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Indigenous organizations: *rising actors* in Latin America

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This article analyses the recent increase in the importance of indigenous peoples as political and social actors in the region, reviewing the changes that have taken place in the situation of the indigenous peoples, the relationship between the State and such peoples, the forging of new identities, and cultural changes: questions that are all being reappraised in the light of what has become known as "the ethnic question". The author highlights the existence of a number of leading threads which appear and reappear in the various types of indigenous movements. These threads may be grouped in five main categories: the definition and legal status of what "indigenous" means; land rights and agrarian aspects; the cultural identity of indigenous peoples; their social organization and juridical recognition of their customs, and the participation of their organizations in politics. The article concludes that indigenous issues stand at the point of intersection of considerations relating to human rights, democracy, development and the environment. It has become increasingly clear that indigenous demands do not only concern the indigenous peoples themselves but involve the whole of national society. The indigenous peoples are not just demanding more and better democracy, better application of mechanisms for the defence and protection of human rights, or a bigger share in the benefits of development programmes: they are in fact questioning and challenging the basic premises on which the Nation-State has been built in Latin America for almost two centuries.

I

Introduction

In recent years, the indigenous peoples have emerged as new political and social actors in Latin America: they are becoming active subjects instead of continuing as passive objects of the course of history. Something has changed in the living circumstances of indigenous people, and something is changing in the relationship between the State and such peoples. Old claims and new demands have joined together to forge new identities; new ideologies are competing with old, long-standing paradigms; the theories of social change, modernization and nation-building are being rethought in the light of the so-called "ethnic question" which was ignored and looked down upon for so long, and finally, the manner of practicing politics in connection with indigenous problems has changed too.¹

Perhaps the best starting point for our analysis would be the formal initiation of a continent-wide policy on indigenous matters (known as indigenism) at the First Inter-American Indigenist Congress, held in Mexico City in 1940. At this congress, government delegates from many countries of the continent decided to put into effect policies to improve the living conditions of indigenous people, mainly through a process of assimilation or integration into so-called "national society". This dominant national society, reflecting the nationalist ideology of the white and

racially mixed urban middle class, however, completely rejected the indigenous components of national culture and simply did not envisage any future for them, except in an idealization of the past mainly represented in museums and, more recently, as a way of earning foreign exchange from tourism and the sale of handicraft products.

The policies adopted with regard to indigenous peoples, though well-meaning, turned out in fact to be ethnocidal and rather ineffective even in terms of their own declared objectives. At subsequent periodic inter-American indigenist congresses (the eleventh congress was held in Nicaragua in December 1993) the government delegates consistently deplored the lamentable conditions of the indigenous peoples of the continent, but while governments reported on their development programmes and projects, often in a self-admiring manner, the economic and social situation of the indigenous peoples, which were often allowed only a symbolic presence at these congresses, visibly deteriorated. A recent World Bank study concludes that poverty among the indigenous peoples of Latin America is severe and persistent. It also considers that the living conditions of those peoples, linked with poverty, are generally speaking abysmally bad (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, eds., 1994).

II

Who are the indigenous people of Latin America, and how numerous are they?

Although the criteria used in the definitions vary from country to country and the available census data are not reliable, it is estimated that there are over 400 identifiable groups, with a total population of around

40 million, ranging from numerically insignificant and almost extinct bands of natives in the Amazon jungles to Andean peasant societies numbering millions of people. Mexico has the most numerous indigenous population in Latin America, amounting to some 10 million people, but they only represent between 12% and 15% of the total population. In contrast, the indigenous populations of Guatemala and Bolivia form the majority of the national population, and in Peru

¹ With regard to the ethnic question, see Stavenhagen (1990); with regard to ethnocide and ethnodevelopment, see Bonfil and others (1982).

and Ecuador they form almost half of it. In Brazil, they represent less than ½% of the total population, but as they are the original inhabitants of Amazonia they have played an important part in resisting the depredation of their territories, demanding territorial rights

and political representation, fighting for the preservation of the Amazonian environment, and securing the incorporation of this objective in the new Brazilian Constitution adopted in 1988 (see González, 1994; CELADE, 1994).

III

Indigenism and the indigenous movement

The Latin American countries have a long and complicated history of indigenist legislation, in which the indigenous populations were generally put at a disadvantage with respect to the rest of society, although many of the laws were protective and tutelary. Although the right to formal citizenship was granted to almost the whole of the national population in the years following political independence, indigenous inhabitants continued to be treated as minors and as legally incompetent in many countries until very recently. It was only in the last few decades that the basic laws of Latin America were modified in this respect, as part of a wave of constitutional reforms which include not only rules regarding indigenous languages and cultures but also in some cases indigenous communities and their territories, as a specific form of social organization. Constitutional reforms of this type have been carried out in recent years in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. Some observers see this restructuring as part of the wave of democratization that swept over Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. Others, however, recognize the active role that the indigenous organizations have played in giving rise to these changes.

