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Autonomies today Indigenous peoples in Latin America

Working Group
Newsletter
**Indigenous
peoples, autonomy
and collective
rights**



PAR TICIPATE IN THIS ISSUE

Lia Pinheiro
Barbosa Peter
Rosset Michael
Pedro Uc
Norihisa Arai
Raúl Romero Gallardo
Nayeli Moctezuma
Rodrigo Villagra Carron
CICDE Team [Costa Rica]
Marina G. Santos
Maria Luiza Muniz
Fábio Márcio

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CLACSO

Latin American Council of Social Sciences - Conselho Latino-americano de Ciências Sociais

Estados Unidos 1168 | C1023AAB City of Buenos Aires | Argentina

Tel [54 11] 4304 9145 | Fax [54 11] 4305 0875 | <clacso@clacsoinst.edu.ar> |

<www.clacso.org>



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Coordinators

Maria Gisela Hadad

Gino Germani Research Institute Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Buenos Aires

Argentina

giselahadad@hotmail.com

Ruby Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor

Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology

Member of CONACyT's System of Public Research Centers.

Mexico

araceli_burguete@yahoo.com.mx

Newsletter coordinators and editors

Waldo Lao

Degree in Ethnology from the ENAH.

D. from the Graduate Program in Latin American Integration.

University of São Paulo (PROLAM/USP) Brazil

Fábio M. Alkmin

PhD Candidate in Human Geography (USP)

Brazil

With support from "Fundo de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP)

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| Presentation

Indigenous peoples' demands for the recognition of their rights are becoming increasingly present in our continent. At this juncture, the struggle for autonomy has taken center stage as a strategy of resistance that articulates their cultural and territorial demands and their collective rights. It is the peoples struggling to continue being peoples, making their autonomies unique and heterogeneous processes, legacies of their most diverse histories and geographies.

The Bulletin: "Autonomies Today" of the CLACSO Working Group Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights aims to bring together (throughout its issues) a diversity of autonomous experiences that permeate our Latin American reality. With the collaboration of brief articles and interviews, we seek to build bridges between indigenous peoples in resistance and researchers of the continent, enabling the creation of networks that allow us to advance in this long journey-questioning of human emancipation and decolonization. "We can already see the horizon," some of these comrades tell us.

The bulletin welcomes contributions from other Working Groups, in order to encourage the active participation of the academic community on the subject of autonomies, as well as from indigenous organizations that **c a n** collaborate based on their own experiences. Texts should be short (between 1,500 and 2,000 words) and the bibliography should follow APA + gender norms. CLACSO uses APA + gender norms, including the full names of the authors in the bibliographic citation (for example: Gómez, Fernanda instead of Gómez, F.),

to make gender visible. Photos and maps (in high resolution) are always welcome to complement the texts.

From the Working Group "Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights", we invite you and wish you an attentive reading. For questions, criticisms and contributions, please contact: boletin.autonomias@gmail.com

In this second issue, we have reflections and analysis on: Mexico, Costa Rica, Paraguay and Ecuador.

Waldo Lao and Fábio M. Alkmin

Attention!

CLACSO Working Group Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights

Brasilia, repression against indigenous people June 2021

The Acampamento Levante por la Tierra (ALT), which brought together approximately 900 indigenous people belonging to 43 different peoples of the country, was created at the beginning of June in Brasilia, as a form of resistance to Proposed Law (PL) 490/2007.

Known as the "Genocide Law", the LP aims to put an end to the process of demarcation of "Indigenous Lands" in the country, in addition to making it possible to open up their territories to capital - whether by agribusiness, mining extractivism or through the creation of highways or hydroelectric plants. The project goes against articles 231° and 232° of the Federal Constitution of Brazil (1988), which recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to their territories.

Indigenous peoples in Brazil are also fighting against other legislative projects, such as PDL 177/2021, which withdraws Brazil from Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, or PL 191/2020, which liberalizes mining on indigenous lands.



On June 23, 2021, the Constitution and Justice Commission (CCJ) of the National Congress approved Law 490 by 40 votes in favor and 21 against, which provoked several indigenous protests in the country. The bill now continues to be considered by the Federal Senate.

See more:

- <https://apiboficial.org/>
- <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2021/06/17/indigenas-sao-recebidos-com-bombas-na-funai-em-brasilia-veja-videos>

Colombia - statues continue to fall June 28th

In the city of Barranquilla (capital of the Department of Atlántico), as part of the protests against the government of Iván Duque - amidst police brutality, a group of demonstrators shouting "asesi- no", knocked down the statue of who they consider a symbol of racism and colonialism, the Genoese navigator Christopher Columbus. Once on the ground, they tore off his head - with a message saying "for our dead".



