloache, and on the fourth he waits for the confirming dream" (Hohenthal, 2001:253).

The degree to which underlying characteristic features of peon, as the numeral system, notions of the functioning of teams and strategic play, or the role of wagers, are considered relevant to the (re-) vitalization of Kumeyaay culture is therefore part of my interest.

#### *The Santa Catarina health fair - an example of NGO networks*

One of the greater upcoming events Peter Ralphs informed me about was a health fair in the fairly remote PaiPai<sup>36</sup> village Santa Catarina. At 8 am that day, as I wait for Eduardo Gómez, a local Kumeyaay and director of CUNA, I meet Dolores. She tells me that she lived and worked in Ensenada. Occasionally, she says, she cooperated with CUNA in advocacy for her people, the PaiPai community from Jamau, who had lost its land base to a Mestizo

<sup>36</sup> The PaiPai are a neighbouring indigenous group to the Kumeyaay with a different language and distinct cultural heritage. Throughout history and at present, there is continuous contact and intermarriage between the communities.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

ejido years ago. After about an hour, we see Eduardo park his car in front of the office. He asks us to wait a little to be able to check mails and phone calls. The technical equipment of the four work places is certainly not brand new, but everything seems to be sufficiently functioning. Handmade dolls dressed in different traditional costumes are sitting among books and brochures, ceramics and woven baskets on shelves around the walls. We take a seat on the plastic chairs of the waiting area and wait for the water to pour through the coffee machine. Meanwhile, Dolores tells me of an elder's anniversary (death ceremony held one year after the actual decease) that she and others had been invited to at the U.S. Manzanita reservation and wondered if I wanted to attend. “Shortly, there was a French anthropologist in the office!” Eduardo joins our conversation, “do you know her?” And after I confess that I had no idea who she was, he continues: “she wanted an interview and seemed to be interested in the same questions as you are.” He notices that I am definitively surprised and quickly adds that he felt really honored by the increasing academic interest. Indians, he said, were definitively en vogue! The car is being loaded with coarse-clothed bags of rice and beans. We get ready to leave and finally manage to set off for Santa Catarina after repeated stops at gasoline stations and taco stands. We pass the suburbs of Ensenada and follow the winding asphalt road into the desert hills heading southeast into the peninsular mainland. It is already getting hot so that the rolled-down windows have to stand in for the lack of air conditioning. Constant radio messages are noising through Eduardo's walkie-talkie informing him about logistics and proceedings in the event's preparation. The density of settlements diminishes by the covered distance and gives way to a wide-open landscape with isolated timber-built ranches. CUNA had been working with the US American NGO “Comunidad” for two years, I am informed, whereof the latter was mainly engaged in providing health services to the communities. A health fair like today was a product of cooperation between the two organizations with CUNA functioning as local and culturally versed mediator between parties. The last part of the three-hour journey leads through a debris plateau, the road stretches right into the horizon. It is the

### *Culturales*

only passage from the Sea of Cortéz to the Pacific not only for legal transport: sandbags and stop signs give a forewarning to a military checkpoint. Slowly decelerating, we come to a halt. The metal gate in front of the vehicle is corroded and neither the shabby booth that had been erected in the middle of the road really provokes much respect. The hold-up machineguns, though, serve proof of the soldiers' mission: this route had been used for drug trafficking for years. We take a left at the next village, the following track is rather bumpy and sand clouds our view. At arrival, Santa Catarina, notably, disputes the earlier passed settlements' entitlement to despondency. The concrete plain in front of the school building now serves as the fair ground provisionally shed with a bluish awning. The place is teeming with people between and around the stands underneath. There are long queues in front of a classroom whose windows are covered with pieces of cloth. The whole scene resembles a huge fiesta with hordes of kids shrieking and scampering around. One room is used as dental clinic with technical equipment run by generators that continuously rumble behind the school's back wall. The entrance to the right is equally busy and the laughing inside results, as I can see later on, from repeated attempts to get as much people photographed as possible: couples, parents with kids, cousins and grandparents reassemble to continuously varying groupings. The photographer belongs to the many volunteers of "Comunidad" whose core of professionals consists predominantly of physicians. Dolores, meanwhile, stands in line at the first table on the fair ground. The lady behind the table is roughly in her 50s and she doesn't seem to get tired in explaining the day's procedure. She then documents paperback "health-check books" with names and personal data and waives us into the arena. We follow the crowd, counter clockwise, to another stand where a friendly 30-year-old woman measures peoples' blood pressure whose faces show shyness and irritation. Once again, notes are taken. Then comes the diabetes test. Here, Dolores declares her unease in respect to needles and it takes some time until she decides to make the test. Everything is fine with the result, which really makes her happy, because the risk of diabetes in the communities is particularly high. We subsequently come

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

to the info corner where a number of volunteers, all dressed in T-shirts with the logo of “Comunidad,” share out prepared plastic bags with calcium and vitamin preparations, toothbrush sets, toiletries, medicinal info flyers and pictured brochures. For some of the volunteers, it was the first time, as I am told, to work with native Mexicans and to practice their Spanish. But everyone seems motivated and misunderstandings are quite often solved with a smile. A conversation reveals that the organization was recently formed out of a “Flying Doctors” delegation, but before getting into details, we are interrupted by a new highlight that, besides the ongoing raffle, mainly addresses the younger participants, the piñata game, a super hit in Mexico. Adults, in the meantime, are requested to proceed to the third classroom where intentions and capacities of the organization were to be explained. The clattering sounds from the “clinic” continue and are well audible through the wall. Two representatives of “Comunidad,” a man and a woman, sit down in front of the black board. The room is filled. The man shortly introduces himself in Spanish then switches into English, interrupting his speak occasionally for Peter’s simultaneous translations. “Comunidad,” he states, now wanted to broaden their prior focus on medicinal assistance toward a more general and encompassing approach. There were several protégés, he says, that were willing to finance future projects. One of them had visited Santa Catarina some time ago and had in particular “fallen in love” with the village, which he wanted to provide with financial help for the completion of the clinic, a new water system, electricity service and an extension of the school building. All in all, assistance was planned for 10 indigenous communities with an estimated three to five year period for each one, in succession, to reach a stable ground for self-sufficiency. He knew how people were sometimes frustrated with development projects in the past, he says, and exactly this fact made it so important for everyone to understand the difference between “Comunidad” and former organizations in that they really wanted to work on a level of partnership, executing solely proclaimed needs which, again, were the result of community-based decisions. “We consider it essential and indispensable to maintain direct communication with each village,” he



### *Culturales*

goes on to explain. Things get a little out of focus in the successive round of discussion, when a woman from “Witness for Peace” is being asked to promote a petition for the Kiliwa to be included into the “Border Crossing Program” and another elder disapproves of shortcomings in the conduct of an Ensenada physician, a problem that, yet again, belongs to the responsibilities of CUNA. The meeting comes to an end. Half an hour before lunch break, only women assemble in the classroom for a “Women’s Health lecture.” A Spanish-speaking lady sketches the outlines of the female genitals on the board and illustrates biological processes of menstruation and pregnancy. The women nod and giggle. During the detailed lesson about the correct use of condoms, though, everyone bursts out laughing.