The emergence of indigenous organizations in past decades may be viewed as both cause and effect of the changes that have taken place in the public sphere with regard to indigenous peoples. Back in the 1950s, there was only a handful of formal organizations set up and run by indigenous people to pursue objectives that were of interest to the indigenous peoples as such. In the mid-1990s, however, there are hundreds of associations of all types with the most varied purposes: local-level organizations, intercommunity and regional associations, formally constituted interest groups, national federations, leagues and unions, and transnational alliances and coalitions with

well-developed international contacts and activities. It can justly be said that indigenous organizations, their leaders, objectives, activities and emerging ideologies make up a new type of social and political movement in present-day Latin America whose detailed history and analysis have yet to be prepared.

One of the first organizations, often mentioned as the prototype for others, is the Shuar Federation, established in the 1960s to protect the interests of the various Shuar communities in the Amazonian lowlands of Eastern Ecuador. The Shuars decided to form this federation in order to defend their territory from the invasions of settlers from outside and various commercial interests, and in the process they discovered that the struggle for land rights could not be divorced from the question of their survival as an ethnically distinctive people, with their own traditions and cultural identity. They also discovered—as so many other oppressed peoples have done in the course of history—that they could only attain their objective by building up their strength and joining forces. Although motivated by economic and social considerations (preservation of the lands of their ancestors and access to productive resources) the Shuars' struggle cannot be described simply as a class struggle, unlike the agrarian conflicts between peasants and landowners which took place more or less at the same time on the Altiplano. Since the Shuars and other lowland indigenous peoples did not fit clearly within an agrarian class structure, their organization took on a more communal and ethnic nature than the more class-oriented movements of indigenous peasants in other parts of Latin America (Salazar, 1981; Descola, 1988; Ibarra, 1987).

Organizations similar to that of the Shuars sprang up during the 1970s in several other countries and further consolidated their activities during the 1980s. They soon managed to break out of the constraints of the community-level activities to which State develop-

ment projects often limited them. Although community development projects, some of them financed by multilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations, did manage to generate growing participation by the local population, it soon became clear to the emerging indigenous elites that local-level activity was very limited from the political point of view. Like the Shuars, they managed to construct a trans-community indigenous identity, incorporating a growing number of local communities and making ethnic identity a unifying link and mobilizing agent. Thus, several ethnic organizations entered on the political scene, with leaders who spoke for their ethnic group as a whole rather than merely representing one or another rural community. These organizations were very soon followed by regional associations which included a number of ethnic groups, such as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuadorian Amazonia (CONFENIAE), the Indigenous Association of the Peruvian Selva (AIDSESEP), the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC) in Colombia, the Eastern Bolivia Indigenous Confederation (CIDOB) and many others. All of them organized congresses, published manifestos and declarations, sent petitions to state and national governments as well as to the international community, and frequently organized militant actions—such as protest marches, manifestations, sit-ins, occupation of land, or other forms of active resistance— or embarked on legal proceedings and lobbied legislatures and public officials to achieve their various objectives.

A more recent form of organization is the national-level indigenous confederation. Once again, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) led the way in political activity when it organized two massive peaceful indigenous uprisings in Ecuador in 1990 and 1993 which practically paralyzed the country and obliged the government to negotiate with the indigenous people on agrarian and other problems. The National Union of Indians (UNI) of Brazil, which brings together numerous Amazonian tribes, was very active in the political discussions on the new Brazilian Constitution in 1988, as also was the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) in 1991 (Guerrero, 1993).

Indigenous organizations have also expanded beyond their national frontiers to take part in international activities. In Central and South America, indigenous activists have attempted, with different degrees of success, to establish transnational regional organizations. Since the second half of the 1980s, various

international meetings of regional and continental scope have been held in connection with the activities to commemorate the Meeting of Two Worlds (or rather 500 years of indigenous and popular resistance) and the International Year of Indigenous Populations (1993) and the International Decade of Indigenous Populations (which began in 1995), both proclaimed by the United Nations. Indigenous representatives of Latin America have also taken an active part in the discussions of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, which is preparing a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples for consideration by the General Assembly, and they have participated in the debates prior to the adoption by the International Labour Organisation of its Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Indigenous representatives are also present in the governing bodies of the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, set up by the Second Ibero-American Conference of Heads of State and Government (Madrid, July 1992) and they are taking part in the consultations currently being held by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States on a future inter-American legal instrument on indigenous rights.