Credit: Reuters/Mery Granados

Chile - A woman is elected president for the new Constituent Convention July 4

Elisa Loncón Antileo, an indigenous Mapuche with a PhD in Linguistics, after obtaining 96 of the 155 votes of the Convention members, will preside over the constituent convention (which will last one year) to draft a new constitution, which next year will be submitted to a referendum with obligatory voting. For the first time - the opportunity opens up - for the rights of indigenous peoples to be recognized in the new Plurinational Constitution.



Credit: Reuters/Ivan Alvarado

Due to the importance of the moment, we transcribe the full words of Elisa Loncón upon taking office:

MARI MARI PU LAMNGEN! (Greetings brothers and sisters)

MARI MARI KOM PU CHE! (Greetings to all people)

MARI MARI CHILE MAPU! (A greeting to the country of Chile).

MARI MARI PU CHE TA TUWÜLU TA PIKUN MAPU PÜLE! (A greeting to people living in the northern lands)

MARI MARI PU CHE TA TUWÜLU TA PATAGONIA PÜLE! (A greeting to the people living in Patagonia)

MARI MARI PU CHE TA TUWÜLU TA DEWÜN PÜLE (A greeting to the people living on the islands)

MARI MARI PU CHE TA TUWÜLU LAFKEN PÜLE! (Greetings to the people living on the coast)

MARI MARI KOM PU LAMNGEN! (Greetings to all, brothers and sisters)

A big greeting to the people of Chile from the north to Patagonia, from the lafken, the sea, to the mountains, to the islands, to all the people of Chile who are watching and listening to us. Here we are pu lamngen, to thank the support of the different coalitions that gave us their trust, that deposited their dreams in the call made by the Mapuche Nation to vote for a Mapuche person, a woman, to change the history of this country.

We are very happy for this strength that they give us, but this strength is for all the people of Chile, for all sectors, for all regions, for all the native peoples and nations that accompany us, for their organizations, for everyone. This greeting and gratitude is also for sexual diversity, this greeting is also for the women who walked against every system of domination, to thank that this time we are installing here a way of being plural, a way of being democratic, a way of being participatory.

This Convention over which I preside today will transform Chile into a plurinational Chile, into an intercultural Chile, into a Chile that does not violate the rights of women, the rights of caregivers, into a Chile that cares for Mother Earth, into a Chile that cleans the waters, into a Chile free of all domination. A special greeting to the lamngen

Mapuche of Wallmapu, this is a dream of our ancestors, this dream is coming true today.

It is possible, sisters and brothers, comrades, to re-found this Chile, to establish a new relationship between the Mapuche people and all the nations that make up this country. In this context, pu lamngen, this is the first sign that this Convention is going to be participatory. We, as native peoples, established that it was going to be a rotating leadership, a collective leadership, giving space to all the sectors of society represented here. All together, pu lamngen, we are going to re-found this Chile.

We have to broaden democracy, we have to broaden participation, we have to summon every corner of Chile to be part of this process. The Convention must be a participatory and trans- parent process, so that they can see us from the farthest corners of our territory and hear us in our native languages, which have been neglected throughout the Chilean nation-state. For the rights of our native nations, for the rights of the regions, for the rights of Mother Earth, for the right to water, for the rights of women and for the rights of our children.

I would also like to express my solidarity with the other peoples who are suffering. We have heard on television what has happened to the indigenous children of Canada; it is shameful how colonialism has attacked and attacked the future of the native nations. We, brothers and sisters, are a people in solidarity.

I want to thank here the original authority of the Mapuche people, Machi Francisca Linconao, for her support. I also have a mother who is watching me from my community of Lefweluan, a mother who made it possible for this woman to be here. I thank all the women who fight for the future of their sons and daughters. Finally, I would like to greet the children who are listening to us, who are watching us.

Today we are founding a new plural, multilingual Chile, with all cultures, with all peoples, with women and with the territories; this is our dream for writing a new Constitution.

Mañum pu lamngen (Thank you brothers and sisters).

Marichiweu! Marichiweu! Marichiweu! Marichiweu! (Ten times we will win, ten times we will win, ten times we will win).