In making the biggest possible improvements on the health of Native Baja Californians, the Mexican NGO CUNA (Instituto de las Culturas Nativas) built up relationships with various other organizations. So did advocacy for specialized medical services lead to linkages with the Mexican Health Department Isesalud, over 80 local physicians, and other Mexican governmental and non-governmental agencies. In 2002, collaboration was started with the “Flying Doctors” that resulted in special health brigades and direct social assistance in indigenous communities including specialized consultations. To this end, CUNA organizes also the transportation of tribal members from remote communities to the scarcely equipped clinics in San Antonia Nécula and Santa Catarina.

In 1992, CUNA was founded by Peter Ralphs, a U.S. American anthropologist, whose father had been devoted to the history of various indigenous groups in Baja California.

In the successive years, a diversity of tribal, U.S. and Mexican volunteers began to build contacts over the border, trying to find solutions to urgent problems facing the Kumeyaay and other indigenous communities. One of their first activities was the organization of a trans-border contact where a delegation of PaiPai visited the Yavapai Indian communities of Arizona. This was the beginning of a series of visits that aimed at strengthening pre-border cultural ties between Native Baja Californians

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

and their relatives in Arizona and California. Today, CUNA is working toward the improvement of infrastructure, health care, education, and economic development in the eight indigenous communities that are scattered throughout the central sierras of northern Baja California:

Native indigenous students of these communities face a wide variety of problems in completing their education, two of the most important factors being economic limitations and the difficult access to educational institutions, many of which are far from the communities themselves. [...] In the two years that the Indian “Education Assistance Program” has been operating, a significant number of secondary, high school and university students have benefited through direct scholarships, thanks to the invaluable support of Lake-wood Village Community church and the U.S. Indian tribes of Viejas, Barona, Prescott and Cucapá.<sup>37</sup>

In its operating philosophy, “Comunidad” bears a resemblance to the approach of CUNA. Monthly medical service trips and health education fairs are combined, here too, with improvements in infrastructure and an educational outreach project that establishes partnerships with U.S. American schools. And although both organizations are likewise “dedicated to creating a self-sustained model in which the Nativos will receive the necessary support and training to be able to take charge of their own future,”<sup>38</sup> they still operate as agencies of distinct national backgrounds, which certainly shapes the relationship with the communities in question. The skepticism and irritation encountered at the health fair in Santa Catarina might be due to different factors, even though the central problem was certainly a mutually perceived distance. Why and under which circumstances are such “cooperations” thus agreed upon and what differences are seen in the relations yet established with CUNA and U.S. American organizations like “Comunidad” are therefore guiding questions for my further research.

<sup>37</sup> CUNA Newsletter, March 2002.

<sup>38</sup> “Comunidad at Work,” [www.bajacomunidad.org/Programs.html](http://www.bajacomunidad.org/Programs.html).

### *Culturales*

“We run ourselves like a business in emphasizing our organizational efficiency,” was one of the introductory sentences in the health fair assembly. Not only did I notice Peter’s slightly modified translation of “business” into “enterprise,” the foremost indifference on the part of community members was definitively noticeable.

I mentioned this incident later in a dialogue with Peter where he understood such confusion to be caused by a “completely different rhythm.”<sup>39</sup> The fact that former developmental projects from abroad had failed because of different perceptions of work, time and decision making processes, made the work model of CUNA particularly interesting. Initiated and principally led by a North American social scientist, the organization increasingly begins to recruit its volunteers and presently its employees from the communities themselves. And although a numeral balance between “outsiders” and “insiders” is not given, the central position of the director had been delegated to Eduardo Gómez from San Antonio Nécua.

I had the opportunity to work for the first time at a workplace in Ensenada, and it was Julia Bendímez Patterson the biologist of INAH (National Institute for Anthropology and History) in the state of Baja California, who gave me the opportunity to work as custodian here in Ensenada. I worked two years for the INAH and there I met very important people, good people who showed me things, people of whom I learned a lot. On the whole, while I worked there as custodian, I was encouraged to openly seek assistance for my people, for the people from the communities, and then I started to work for CUNA. First, I started working as coordinator for the “Medicinal Aid Network” program of CUNA where I am already working for eight years. By now, I am the director of CUNA and we currently, as result of the past years, administer four programs that form the essential stronghold of our institute, namely medical assistance, education, culture and sustainable development for the indigenous communities of Baja California.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Peter Ralphs, CUNA, November 11th, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Eduardo Gómez, CUNA, November 15th, 2004 (my own translation).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

At the time of the interview, he had been executive director for two years.

He obtained two years of his elementary school education in Ensenada, living with his brother, and spent part of his secondary school years in a Mestizo village. During these years, a secondary school was built in San José de la Zorra so that he had the chance to practice and study agriculture and farming there. After the end of his conventional school career, he further obtained a scholarship from INI (National Institute for Indigenous People) to take part in a nationwide workshop for VHS videotaping, one of his first projects that were to serve his community with outside resources. He later recorded between 80 and 90 tapes of oral history. “I am on both sides,” he comments his outside position, “I can tell you how my people think and how they act and I can also tell you how white people think and act. This is the opportunity that was given to me in life, to know people from the larger society and people from my community.” His distinction underlines a rather contrasting and bi-polar concept of belonging: “A person who leaves his community and stays there for a while will never lose his culture unless he has to assimilate.” In this sense, he understood his earlier video venture to Oaxaca: “[...] and to be honest, for me, it was a privilege since, on account of this vocational training and an awareness of the necessities that were urgent in my community, I could not go back to my community before I hadn’t brought benefits for which I had left my community in the first place.”<sup>41</sup> In working as director for CUNA today, he sees himself as communal advocate working under “outpost” conditions.