Through these activities, the representatives of the indigenous peoples of Latin America have made contact with representatives from other parts of the world and have become familiar with international law and the mechanisms and procedures for the protection of human rights in the international system: a relationship which both furthers their own cause and helps them to improve their political negotiating capacity in their own countries (Brysk, 1994).

A detailed analysis of the declarations, resolutions and proclamations of these various organizations and congresses (which is of course outside the scope of this article) would reveal a clear progression of ideas and sequence of items of concern to their members over the years. In the first few years, the indigenous manifestos reminded the public in general of the historical subordination of their peoples and their long-standing poverty, and called upon governments to grant some kind of compensation and justice for the wrongs of the past. At the same time, many of these documents idealized the pre-colonial indigenous past, sometimes described as a kind of Golden Age in which there was no exploitation, discrimination or conflict, while the pre-Columbian indigenous cultures were perceived as being morally superior to so-called Western civilization.

In later years, the demands posed by the indigenous organizations have been aimed more at specific problems such as access to land, agricultural credit, education, health, technical cooperation, investments in infrastructure, etc., whose solution they see as being the responsibility of governments. More recently, in addition to concrete economic and social demands they have also called for autonomy and self-determination. Ethnic identity has become a central issue for many of these organizations; concern with the environment is also an item of prime importance, especially in the case of the Amazonian lowlands, and there are increasingly frequent demands for changes in legislation and the fulfillment of recent international legal instruments, such as Convention 169 of the ILO and the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples (Stavenhagen, 1988).

Indigenous organizations do not only hold meetings and spread their programmes and ideas: they also

negotiate with the public authorities, send representatives to international conferences, and often receive financial aid from international agencies for specific purposes. But who do these organizations really represent, and how representative are they of the indigenous population? This matter is often raised by governments when they want to question the "authenticity" of indigenous representation at the national and international levels, or by rival factions and groups competing for official recognition or access to resources. It is true that in many cases the existing indigenous organizations were constructed from the top down and are made up of indigenous intellectual elites which do not have an authentic "popular" base, but such indigenous organizations are increasingly being constructed from the bottom up, through a laborious process of mobilization and organization which gives rise to a new leadership with popular bases and which expresses the true concerns of members.

IV

The indigenous leadership

The question of representation will assuredly continue to be raised for some time to come. The traditional community-level leadership is generally carried out by an older generation of local authorities who, although steeped in the culture of their group, are not always well prepared to meet the challenges of "modern" organizations and political negotiations. These traditional authorities are gradually being displaced by a younger generation of indigenous activists, many of them professionals who have lived and matched their skills in a non-indigenous environment. Although tensions may arise between these two generations, their roles are often complementary: the traditional authorities made up of older people take care of community matters, while the younger leaders devote their efforts to building organizations and alliances and dealing with the outside world.

As more and more young indigenous people pass through the formal educational system and obtain professional positions as agronomists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc., an indigenous intellectual elite has been growing up in a number of Latin American countries which is becoming the lifeblood of the new organizations. Indigenous intellectuals are actively engaged in

developing the "new indigenous discourse" which gives these organizations their distinctive identities. Not only do they devote their efforts to formulating the political agenda of their movements but they are also rediscovering their historical roots, concerning themselves with indigenous languages, culture and cosmology, and playing an active part in "inventing traditions" and constructing new "imaginary communities". And in proportion as the new indigenous intelligentsia participates in national and international networks and succeeds in spreading its message to other sectors of the population, and as it proves capable of mobilizing resources and obtaining a certain amount of "collective goods" (material and political resources, public and legal recognition, etc.), so the indigenous intellectuals have been developing into indispensable links in the process of organization and mobilization. At the same time, the indigenous leadership is also succeeding in winning the support of the grass-roots elements of the community, the local activists who are fighting against violations of human rights or struggling for land rights or protection of the environment: matters in which indigenous women are often particularly active. There sometimes seems to be some tension between

local activists and the intellectuals, however, because the former deal with more immediate issues and seek concrete solutions, whereas the latter are more involved in building up institutions in the medium and long term. Furthermore, while indigenous intellectuals are helping to develop an "indigenist" ideology and *Weltanschauung* and are also sometimes involved in discussions with different ideological trends in Latin America (nationalism, marxism, the theology of liberation, the Christian Democrat movement, evangeli-

cal protestantism, etc.), local activists do not have much patience with these intellectual debates and are more interested in negotiating solutions for specific problems with the existing powers rather than pursuing ideological purity or coherence. These different approaches, along with other factors, have led to quite a few disputes over questions of organization, strategy and tactics which sometimes give the impression that the indigenous movement is seriously fragmented and split into factions.