Autonomy in the context of indigenous and peasant resistance in Latin America¹

Lia Pinheiro Barbosa*
Peter Rosset
Michael** Peter
Rosset Michael** Lia
Pinheiro Barbosa

Introduction

In this paper we argue the relevance and urgency of the debate on peasant and indigenous autonomy for rural social movements in Latin America, especially in the light of the pandemic of

* Professor at *Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE)*, in the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Sociologia (PPGS) and in the *Mestrado Acadêmico Intercampi em Educação e Ensino (MAIE)*. Researcher at CLACSO and CNPq/PQ2 Fellow. Invited researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: lia.barbosa@uece.br

** Professor-Researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR), Mexico; Visiting Professor BPV-FUNCAP at the *Programa de Pós-Graduação em Sociologia (PPGS)* of the *Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE)*. Invited researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact:

prossset@ecosur.mx

¹ For a more complete argument, we suggest to read Rosset and Barbosa (2021): <http://apostadigital.com/revistav3/hemeroteca/prossset.pdf>

Covid-19. The pandemic revealed a series of weaknesses and strengths of peasant, indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations, weaknesses that could be addressed and strengths capitalized on through an autonomous shift in political strategies and the collective construction of territorial alternatives. We consider that we are facing a perfect storm, composed in equal parts of disillusionment and realism, a harsh political situation, the advance of right-wing populist authoritarianism, a health, economic and food crisis, which should open the way for a debate on autonomy within rural movements and organizations in Latin America.

In the face of the current reality, there is the *autonomous proposal* made, from their own ontologies and epistemologies, by an important part of the indigenous movement in Latin America (Escobar, 2020; Cal y Mayor, 2018). In this essay we intend to take advantage of the conjuncture of the pandemic to illustrate the importance of promoting a discussion on *peasant autonomy* - capitalizing on strengths and minimizing weaknesses and vulnerabilities - as a political proposal and as a strategy of struggle. Autonomy is an issue that dates back long before the pandemic juncture, and will last long after, but we argue that its importance was highlighted throughout Latin America by the health contingency.

Autonomy as a political project

The indigenous autonomy proposal is not the same as the most visible autonomy proposal, which is that of anarchism, although in certain themes and moments they dialogue with each other. Indigenous autonomy has other ontological and epistemic roots, prior to the conquest, and has to do with the ways of cohabiting their territories and forms of communal organization. The very conception of *Abya Yala* as a transboundary territory also represented other forms of political organizations (Barbosa, 2020).

The main elements of indigenous autonomy are: 1) Defense and reconstitution of territories; 2) Reaffirmation of identity as original/indigenous peoples; 3) (Re)constitution of their own political institutions, whether indigenous governments, self-governments or communal governments (Cal y Mayor, 2018). Likewise, three principles are central to autonomy: the principle of interrelation, the principle of complementarity and the principle of reciprocity (Rendón-Monzón 2003). Bur- guete Cal y Mayor (2018: 18) states that autonomy "does not operate on a social body as a whole, but on certain dimensions of social life." Hence, autonomy could manifest itself, in the organization of the territory based on a legal framework and a collectively constructed autonomous government, at its different levels, community, mu- nicipal or regional, in which dialogue with the state institutionality can be opened, or expressed in a more radical form, such as Zapatista autonomy, without state recognition.

In this direction, it is necessary to recover the proposal of territorial autonomy made by the native peoples, to demonstrate its compatibility, convergences and dialogue, throughout the post-Conquest centuries, at least with the currents of European thought and to argue in favor of its possible strategic importance for the peasantry, which includes peasants, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, rural workers, landless, transhumant, artisanal fishermen, riverside dwellers, forest peoples and inhabitants of small urban towns dotting the countryside (Rosset and Barbosa, 2021).

It is important to note that, although the struggle for autonomy is central to the history of the peasantry, part of the reluctance to discuss autonomy on the part of peasant organizations stems from previous misunderstandings between the peasant movement and urban and middle-class anarchism, which are carried over into the current debate. However, bringing the two conceptions of autonomy - indigenous and peasant - into dialogue can open the way to thinking about autonomy as a political project among rural social movements in Latin America.

At the moment of understanding the convergences of autonomy, a common sense is built that territorial, community, collective, peasant and indigenous autonomies, although partial, implicit rather than explicit, and relative, can strengthen social subjects with great political potential to confront the expansion of extractivist capital in the countryside, and be, to use the language of the "old left," collective subjects with class character ("in and for themselves") and with "revolutionary potential" (Shanin, 1970).

Autonomy in the contexts of indigenous and peasant resistance

At the end of the 20th century, the sharpening of the contradictions resulting from the implementation of neoliberalism led to the emergence of a new cycle of struggles in Latin America, which brought together the most diverse organizations of the popular camp, constituting frameworks for a regional articulation between the set of peasant, indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural workers' organizations to think of a transnational political strategy in defense of the territories (Barbosa, 2017).