The conceptual difference between “Comunidad” and CUNA is thus more concentrated around the question of “who helps whom” if the current tendency in employment was to continue. Before long, CUNA’s personnel is expected to consist entirely of community members, so that the founder himself, Peter Ralphs, would become redundant. CUNA’s four leading programs, nevertheless, are still financed by foreign donations mainly.

In the political pamphlet of the recently founded “Intertribal

<sup>41</sup> All quoted passages from cited Gómez interview.

### *Culturales*

Council” of the PaiPai, Kumeyaay and Cucapá, I found interesting strategic merges and close correspondences in the formulation of political issues that hint toward the influence of CUNA’s projects and operating guidelines on the representatives’ policy making. The following statement is part of the Councils five-point declaration:

The Council will join forces with CUNA and other organizations to support and maintain region-wide cultural and social assistance programs such as the Medicinal Aid Network, the Indigenous Scholar Program, support for indigenous artisans, traditional gatherings, applied research and sustainable development projects.<sup>42</sup>

CUNA, in addition, fulfills a function as (international) liaison, while the Council, conversely, “provide[s] evaluations to improve and strengthen the work of CUNA.”<sup>43</sup>

The structure and management of “Comunidad,” in this regard, is associated more with work schemes of classical (though modernized) developmental projects.

What both organizations have in common, is the ideal of a functioning economy inside the villages to enable the greatest possible continuity of indigenous ways of life:

I think for us in general, we’re especially interested in making it possible for people to continue living on their land. When they move into the city, there’s a process of assimilation that happens much more rapidly and then they are much more likely to loose their land, because, if they’re not there to protect it, by Mexican law, it’s easier for other people to take it. In that sense, we probably referred to try to find ways to help people that live in the communities.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Political pamphlet of “The Baja California Intertribal Council. PaiPai – Kumiai – Cucapá,” founded in 2003.

<sup>43</sup> From „Intertribal Council of Baja California established“ in *CUNA*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Nov. 2002-Sept. 2003 (3).

<sup>44</sup> Passage from cited Ralphs interview.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

Policies on land rights and recognition are fought on several fronts: from within communities and from without, as in the case of Dolores, and with a broad selection of weaponry carefully chosen in accordance to the respective adversaries. The four native groups of Baja California Norte, the Kumeyaay, PaiPai, Kiliwa and Cocopá, obtained their present land bases in the 1930s and 40s as result of the agrarian reform in the post-revolutionary period though special status, as people of indigenous origin, was not granted until mid-century when the first Institute for Native People, INI, was founded in Ensenada.<sup>45/46</sup> The reform established communal land rights that remained unchallenged until 1992 when article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was modified in order to allow the privatization of *ejido* land in the process of the institution of a free market economy. Names like (the PaiPai) Ejido of Santa Catarina or the (Kiliwa) Ejido of Arroyo de León still refer to this type of land tenure. Today, there are eight federally recognized indigenous communities or ejidos in the northern sierras of Baja California whereas a ninth, the PaiPai community Jamau, has been completely removed from its lands to urban Ensenada. It is essential to understand that official recognition of indigenous groups in Mexico

<sup>45</sup> “I went to Mexico City in order to fight for our land. In that time, the government of Baja California used to hide the local Indigenous populations because it did not want the Federal Government to realize about our presence. In this way, authorities in Mexico City did not know anything about us and we did not know anything about the existence of a federal bureau of Indian affairs; consequently, the state government could entirely rule Baja California and sell out our territory. I went to see President Díaz Ordaz and he ordered to make some estimations of the native population in Baja California and see if it was necessary to establish an INI office. Since then we started to participate in a more active way in national conferences like that of Pátzcuaro, during the period of President Echeverría, and we were finally recognized as Indigenous people.” Interview with Jon Meza, Kumeyaay informant, in Everardo Garduño, “Chapter 3: The Imagined Communities,” *The Yumans of Baja California: From Invented to Imagined and Invisible Communities*, unpublished dissertation (20).

<sup>46</sup> Until 1948, there was no official Indian policy in Mexico. Afterward, INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista) was established with the aim of integrating indigenous populations into Mestizo society. Key to integration was a monolingual incorporation, an assimilatory stance later partially abandoned when, from the late 1970s on, Indigenous groups began to demand pluralism and autonomy.

### *Culturales*

does not take account of a political special status as comparative to the sovereignty model inherent to the U.S. Constitution.

Since the communities official recognition during the presidency of Echeverría Alvarez in the 1970s, one could say that some progress had been made on the subject of “public relations:”

Mexican President Vicente Fox visits Kumeyaay in Baja California. 02/03/2003 – La Huerta, Mexico. [...] During his visit, the Mexican president spoke to the assembled members of local indigenous communities and neighboring ejidos about his administration’s commitment to helping the country’s indigenous people. He pointed out that the Commission for the Development of Indigenous people [formerly called INI] has recently formed a National Indigenous Council made up of representatives from all of Mexico’s indigenous communities to formalize channels of communication between tribes and the federal government. Baja California has currently four members on the Council. [...] Fox recognized the important work of indigenous community members to preserve their culture and traditions, and he told reporters that he had called for all three levels of government to carry out a coordinated effort to immediately begin work on rescuing Baja California’s native languages, all of which are considered of disappearing.

The article subsequently ends portraying the more practical facts that awaited the noble visit: “President Fox lunched at the home of 85 year old traditional authority Teodora Cuero. When asked what was on the menu, the ever-feisty octogenarian replied, ‘Rice and beans, of course! What should he expect? We are poor, that’s what we eat!’”<sup>47</sup>

I met the traditional Kumeyaay authority from the La Huerta, Teodora Cuero, as participant of the “Comunidad” health fair where she chat, now and then, with another traditional authority, Josefa Rodríguez, from San José de la Zorra. With Josefa and her son Felipe, activist in the bi-national Kumeyaay border alliance and coordinator of various community-based projects, I

<sup>47</sup> Wilken, Michael: “Mexican President Vicente Fox visits Kumeyaay in Baja California. 02/03/05 – La Huerta, Mexico,” under *Latest News*, [www.kumeyaay.com](http://www.kumeyaay.com).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

later established closer contact. During the course of a couple of weeks, the Rodríguez family allowed me to get a glimpse of what living in the communities approximately meant.