V

Alliances

As most of the indigenous communities in Latin America consist of rural peasant societies, indigenous demands have much to do with the concerns of all peasants over such matters as their rights to water and land, agrarian reform, agricultural credit, technical assistance, access to markets, agricultural prices and subsidies, etc. These questions have been particularly urgent on the Altiplano, as in other parts, since the 1960s, when numerous militant peasant movements sprang up in Latin America. Although indigenous organizations are very aware of their identity and independence, they also know that their impact and scope will be limited if they cut themselves off from other social movements. They have therefore had to cope with two interrelated types of problems: the role of indigenous movements in the framework of the conflicts and coordination of interests within their own national society, and the crucial issue of the building of strategic alliances with other organizations.

With regard to the first of these points, I will not waste time here with the outworn debates, common in the nineteenth century and the early part of the present century, about the alleged inferiority of the indigenous "races" in Latin America, nor with the national elites' objective of eliminating the indigenous "barbarians" who were endangering the survival of civilization. Instead, the debates in more recent decades have centered on two alternative concepts. On the one hand, there is the idea that indigenous cultures are not integrated into national culture and that national integration calls for the rapid incorporation of indigenous populations, which would mean their disappearance as such. This model presents indigenous organizations with the options of accepting the assimilationist policies of the State, while negotiating their terms; rejecting them out of hand; or putting forward other possible alternatives. Each of these three stances has been adopted at some time by one or another of the indigenous organizations.

VI

Ethnicity and class

On the other hand, extensive debates have been held since the 1930s about whether the indigenous peoples should be considered as an example of a subordinate and exploited social class (subsistence peasants, agricultural labourers) or as culturally different oppressed peoples (nationalities) which in fact can also be internally differentiated in economic and social respects.

This is the debate on ethnicity or class which has been heard so frequently in academic circles and which has various different connotations for the objectives and strategies of indigenous and other social movements.

If indigenous populations are to be considered simply as a segment of the exploited peasantry, then the solution to their problems may be found in the class

struggle and organization (peasant unions, agrarian reform); from this standpoint, emphasis on ethnic identity would dilute their class consciousness and their corresponding political attitudes.

If indigenous identity is considered to be of fundamental importance, however, then matters connected with the class situation will be relegated to a secondary plane.

It would appear that in recent years indigenous organizations have mostly opted for the second of these positions. Without denying or ignoring considerations of class, they have emphasized their ethnic identity and the "ethnico-national" aspects of their struggles, which has also given them some prominence both at home and abroad. One of the reasons why they have adopted this position is the rather prejudiced attitude that traditional left-wing political parties have taken in Latin America to the "indigenous question". For many years, these parties promoted a conventional "classist" attitude to social conflicts, thereby alienating many potential indigenous allies who did not feel that their own concerns were reflected in the marxist discourse of many of these political parties. Examples of these tensions may be seen in the conflict between the Sandinistas and the Miskitos in Nicaragua in the 1980s and the evolution of revolutionary ideology and armed conflict in Guatemala over the last thirty years (Díaz-Polanco, 1985; Arias, 1990; Le Bot, 1995).

The debate on class versus ethnicity also has broader implications with regard to political strategy and tactics, because it concerns the possibility that indigenous movements may make alliances with other social and political organizations. From the very beginning of their process of organization and mobilization, indigenous activists realized that in order to achieve their broader objectives and avoid being left in watertight compartments they must seek alliances with other sectors of society, especially trade unions, peasant organizations, students and urban intellectuals, as well as with established institutions

such as the Catholic Church (or at least with some of its current trends, such as the promoters of the theology of liberation) and, in certain circumstances, with some political parties.

Some indigenous organizations started off as branches of some political party. In Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) tried to organize and control some indigenous organizations in the 1970s, and in Bolivia the various political parties had, and some of them still have, indigenous branches: a clearly indigenous party, the Tupac Katari Indigenous Movement, or "Kataristas", openly competed for political power and their long-standing Presidential candidate, the Aymara Víctor Hugo Cárdenas, was Vice-President of Bolivia from 1993 to 1997 in a coalition government. Usually, however, indigenous organizations (though not their individual members) have avoided linking up with any specific political party, and their leaders generally reject the offers of political parties to incorporate or coopt them into the established party structures (Albó, 1994).

