

Identity and Land: The Twofold Dimension of Indigenous Peoples' Struggle to Contain Pressures on the Amazon Forest in Santarém, Brazil

Omaira Bolaños¹

¹Department of Anthropology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA

Spatial dimensions of socio-cultural beliefs and practices represent for indigenous peoples essential aspects of their identity. Indeed, indigenous conceptions of land are characterized by a particular relationship with specific ecological regions through which socio-cultural and economic practices are reproduced and recreated. Ethnographic research on the symbolic and material significance of land in indigenous identity construction showed that land is not an unproblematic entity; instead, it is a highly politicized and contested place in which different actors and interests converge and compete for the control of natural resources. In Santarém, Brazil, the expansion of soy industry and cattle ranching is threatening not only Amazon forest by increasing deforestation rates, but also the lands that several indigenous groups have traditionally inhabited. These indigenous groups organized through the Indigenous Council of the Tapajós and Arapiuns region (CITA), joined efforts to contain growing pressures of deforestation and invasion of their lands. These efforts include the struggle for the demarcation of their ancestral territories and state recognition as indigenous peoples. By evoking their rights to original lands, indigenous peoples have contested these threats, redefined their identity, the meaning of their lands, re-constructed their own history, and reevaluated their relationship with the environment. Although the changing meanings of indigenous peoples' identity and land constitute potential components for the protection of the Amazon biodiversity and the establishment of new forms of partnership, CITA has not received the decisive support of environmental organizations working in the region. This poster intends to call the attention to this issue.

Key Words: Indigenous peoples, identity, Indigenous Lands, CITA, Amazon Forest,

Contact Information: Omaira Bolaños, Department of Anthropology, University of Florida, 1112 Turlington Hall, Gainesville, FL 32611 USA, phone 352 846 5377
Email: obolanos@ufl.edu