*November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004*

The ringing of the Disney-style clock is the reminder that today was a normal school day. To check the time would have meant to sneak past the girls' beds to the dresser but I decide that I could do without. I guess the time around six o'clock in the morning. It is still dark outside. Slender rain is falling. The neighbors' cocks seem to be quite hale and hearty. In the small kitchen, I grope for the matches and it takes some time until I manage to light up the lamp that contains no more than a puddle of petroleum. Water access down here in the valley of Guadalupe is notably less complicated than up in San José de la Zorra, the Rodríguez' main residence. Morning coffee is brewed from the huge container of purified drinking water. All other needs are served by the yellow rubber hose screwed to the freestanding faucet right behind the out-of-order washing machine in the drive-up. Only after I brushed my teeth and packed, the sun rises slowly. I realize that I got up one hour early, at five. I hear the girls shuffle and giggle while they are frying in the kitchen. It is seven o'clock in the meantime and furthermore no indication of Felipe's arrival so that the girls also become a little nervous since he had offered them a ride to school. Chances for the planned appointment at Peter's house in Ensenada shrink by the minute although I hope that he had calculated in "Indian time." Around 8:30, Felipe drives by the "Dos Hermanos" shop where I am likewise busy buying donats and watching Claudia Schiffer praising the advantages of the newest Volkswagen in German. It comes out that he had been occupied the whole night in his San José bungalow wrapping up and packing the ceramics and various artesanías that we had bought the day before in Santa Catarina. Today, he says, they are sent to Mexico City with some people from SAGARPA. On the village dirt road, I see the girls come back from the bus



### *Culturales*

station, where they had been informed that the buses were not running because of the rainfall. Rain, on many occasions in this area, brings normal bus and school schedules to a standstill. Felipe and I then say good-bye to Josefa and the “chamacas,” how her grand daughters are jokingly called. It is the last time that I see them this year. After half an hour drive, we meet Eduardo Gómez at his CUNA office. Peter had already left for San Diego, so that the three of us would have to drive in a separate car. Eduardo waives at me with a scribbled-down address of a hotel and asks me to look it up on the “mapquest” Internet page. I try my best with considerable difficulties, but the hotel seems not to exist. And only later on, I get its correct name and location calling Peter’s cell phone. We start our 2-hour journey at nine after Felipe had asked the CUNA secretary to transport his numerous packages to the SAGARPA office. We drive with Felipe’s Japanese car. The pacific to the left glitters in bluish tones. At the coastline, the rain appears to be defeated. There are no greater delays at the border and the vendors, crippled and in wheel chairs many of them, perform unwillingly as protagonists in some kind of absurd picture show while I film them through the rolled-down window. Roaring deer on canvas, Indian dolls, sorted sets of chewing gum, bamboo flutes and oversized plastic robots float by in a surreal visual sequence accompanied by a chorus of crying babies and the hollering sound of countless cars. At 11 am, we finally arrive at the “Red Lion Hanalei.” Asked for the NAEPC (Native American Environmental Protection Coalition) symposium, the receptionist sends us to the conference room on the first floor. Lunch break had just begun and everyone waits in line for self-serve at the buffet. We take a seat at one of the round tables and get into a conversation on questions of political self-determination with the interpreter, a charming lady from Ensenada who, prior to this day, confessed to have never heard of the Kumeyaay. After lunch, we assemble in a small group in the designated smoking area. A representative from the Arizona Tohono O’tham tribe, another border community, Peter and a biologist from San Diego are joining us. At that point, I remember coming across biologist’s name in a book on research projects in Baja

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

California. We had just missed the talk “Water Systems assessment in Baja California” on her last year’s investigation in Nécua, Eduardo’s place of birth. The conference starts again. Contrary to prior assumptions, the meeting is not attended by the San Diego EPA (the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) official, which maybe led to the prolonged discussion on the continuously worsening state of communication and coordination between the latter and NAEPC (NGO in charge of synchronizing US tribal interests with respect to environmental issues). It becomes apparent that current tendencies in the actual “Border 2012”<sup>48</sup> program to shift administrative authority from the national level to state and communal levels provoke ambivalent reactions, which, on the one hand, voice a menacing loss of political power and, on the other hand, a greater potential for efficiency in more locally defined and controlled environmental programs. The thus following subject, the drastic and ongoing cut in financial funds by the U.S. government, is being assessed by all participants in unison. The discussion then touches the nationally corresponding side of the joined enterprise when Peter is being asked if there were alliances between a government agency comparable to EPA and local indigenous communities in Mexico. “No, Semarnat, which, in this regard, would be the equivalent, has no contact to Baja California indigenous communities.” And he points out that CUNA in accordance to NAEPC would find itself in a similarly difficult situation of not being authorized nor in aspiration of speaking for indigenous communities in government-to-government agendas. In finishing his comment, he rounds at Eduardo and applies for a direct consultation. Logistical pause. The English-speaking majority of people hunt for their headsets to be able to follow the exposition of his perspective. First, Eduardo draws attention to the incongruously artificial quality of the “100 kilometre” clause<sup>49</sup> in the “Border 2012” program

<sup>48</sup> Ten-year binational environmental program, agreed on in Tijuana 2001.

<sup>49</sup> The binational environmental program „Border 2012“ considers the border region as the area extending 100 kilometers on either side of the U.S.-Mexican border, based on the *Agreement on Cooperation for the Protection and Improvement of the Environment in the Border Area* signed in La Paz in 1983.