Indigenous leaders realize, however, that they need to establish tactical alliances with other social organizations, especially when they share the same social objectives, such as the defence of human rights under repressive regimes (like the successive military dictatorships in Guatemala). The question of alliances has been publicly raised at some international congresses attended by indigenous organizations, where participants held that broad popular mobilization will have a bigger political impact than isolated actions by smaller, fragmented groups. On the other hand, indigenous leaders say that their specific interests (ethnic identity, recognition of the historical rights of indigenous peoples) are easily lost sight of and subordinated to the more general concerns of broad popular organizations. They generally fear (perhaps quite rightly) that indigenous organizations may come to be minor players in a game dominated by the established mixed-race organizations and that they will run the risk of being manipulated by the more experienced non-indigenous politicians.

VII

External support

Indigenous organizations would not have progressed as much as they have done in all these years without external support. Indeed, many organizations originally started with the aid of outside agents who still often maintain their influence over them. Catholic and Protestant missions helped some of the Amazonian indigenous associations to organize their activities in the 1960s and 1970s, and the organization of the indigenous movement has also

been aided at various times by teachers, government agronomists, anthropologists from academic institutions, health workers, and other non-indigenous professionals, as well as activists from different kinds of political groups. Many of these organizations now receive financial aid or subsidies from the many international agencies and different kinds of non-governmental organizations that have been established in Latin America.

VIII

Prospects of the indigenous movement

Is the emergence of the indigenous movement a passing phenomenon, or is it a permanent element which represents some profound change in Latin American society? Only time will tell, but at the moment it is clear, at least for the writer, that the indigenous movement expresses fundamental social forces which are behind some of the changes that have been taking place in the continent during the last third of this century.

There are various factors which can account for the emergence of indigenous awareness and of these new social movements on the public scene. First, there is the general disenchantment with the failure of the traditional developmentalist policies assiduously applied by national governments and multilateral organizations since the end of the Second World War. "Economic development" was the magic expression, used by generations of official planners and academics, which was supposed to bring better standards of living and higher incomes to the poor, the marginalized, and the under-privileged people of Latin America. This promise was not fulfilled, however, as is shown by the "lost decade" of the 1980s. The indigenous peoples were indeed incorporated into the modern sector of the economy through the market mechanisms, labour migrations, and the expansion of the transport and communications infrastructure, but they saw that the benefits of growth went, as always, to the elites. Except in the case of a few experimental projects, the indigenous

peoples witnessed the deterioration of their situation during this period, as they steadily lost their autonomy and means of subsistence and became increasingly dependent on market capitalism.

In this process of unequal development, the indigenous populations were everywhere victims rather than beneficiaries: the most vulnerable and fragile population groups, caught up in a maelstrom of rapid and unstable economic and social changes. This did not go unnoticed by the emergent indigenous intelligentsia, who quickly became sceptical of the optimistic economic projections and promises of their governments and the predictions that they were on the threshold of progress and civilization. Thus, their disillusionment was just as great as their hopes had once been (Davis, 1977).

Another factor, connected with the foregoing, was the increasing awareness of the emergent indigenous intelligentsia that the modern nation-state that the racially mixed ruling elite had been building so diligently since the nineteenth century was flawed in its very foundations. Instead of being an integrative State it was exclusive: indigenous cultures were denied and "Indians" were victims of overt or covert racism and discrimination, and the indigenous peoples—even when they were the majority population groups in the nation as a whole, as in Bolivia and Guatemala, or in many subnational regions in the other countries—were excluded from economic well-being, social equality,

political decision-making processes, and access to justice through the legal system. Indians saw no place for themselves in the prevailing model of the nation-state as constructed by the mixed-race or white elites of the ruling class (mixed-race elites came to power in some countries such as Mexico, but the traditional racial-cultural elites dominated by the locally-born descendants of the Spanish colonists or other Europeans continued to prevail until well into the twentieth century in the other countries).