### *Culturales*

that momentarily excluded the Mexican Kiliwa from the program's outreach because of their geographical location south of the demarcation line. "They will have to understand that pollution, be it air pollution or water pollution, doesn't respect bureaucratic boundaries!" he illustrates the case, "The Kiliwa are affected to the same degree by border-related contamination as we are!" Most of the assembled mumble a general consent. His overall concern, though, would be that, for the future, he considered it essentially important to intensify a direct tribe-to-tribe contact without mediation through NGO agencies and thus refers to the existence of the Mexican Intertribal Council. After he finished, all switch back to English. The subsequent wrap up envisions, very generally, improvements in networking and communication. It is late afternoon. People pack up and move towards the door. Stepping outside into the bright daylight, I take some time to find everybody. While getting into the car, I am acquainted with the changed plan for today, a spontaneous trip to Santa Ysabel, the newly home of Felipe's sister Adriana and her husband Steve. And so we start out for the northernmost Kumeyaay reservation in San Diego County. It takes about an hour drive. Rain has started to fall again. With the commencement of dusk, we finally pass the reservation sign. A rather steep, woody hill elevates to the right, the pasture on the left side of the small road shimmers in a fresh green. How different the landscape was in comparison to the desert region of the border! I am inspired to think that people here were quite well-off but am quickly corrected when I see the down-and-out trailers along the narrow mud road winding up the hill. The road becomes increasingly impassable. Our journey ends at a clearing where I hop out the vehicle to call for help since Felipe's mobile phone has no reception on the U.S. side of the border. It is a ten minutes' mud walk to Adriana's house. Her dark blue Cherokee and a jeep convertible are parked in front of an old trailer. A personal visit in a weather like this and at this time of the day is surely unexpected. A longhaired fifty-year-old man opens the door to a crack. There is a sudden and awkward tension. Intuitively, I switch into Spanish to introduce the situation and am relieved to hear Adriana's voice

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

from the living room. Steve induces us to take everything out of the car as we pick up Felipe and Eduardo with the jeep. Back at the house, we eat the offered tuna sandwiches and Mexican galletas with great appetite. Conversation is carried on in Kumeyaay with dispersed words in Spanish meanwhile Steve and I start to talk in English about the Iraq war, the impact of casinos on US indigenous communities and the living conditions here in Santa Isabel. Electricity and running water was still needed up here in Santa Isabel, I am informed, and it is only now that I knowingly become aware of the rumbling noise of the generator. Before it is becoming too late to drive back to Mexico, we get ready for our departure. Steve shoulders his 22-rifle placed right by the door. Thus, we are “convoyed” to the car. “I never leave the house without a gun!” is the comment to my questioning gaze at the weapon, “there are too many drugs around and people here don’t bother killing you for a dime! It’s Crystal Math here! You don’t want to know!”

The additional housing in the Guadalupe valley is a real benefit to Josefa’s grandchildren who otherwise wouldn’t have a chance to receive a by and large acceptable schooling. And it is only due to the Rodriguez’ relative decent income that the six kids from five to fourteen years of age are being taken good care of since their parents find themselves unemployed throughout most of the year. And whilst the earnings of Adriana, Felipe and Josefa, most certainly, are contributing in principle to the family’s economic state, does the most demanding part come up in their respective moneymaking strategies.

So have Josefa’s skills in basket weaving become a rather lucrative source of income throughout the last years. Most of her beautiful work is now being sold in the U.S. where she upholds regular personal connections with sister tribes. Cultural gatherings, Powwows and special invitations have proven to be an utterly reliable market and steady source of revenue not only for selling but also for practical teaching. Apart from being a respected authority on the communal level, she has moved on to tie up with indigenous tribes across the border, which involves, in exceedance to prior upheld familial relations, a financial profiting of the North Americans’ fascination for indigenous art. And since the demand for beadwork,

### *Culturales*

baskets and wooden bows and arrows surpasses a single person's capacities of production, her enterprise has evolved into a "greater" business that encompasses the marketing of products of friends and acquaintances living in different communities on the Mexican side. The small kitchen in her San José domicile and the telephone connection in the more technologically developed Mestizo village of Guadalupe are serving accordingly as business office.

For the time being, it is maybe a handful of people, and mostly Kumeyaay women, that are in the position to undertake such endeavors. Organized cultural visits with CUNA, for example, have enabled Josefa to establish her connections a few years ago. Another essential precondition for such trans-border activities is the legal permission for pass and re-pass, the so-called "Cultural Exchange Visa" whose issuance is being assisted by the "Kumeyaay Border Task Force," and only about half of the indigenous border population in Baja California today are holders of such permissions.

The question whether these transnational ties are predominantly running through the hands of women, yet has to be seen. The gender topic, nevertheless, seems to bear the potential to mirror social and economical adjustments and renewals within the communities. So has the Mexican anthropologist, Everardo Garduño, for his part, observed a profound shift in gender roles in the named communities:

In the last fifteen years, the traditional role of women among the Yumans<sup>50</sup> has significantly been transformed. From being conferred to domestic affairs within the household, women among these groups now are representing the most salient interlocutors of the Indian community [...].

As explanation for this development, he gives two main reasons. An intense male predominated migratory movement to Mestizo workplaces, a lack of men presence in this sense, and an increased relevance of female agency with respect to Mexican official institutions:

<sup>50</sup> Yuman is the general term for the linguistic group which includes the Kumeyaay and most southern California and northern Baja California tribes.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

In this particular case of the Yumans, her traditional family-oriented role has kept women away from corruption and fraud, [...]. This is why women-directed organizations among the Yumans remain funded by federal programs, while funds for projects led by men have been cancelled. In this way, women, in many cases, have become the main source of income in the Yuman family (Garduño, 2004:24, 29).

Mexican national institutions, indeed, play a central role for economic opportunities in the case of the Rodríguez family whereof the transfer of handcrafts at the day of the conference had been an example. The shipment contained basketry from San José de la Zorra and purchased pottery from Santa Catarina and was, as a business dealing, part of the currently most important and wide-ranging project conducted in San José, the so-called “Alliance for Sustainable Development in the Indigenous Communities of Baja California,” short ADESU, in which Felipe presently operates as the main person in charge. Under the superordinate of the community-led “Tipai Uam,” a civil association for the right to self-determination of the Kumeyaay people, ADESU had been formed in collaboration with CUNA and the bi-national environmental organization “TERRA” to actively generate employment within the communities.

Since about two years now, eco-tourism has become the long-awaited objective:

The idea of the project is to work with the communities and we are starting with Nécua and San José to encourage sustainable development, especially through ecotourism and handcraft production. [...] And we like that, because this project is meant to be an alliance, the idea is to bring together communities and governmental and non-governmental organizations and individuals.<sup>51</sup>

Sagarpa, Secretary for Agriculture, Livestock, Rural development, Fishing and Sustenance, and other national and state agencies, are now forming part of this alliance and contribute, financially or logistically, to diverse segments of the project:

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Peter Ralphs, November 19th, 2004.

### *Culturales*

Our objective is to generate support for the directive council [of TIPAI UAM]. When something is needed for a project, the directory of the association assists the community in question, the respective traditional authority, education sector, housing developers, elders or health sector. At times, we support the eco-tourism project if something is needed. So, consecutively, we can arrange and solve the problems coming up. And well, the financial support we got from the federal government, from the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People [CDI, formerly INI], well, thanks to them, we received important recourses to be able to solve and exercise our ecotourism project. And we also received support from other institutions like the SAGARPA and CONAFOR from the state government with which we realized construction work or electrical installations. In any case, this bundle of logistical support has revolutionized, day by day, our center for eco-tourism.<sup>52</sup>

At present, the San José center for eco-tourism materializes in a cluster of professionally built adobe structures at the village entrance. Barbeque places and playground provisions with swings and slides are so far completed and only the bungalows and the nearby museum are still in need of electricity and running water. The settlement's luxury standard highlights in this fashion the comparatively poor state of the surrounding constructions whose owners, until one year ago, had only dreamt of electrical light.

How manifold the Rodríguez' activities are, became apparent when it came to the arrangement of my fieldwork. The only available period in the calendar for late October and the beginning of November was between October 18<sup>th</sup> and November 11<sup>th</sup>. In the case of the formerly scheduled time, he and his mother had been busy preparing a week's travel to Mexico City. A national foundation (FONAES) that supports micro-businesses and social projects, had invited participants to a trade fair to show products, partake in workshops and develop national and international contacts. But, the event had also another positive effect, as Felipe eagerly added:

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Felipe Rodríguez, November 4th, 2004 (my own translation).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

At this event, it was very important for us to see the Mexican president, Vicente Fox, the secretary of labor and the general director of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People at the federal level. And we were also very impressed by the communication between business ventures, which really seems to nourish future prospects. So lastly, we are very content with this additional support for the Kumeyaay community of San José de la Zorra and, most of all, proud of the recognition and tribute we are paid by the Mexican society.<sup>53</sup>

When I left the family, Felipe was packing up once again, this time, to participate in a similarly organized, yet smaller event in Chiapas.

Inadequate border environmental infrastructure. Sustainable economic development is seriously limited by a deficit in environmental infrastructure (water supply, treatment, and distribution; wastewater collection, treatment and disposal; solid and hazardous waste handling, storage, and safe elimination; and air quality monitoring equipment and emissions reduction programs). NAFTA-enabled transborder trade, transportation, industrial development, and energy demand have exacerbated the trends. Border communities, particularly smaller U.S. communities and Mexican municipalities are overwhelmed with the challenges of providing environmental infrastructure. The current border environmental infrastructure deficit is between \$5.8 billion and \$10.8 billion. It is likely that the cost of meeting the current deficit and addressing needs generated by growth to 2020 will be \$20 billion.<sup>54</sup>

This situation is especially critical in Mexico where indigenous communities are amongst the poorest of the rural communities in the border region. Ironically, the Kumeyaay and PaiPai are rich in land and natural resources and possess an extraordinary knowledge of their environment. However, the lack of comprehensive

<sup>53</sup> Above-mentioned interview.

<sup>54</sup> Quotation from the “Executive Summary of Recommendation,” of the “Border Institute II” conference *Economy and Environment for a Sustainable Border Region: Now and in 2020*, Rio Rico, Arizona, April, 2000. [www.scerp.org/BI-II.html](http://www.scerp.org/BI-II.html).



### *Culturales*

land management plans for each community has resulted in subsistence strategies for survival such as overgrazing and overexploitation of natural resources. Some of the endangered species of plants, such as the sauce, are furthermore needed for the production of handcrafts while groundwater is the most important prerequisite for the formation of clay.

Some of those environmental problems were also central to the presentation at the NAEPC conference where water quality in the villages of Nécua, San José and Santa Catarina were examined. The lecturer, San Diego biologist and member of the North American NGO "Aqua Link," for years, had been collaborating with CUNA to monitor and improve water quality through practical research. The outcome, as presented in her talk, is an extensive list in which low water levels, contamination and the lack of fresh water and waste water distribution systems are identified as prior concerns.

This above-mentioned project, again, was financed by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Yet, far from willing to portray the entirety of border-spanning agencies, is the U.S.-Mexican environmental program "Border 2012" the most capital-intensive and high-ranking on behalf of which, pursuant to the 1983 "La Paz Agreement," the EPA administrator and the Mexican Secretary of the Secretariat for Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat) agreed on working jointly with the 10 border states and affected U.S. border tribes to develop a new bi-national ten-year agenda. The EPA agency, by definition, cooperates with NGOs, state, local, and federal governments, U.S. tribal governments, business associations and academic institutions. The EPA's budget, though, has been cut down considerably since the beginning of the Bush administration, so that the potential of this institution will be on the decline in the nearer future.

The "Border 2012 Tribal Caucus" on November 8th, accordingly, was a legislative assembly of indigenous representatives whose aim was to discuss outcomes of regional work groups, task forces and forums. For most undertakings, funding comes from EPA and grants are permitted only if the given proposals foresee a verifiable environmental benefit to the U.S. as well as

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

a benefit to the health of U.S. citizens. This means that most funding goes into border city projects. Unfortunately, most of the small Kumeyaay communities on the Mexican side are further away from the border, so that grants would either have to go to U.S. tribes and from there to related Mexican communities, or to NGOs, a common procedure, as Michael Rogers from the San Diego EPA border office states:

We cannot give funds directly to Mexican organizations. So, we always have to find ways. Sometimes, you give them to a U.S. NGO and they can go into Mexico and spend the money or they can give the money to a Mexican NGO or they can work with a U.S. tribe, then it's a tribal issue and they can spend the money in Mexico.