Latin America's indigenous roots were long considered a painful burden by the "European" elites, and the assimilation-oriented indigenist policies of their governments clearly indicated that indigenous cultures had no future in the modern nation-state. In spite of having received formal citizenship rights in most Latin American countries, the indigenous peoples have often been treated as second-class citizens, if not completely deprived of their rights as citizens (in some countries they were treated as minors, wards of the State, or legally incapable). Representative democracy, institutional political participation, equality before the law, due process, respect for their languages, cultures, religions and traditions, and the dignity accorded to the rest of national society were simply not for the Indians, many of whom reluctantly accepted the stereotypes and stigmas imposed on them by the dominant sectors and gave in to self-negation and self-denigration in order to be accepted by non-Indians. Others developed a "culture of resistance", becoming more introverted and avoiding contact with

the outside world as much as possible (a reaction which has been increasingly difficult to maintain in recent years). Still others, conscious of the fact that the existing model of nation-state denies them their identity and their possibility of survival as viable cultures, have begun to question the prevailing idea of the nation and to propose alternative concepts of a multicultural and polyethnic State. This is one of the demands that the new indigenous movement has been putting forward in recent years.

There can be no doubt that the indigenous movement has also been inspired by the anti-colonial independence struggles of the post-war years. Indigenous intellectuals have identified themselves with the national liberation movements, often considering that their own struggles are also anti-colonial, because their peoples were victims of an earlier form of colonialism which became domestic colonialism after Independence. When they saw the achievements of the anti-colonial and national liberation movements, they probably asked themselves "And why not us too?". Indeed, in the many indigenous manifestos and proclamations the Indian peoples of Latin America are presented as the victims of colonialism, and their struggle is seen as an anti-colonial resistance movement. This was expressed and repeated very clearly at many national and international meetings on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Meeting of Two Worlds: a celebration which further stimulated the establishment of indigenous organizations in the continent.

IX

Towards a new approach

The emergence of indigenous organizations also reflects the emergence of an indigenous or "Indianist" *Weltanschauung* which does not yet constitute a structured and coherent political ideology but does contain elements of such an attitude that clearly distinguish it from other ideologies which have permeated social thinking for many decades. It would seem that the emergent indigenous intelligentsia rejected the leading ideologies of the time because they did not tackle the problems of the indigenous population and the nation-state satisfactorily, deciding instead to formulate their own ideological texts.

A concept closely linked with the ideas of economic development and nation-building is that of modernization, which was once put forward as a universalizing social process that would eventually embrace all the traditional, backward or pre-modern forms of society. It was considered that these forms were typical of indigenous communities and cultures and were therefore doomed to disappear. Modernization policies, touted as a remedy for under-development and poverty, were designed to accelerate this process, which was felt by many to be both inevitable and desirable. The modernization paradigm, still proudly maintained by national leaders

as a synonym of progress and hence morally legitimate, is now considered by many indigenous activists and their sympathizers as something tantamount to ethnicide. The emergent "Indianist" ideology finds little support in this paradigm and does not support it in its turn. On the contrary, in many cases it explicitly rejects modernization as a viable objective for the indigenous peoples. This tension is clearly expressed in the conflicts over ecological changes, particularly in tropical rain forest areas. In these areas, modernization is often identified with vast ecological changes that destroy the bioresources of the tropical forests, which are the habitat of many indigenous groups.

The theory of modernization (one of the intellectual modes associated with the sociology of development) also asserted the need for profound changes in the cultural values of "backward" and "traditional" population groups. Various schools of "applied social scientists" used their skills to inform the indigenous populations of the world that their lifestyles were morally wrong (the missionary approach) or dysfunctional to the modern world (the technocratic approach). Indigenous peoples which accepted these arguments very soon found themselves morally dispossessed, culturally impoverished and materially devastated. The current indigenous (or Indianist) ideology therefore condemns the modernization paradigm as irrelevant in the best of cases and potentially destructive of indigenous values.

For decades, the modernization approach to social and cultural changes competed among indigenous peoples with the marxist view of the world, which served not only as a cognoscible map of the "real world" in which the indigenous peoples lived but also as a revolutionary guide for action and for changing the course of history. The various currents of marxist political groups (communists, trotskyites, maoists, Castroists, etc.) sometimes had their own "indigenist" platforms (when they thought of the indigenous peoples, which was not very often). This generally meant inviting these peoples to give up their indigenous identities to join in the class struggle as poor and exploited peasants. Sometimes, however, it meant simply rejecting the indigenous peoples as being too primitive to understand the class struggle and concentrating instead on fomenting the revolution of the "advanced" classes of Latin America, especially the urban proletariat. It was claimed that once the battle was won, an enlightened revolutionary government would bring progress to the backward indigenous groups.