The most noteworthy difference is the political relation between the national governments and tribal councils north and south of the border. An allusion to this asymmetry in political recognition was one of the priority issues listed on the conference board, the disparagement of the lacking communication between the Mexican governmental institution Semarnat and Mexican indigenous representatives:

And it's sort of difficult for us, because Mexico doesn't recognize tribes like sovereign nations, they recognize them as citizens of Mexico. Sometimes, we've got to walk a fine line with Mexico, because of the tribes. They are willing to work with tribes in the U.S., that's not an issue for them, but to recognize the tribes as separate in Mexico causes them some political problems, more, because of the issues with tribal members in Chiapas in southern Mexico. If they recognize tribes like the Kumeyaay here, then that has implications in southern Mexico. [...] It's big deal to Mexico! In public meeting, I have seen where U.S. tribe were sort of partitioning the Mexican to work closer with their own tribes and asking for recognition and status. I have seen Mexican officials getting really angry about it! That's the only time I've ever seen them get angry about anything! Most of our relations are very cooperative, we get along well, and it's really a touchy issue for the Mexican government!<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Michael Rogers, San Diego EPA border office, October 18th, 2004.

### *Culturales*

A cross-border tribal cooperation is nevertheless established, though needs to be fortified as the director of CUNA, Eduardo Gómez, emphasized at the NAEPC meeting.

Felipe's twenty-six year old sister Adriana has been living in San José most of her lifetime. After school, she became a kindergarten teacher in the surrounding indigenous communities paid by the National Council for Education (Conafe). In this function, she received an award and subsequently a grant for studying a few months at a college in Ensenada. In 2000, she got to know her husband Steve at a yearly traditional gathering in Baja California.<sup>56</sup> Since three years now, she works as secretary and tutor at Sycuan College. She mostly speaks a mixture of "Spanglish" and Kumeyaay with her husband.

Visits to San José are fairly regular although Steve, a Navy psychologist, is often occupied working in the US and abroad. The "Cultural Exchange Visas," moreover, allow some family members to visit the couple's new home on the reservation. San José, though, still seems to occupy a very central place of social interaction for Adriana:

Yes, I have my acres of land in San José de la Zorra and I am currently preparing projects for the kids there, for the young ones. Their parents want them to learn Kumeyaay<sup>57</sup> and I want to offer courses and other workshops at a monthly basis, but for now, the money is lacking and I can't start. In summer, though, I plan a gathering for kids from different Baja California communities so that they can exchange ideas and have the opportunity to take part in workshops here in San José. I will be like a camp.

But it is not only Adriana that upholds close ties, but also Steve who established his own linkages with the Mexican community:

To live there? I don't know yet, I will have to build my house first!  
[...] Yes, we want to build a hut. And since Steve knows how to play

<sup>56</sup> The Mexican anthropologist Everardo Garduño, most interestingly, was invited to attend the traditional wedding in San José de la Zorra and to perform as witness at the ceremony (personal communication, November 2004).

<sup>57</sup> Native tongues are also endangered south of the border, although Kumeyaay is still spoken in Baja California communities.

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

peon and sing the traditional songs, we want to teach that to the kids there. Some time ago, we came and organized a meeting in the school building. Kids, and many older people too, came and we practiced playing peon and a lot of people finally played! And all the kids had a big fiesta playing!<sup>58</sup>

*Conclusion*

For this jaunt into the territory of community-related agencies, I thus chose to focus on applicable concepts of community and indigenous political agency to locate my findings in a broader analytical context. To that extend, I will also explain what I understand by “indigenous” communities. The term “cross-border community of the Kumeyaay” implies two assumptions. So is the first one a postulation of a locally bordering and transnationally tied community of a certain group of people, while the second claims a distinct Kumeyaay ethnic identity as denotative and unifying bracket.

The Kumeyaay have traversed the border region separating the US and Mexico for thousands of years, the international border literally splits our aboriginal territory in half! It wasn’t really a problem until “Operation Gatekeeper” went into effect, that was approximately in 1988.<sup>59</sup>

The resolution to institute the “Kumeyaay Border Task Force,” an organization that aims at supporting the pass and re-pass for Mexican Kumeyaay, was passed by eight out of the twelve federally recognized Kumeyaay tribes on the U.S. side in 1999. One could argue now, that the remaining four tribes were not interested in a regular contact with their Mexican relatives, and that might be true to some extent. A glance at the map, then, shows how dispersed the small reservations are scattered, some are right in the desert and close to the border while others are

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Adriana Rodríguez, November 4th, 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Juan Taboa, executive director of the “Kumeyaay Border Task Force,” October 11th, 2004.

### *Culturales*

located at a distance of over one hundred miles to the north in the rather fertile hills of San Diego County. Most of those reservations have been “established” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Conflict over political recognition, though, resulted in continuing removals and genocide for over a century.<sup>60</sup> The reservation system, then, further fragmented traditional clan lines and stipulated new categories of belonging. Today, one can meet Campo Kumeyaay, Kumeyaay from the Barona Band of Mission Indians as well as members of the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians, all belonging to different reservations or tribes but to the same Kumeyaay nation.

On the other side of the fence, the Kumeyaay are considered Mexican citizens without any special political status as indigenous people. They are officially recognized, though, by the National Institute of Indigenous People *as* indigenous people,<sup>61</sup> meaning descendants of the original inhabitants of northern Baja California prior to colonization who have maintained some or all linguistic, cultural and organizational characteristics. In contrast to identification procedures in the U.S. where the “blood quantum” plays a central role in membership applications, is

<sup>60</sup> When the Mexican-American war ended in 1848, the border was drawn. In 1852, the Kumeyaay met in Santa Ysabel and negotiated a treaty with the U.S. This treaty was the mechanism whereby the Kumeyaay people acknowledged their status as a nation within a nation. This treaty was then voted down and placed under seal by the U.S. Senate and territories were further parcelled. In 1875, the first of these parcels began to be converted to Reservation trust land. Further additions were then taken into trust over the next 25 years. In 1904, the seal of secrecy was removed from the Treaty of Santa Ysabel. An organization called the Mission Indian Federation was then formed to promote the establishment of rights for Indian people in southern California. This federation challenged the Bureau of Indian Affairs and fought for full citizenship rights for Indian people. When the U.S. Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 years later, legal ambiguities in federal policy toward tribes were recognized. In 1975, the Indian Self Determination Act was passed by the U.S. Congress, a legislation which gave more authority to tribes to determine their own priorities and manage their affairs.