Indigenous intellectuals perceived the orthodox marxist view of the "indigenous problem" as being not very different from that of the advocates of "modernization" mentioned earlier. Some of them rejected both approaches because they considered them to be products of the colonialist West. Indigenous scepticism increased still further when they saw how some indigenous groups were literally in the middle of the crossfire between leftist guerrilla movements and repressive armed forces under various Latin American governments (Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru) during the 1970s and 1980s, while in Nicaragua they were caught between a leftist revolutionary government and the United States-organized "Contras" (Vilas, 1992).

Thus, the "Indianist" ideology arose as an alternative to the ideological vacuum displayed by the main political philosophies (both liberal and marxist) with regard to the indigenous peoples. Although it would be hard to talk at present of a perfected, structured and coherent Indianist ideology (indeed, this could never exist), there are a number of issues and lines of thought which persistently appear in the various currents of "Indianism", as reflected in the documentation of indigenous organizations, groups, seminars, conferences, workshops, reviews and periodicals. These issues, which are usually associated with specific demands made mainly to governments but also sometimes to society as a whole, may be grouped under five main headings.

a) *Definition and legal status*

While bureaucrats, legal experts and anthropologists, as well as the occasional missionary, have racked their brains over the question of who is or is not an Indian (or what qualifies as "indigenous"), since the definition and quantification of the indigenous peoples of Latin America is an ambiguous matter, the right to self-definition is one of the recurrent demands of indigenous organizations. This has become a question of cultural identity and often a matter of honour (independently of such "objective" criteria as the language or style of dress used, or active participation in community life). Rather than seeing this as a matter of individual choice, many organizations call for official recognition of indigenous groups and collective identities. When being an indigenous person was a source of social stigma there was little incentive for self-identification, but as times are changing, self-identification as an indigenous person has become a political instrument in a disputed social space.

Since social and cultural labels often imply a specific legal status, and the attribution of such status has typically been a prerogative of governments, indigenous organizations which claim the right to self-definition (now considered as a fundamental human right) also question the authority of governments to impose this status unilaterally (which is what actually occurred right from the start). The indigenous movement claims a new status for indigenous peoples within a democratic society: a demand which has been reflected in recent years in the legislative and constitutional changes mentioned at the beginning of this article.

b) *The right to land*

Although land rights –from which the agrarian reform question stems– no longer receive much attention in this era of economic globalization, they are of fundamental importance for the survival of the indigenous peoples of Latin America and form one their main demands. Loss of their lands (which are essential for their lifestyle) has been a constant feature of the history of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, and the struggle to preserve or recover their land tenure rights lies at the root of many recent attempts by the indigenous peoples to organize themselves. Land and its various resources (forests, water, animals and even minerals) are viewed mainly as collective, communal goods, although the notion of individual property rights has made some headway among indigenous communities after decades of capitalist expansion. There have been struggles for land tenure rights by the Mapuches of Chile, the inhabitants of the Altiplano in Peru and Ecuador and the Mayas of Guatemala, and they also lie at the root of social conflicts in Mexico, including the 1994 indigenous uprising in Chiapas. For the indigenous peasants of Latin America, the land tenure question is far from being solved, and the neglect of this by governments –after the wave of agrarian reform measures during the 1960s as part of the programme of the Alliance for Progress– is a heavy burden for the indigenous peoples to bear.

Although land tenure rights in the strict sense refer to production resources, the indigenous peoples insistently lay claim to their territorial rights, that is to say, the recognition and legal delimitation of ancestral territories occupied continuously by an indigenous group for time immemorial, which generally represent the geographic space needed for the cultural and social reproduction of the group. Indigenous territories have suffered serious losses as the result of colonization

from outside or expropriations decreed by governments, and there is a general consensus that, without their own territory, the social and cultural survival of the indigenous peoples is seriously threatened.

c) *Cultural identity*

Spontaneous cultural change and the process of acculturation, as well as State policies of assimilation of indigenous peoples, have been considered to represent a form of ethnocide: that is to say, they endanger the survival of indigenous cultures. Through a passive culture of resistance, many indigenous peoples have managed to preserve elements of their culture and keep alive their ethnic identity: efforts which have been strengthened in recent years by the conscious cultural rebirth promoted by the indigenous elites and cultural militants. Thus, for example, the Mayan culture is being actively promoted in Guatemala by numerous indigenous organizations (furthermore, in highly repressive environments purely cultural activity is somewhat less dangerous than openly political actions). The Quechua and Aymara languages and traditions have been revived in the Andean countries, and in Mexico an organization of indigenous writers and intellectuals is promoting indigenous literature. Sometimes these activities receive government support, but they are generally dependent on their own resources, with perhaps some aid from a sympathetic non-governmental organization.