<sup>61</sup> The so-called “indigenismo” was born during the time of the Mexican revolution of 1910. From the 1930s on, first efforts were made to alphabetize also in the indigenous language at the Purépecha region of Michoacán although it took several more years to adopt the idea of a bilingual education throughout the nation. In 1940, then, did the president Cárdenas call upon the first “Interamerican Indigenous Congress” in Pátzcuaro where the national and interamerican instituts of in-

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

self-identification a fundamental criterion to determine who is considered indigenous.

Throughout the last decade, the development of neo-liberalism in Mexico resulted in complex cultural shifts. The modern nation was built on the idea of “the people,” a citizenship with common interests transcending cultural differences. As Mexico entered the global economy, “the people,” as the basis of nation-building, have passed, causing fundamental re-configurations in the relationships between government and cultural formations.

If ethnicity in its reference to decent, culture and place as mirrored in Taboa’s account on the border problematic could be taken as starting point, it is exactly the cohesion of these components that bring communities like the Kumeyaay’s into existence. And as culture cannot be possessed nor ancestry shared per se, do people have to elaborate these traits into the idea of community. In this sense, I understand communities, and the differing meanings given to them, to be in a permanent state of construction and re-construction.

More to the point of the named self-constitutive character of (those) communities, it is important to consider not only internal, but also external dialectics of community formation in the sense that both processes, internal identification and external categorization, are likely to feed back upon each other. A notion of community then likewise implies similarity and difference within itself and in opposition to other social entities. This, mostly symbolic, notion of community is therefore based upon a relational idea, called into being by the exigencies of social interaction.

The beginning and end of a given community is marked by its (symbolic) boundaries whose perception and creation are

indigenous people were founded with a theoretical basis of assimilation. It was not until the 1970s, that bilingual teacher from within indigenous communities were officially allowed to teach in primary schools and a bi-cultural education was more and more accepted. This “ethno development” was adopted by the National Institute of Indigenous People (INI) and the Secretary for National Education. From Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Derechos Humanos de los Pueblos Indígenas*, Mexico: 2000.

### *Culturales*

tied to individual members and their realization of the community's specificity and distinctiveness. The meaning given to these boundaries, though, is decidedly essential although the nature of these boundaries might be more tangible at one instance and more symbolic at the other:

The manner in which they [the boundaries] are marked depends entirely upon the specific community in question. Some, like national and administrative boundaries, may be statutory and enshrined in law. Some may be physical, expressed, perhaps, by a mountain range or a sea. Some may be racial or linguistic or religious. But not all boundaries, and not *all* the components of *any* boundary, are so objectively apparent. They may be thought of, rather, as existing in the minds of their beholders. This being so, the boundary may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on opposite sides of it, but also by people on the same side (Cohen, 1985:12).

In the face of this variability of meaning, the consciousness of community has to be continuously kept alive by means of either reiteration, modification or a partial neglect of its symbols. The reality and efficacy of a community's boundaries, and therefore of the community itself, depend on their symbolic construction and embellishment whereby the centrality of power in such processes has to be taken into consideration.

Among the more important contexts within which communal identification becomes consequential are therefore institutions and, particularly, organizations or "task-oriented collectives," (Jenkins, 1996:25) like the ones mentioned above.

The agencies that I describe in the course of my writing can be differentiated into national and tribal governmental agencies, institutional and academic interest policies, as well as small-scale courses of action. In observance of these different fields of task-oriented practices, I thereby witnessed the building and functioning of political networks that assist the Kumeyaay's demands in a variety of ways in involving some or all of these levels simultaneously. I therefore consider the (transnational) entanglement of agencies a "crossing of scales" (Radcliffe, 2002:2).

“Tipai Uam”: *el recorrido indio*

In demanding rights to territory, language, and political and cultural autonomy, the Kumeyaay have engaged with their respective nation-states, seeing the possibility of institutional frameworks and resource distribution. This characteristic phenomenon of multi- and state institutional networking toward specific pro-indigenous development projects can be observed now throughout all of the Americas. In the case of the Kumeyaay, I define “transnational” not as a “level” of action, but as actors, actions, and interactions that cross over levels and boundaries, accentuating, in this manner, the transgressive and similarly encompassing nature of transnationalism. Entrance into political processes of states, regions and bilateral systems thus increasingly offers unprecedented opportunities for indigenous communities. In this article, I examined the social formations made in and through transnational, national and community connections in drawing attention to political actions as processual and embodied.

Fusions of transnational agency and indigenous political action are likewise described in Radcliffe’s paper on Andean indigenous people:

Compared with transnational circuits’ deracialized, apolitical discourses about indigenous people, which tend to emphasize *indigenous* people’s lack (of wealth, contacts, resources), indigenous people reverse this discourse, displacing lack away from themselves and highlighting issues of racism and political economy. In doing so, indigenous social movements argue that the state lacks a long term perspective for socially and ecologically sustainable development, and they consider the state as the primary interlocutor in demands for development (Radcliffe, 2002:5).

However, (indigenous) discourses do converge around an idea of cultural specificity:

Notions of indigenous cultural specificity provide a powerful discourse around which indigenous issue networks come together, and which crosses multiple scales from the local to the international. Looking at the ways in which indigenous, multilaterals, consultants



### *Culturales*

and advocacy INGOs talk about indigenous culture reveals a construction of notions of culture as being discrete, transcendent and holistic (Radcliffe, 2002:10).

Likewise, as I noted so far, do the Kumeyaay effectively position their culture around a set of practices and spaces by which cultural boundaries are inscribed and reproduced.

And, although the Mexican Kumeyaay see themselves predominantly as political agents rather than vulnerable beneficiaries, they are often pictured as such by North American NGOs, environmentalists, and other (trans-) national representations, though by contrast, a sense of a shared ethnic history of colonialism is seen as legitimate and uniting element on both sides of the border.

The border situation, nevertheless, remains a two-sided sword for the Kumeyaay. On the one hand, does it stipulate large-scale and regional bi-national agencies that underscore a certain unity and sense of common interests. On the other hand, though, are past as well as contemporary experiences in the U.S. and Mexico poles apart. Remains now the question whether the portrayed cross-border activists will be able to assist in the building of a “new” sense of belonging and political posture on the basis of a shared though divided space and history.

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