Back in the nineteenth century, Spanish was declared to be the official and national language of the Spanish-speaking States of Latin America, and in the best of cases the indigenous languages were dismissed as dialects which did not deserve to be preserved. Consequently, formal and private (generally missionary) education imposed the State language on indigenous groups, and the use of indigenous languages was often even forbidden in public activities such as legal proceedings, municipal administration, etc. With such a disadvantage imposed on them in respect of the use of their own languages, the rights of the indigenous peoples were easily and systematically destroyed. In recent years, however, as the result of indigenous demands and the reappraisal of indigenist policies by teachers and social scientists, some governments have applied bilingual education programmes in indigenous areas. The indigenous organizations now demand educational services in their own languages, teachers' training programmes for their own people, and curricula which take the indigenous cultures into account.

In some States (such as Peru) indigenous languages are now recognized as national languages, while in others members of the indigenous population are officially allowed to use their own language in administrative and legal matters that affect them.

d) *Social organization and legal customs*

Indigenous community life, and hence the viability of indigenous cultures, depends on the vitality of the group's social organization and in many cases on the active use of local legal customs. In recent years this has become an important demand of indigenous organizations, since failure by the State legal system and the public administration to recognize the local form of social organization and legal customs is yet another factor contributing to the weakening and possible disappearance of indigenous cultures.

No Latin American State formally recognizes multiple legal systems, but there has always been some degree of tolerance for local "usages and customs" (in Colonial times, a special legal system was established by the Crown for the "Indian Republics"). Many indigenous organizations have now adopted the objective of securing formal recognition of legal customs, traditional forms of local authority and settlement of disputes, practices regarding inheritance and patrimony, rules on land use and communal resources, etc. These represent political demands which are often expressed in the indigenous population's objective of achieving a higher degree of political participation.

e) *Political participation*

The indigenous organizations are now not only claiming greater political representation in government institutions (municipal councils, state legislatures, national congresses) but are also trying to win the right to self-determination (guaranteed in international law), as expressed in local and regional autonomy and self-government. Many States are still fearful of these demands because they see them as a step towards secession and fragmentation of the nation-state, but indigenous organizations generally insist that all they want is internal self-determination and greater participation in national politics, not as an excluded minority but as descendants of the first inhabitants of the country and hence "authentic" representatives of the "nation".

Various countries, including Brazil, Nicaragua and Panama, have adopted statutes giving autonomy to indigenous regions, while others are considering doing so. This is a matter which will undoubtedly give rise to much controversy in the future.²

The progress made in recent years at the international level in the field of indigenous rights has strongly influenced the position and evolution of the indigenous organizations of Latin America, and may also have influenced the evolution of governments' positions. The United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations has been preparing a draft declaration of indigenous rights since 1982. To begin with, Latin American governments paid little attention to these efforts, but as time has gone by they have been showing greater interest. At first, few representatives of the Latin American indigenous population participated in this work, but in recent years more and more indigenous organizations of the region have taken part in the annual debates of the Working Group in Geneva. Attending these meetings gives many indigenous leaders the chance to get to know the international environment, make contact with their opposite numbers in other countries, and thus strengthen their own domestic organizational work. Whatever the final result of the draft declaration (the United Nations General Assembly may adopt it in an amended form), the indigenous organizations already consider its various articles (though still only provisional, of course) as a necessary point of reference in their own political discourse. This is so, for example, in the case of the assertion that the indigenous peoples, just like all other peoples, have the right to self-determination.

On the other hand, there were few indigenous representatives at the debates leading up to the adoption of ILO Convention 169 in 1989. The indigenous points of view were mainly expressed by the workers' delegates, who were not always very familiar with these matters. Since Convention 169 has been ratified by a number of Latin American countries, the indigenous organizations rightly see it as one of the existing legal instruments which are binding on governments,

² For an earlier study of these questions, see Stavenhagen, 1992, pp. 63-118.

and they are consequently actively promoting its ratification by the remaining countries.

As international law on indigenous rights grows up, the indigenous organizations of Latin America will use it for both legal and political purposes.

The indigenous discourse stands at the crossroads between matters of human rights, democracy, development and the environment. It has become increasingly clear that indigenous demands are not just of interest to the indigenous peoples themselves

but also involve the whole of the respective national societies. The indigenous peoples are not just calling for more and better democracy, better application of the mechanisms for the defence and protection of human rights, or a bigger share in the supposed benefits of development programmes. What they are really doing is questioning and challenging the basic assumptions on which the Nation-State has been built up in Latin America for almost two centuries past.

(Original: Spanish)

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