The indigenous movement is a constituent element of this cycle of struggles. Characterized by a social and organizational framework based on community life, the presence of indigenous movements gives other meanings to the social struggle, while at the same time it raises a political project of a historical nature. In their political narrative, they recover the historical memory of their cosmologies and the philosophical matrices of their languages, which demarcate an ontological paradigm of their own that grounds the nature of their demands, their practices and their political project (Barbosa, 2017). Although autonomy is a political demand that runs through the indigenous historical struggle, it becomes more explicit and attains a more solid materiality in this cycle of struggles.

The absence of the State in many indigenous territories (Cortez-Gómez et al. 2020), together with the historical oppression,

expropriation and discrimination of indigenous peoples, have created the historical conditions

The indigenous peoples' discourse is not a rejection of modernity and its legacy, but rather an openness to dialogue and the recognition of indigenous peoples as a collective subject with a collective identity. In the discourse of indigenous peoples, it is not a rejection of modernity and its legacy, but rather an openness to dialogue and recognition of indigenous peoples as a collective subject with equal rights, in a collective perspective, in the same way that modernity recognized and guaranteed, in the sphere of individuals, individual rights (Dávalos, 2005).

For indigenous movements, the construction of autonomy is not a struggle to "take over the government" and install themselves in power, but rather to build, from within the communities, counterpowers capable of converting them into political subjects with the capacity to make decisions at the community level. Therefore, indigenous peoples seek to disperse power (López-Bárceñas, 2007) to enable the direct exercise of autonomy in the community. Self-management and autonomous experiences of self-government are present in the recent political history of all Latin American countries. However, the EZLN insurgency highlights a radical way of demanding and constructing explicit autonomy as a political project, becoming the autonomous experience with the greatest national and international resonance.

In the context of the pandemic, rural communities are increasingly turning to their own structures to maintain their resistance and existence. Based on what we have identified in different social networks, we highlight seven axes that articulate these initiatives in response to the hollowing out of the public dimension of the States in providing an immediate and effective response in a pandemic context:

1. Agroecological food production;
2. Social solidarity, humanitarian donation and barter;
3. Popular and ancestral medicine;
4. Community protocols and health cordons;
5. Diverse self-management;

6. Marketing of agricultural and livestock production and
7. The defense of the territory.

Observing these axes that structure the responses to pan-democracy, we conclude that, in reality, peasant and indigenous organizations are exercising aspects of autonomy, which sets the stage for this debate. In this sense, we propose some autonomy strands that could be analyzed in their degrees, and in a wide range of processes, organizations and movements (Rosset and Bar-bosa, 2021): *Political autonomy and self-government*; *Productive autonomy*; *Food autonomy*; *Economic autonomy and local economy*; *Self-defense of communities and territories*; *Health autonomy*; and *Solidarity autonomy*.

These examples make it clear that autonomy, and in particular its different aspects and degrees, can serve as categories of analysis to interpret any process of social struggle and collective construction. We propose an expanded concept of *peasant autonomy*, understanding that it can extend from the partial and relative levels of using agroecological practices instead of purchased chemical inputs, to having local and territorial self-governance and self-defense. Peasant autonomy, we argue, is compatible with, and shares roots and subjects with, indigenous autonomy, should be able to dialogue with, and learn and draw inspiration from, Zapatista autonomy, even as they demand better public policies for the countryside and enter into political fronts against fascism, or even support an electoral campaign, without ceding their (political) autonomy to politicians and their parties.

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The Mayan Water of the Yucatan Peninsula

Pedro Uc

The Mayan Peninsula of Yucatan, fragmented into three states called Campeche, Quintana Roo and Yucatan itself, is a flat region of southeastern Mexico, inhabited for several millennia by women and men who territorialized this great plain as Mayan, where the stones with which our grandparents built interesting buildings known to this day as Chichen Itza, Uxmal and Mayapan, among others, abound.

It is surrounded by the sea, partly by the gulf and partly by the Caribbean with some outstanding islands such as Cozumel and Isla Mujeres. Among the forms of life that this territory enjoys are the cenotes, they are large mouths of the earth that offer fresh, clean, fresh and crystalline water, some can be drunk from the lips of the earth and in others it is necessary to go down a few meters to supply the water that keeps its fish, turtles and lizards.

Our Mayan grandmothers and grandfathers territorialized the entire Peninsula by building their homes, their families and their communities around these

* Mayan indigenous person from Buctutz Yucatán Mexico, member of the Assembly of Defenders of the Mayan Territory Múuch' Xíinbal. Invited researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: pedroucbe@gmail.com

They discovered that the forest or jungle with all its fauna depends on the water that comes from the sky and from the water that is in the cenotes, lagoons and watering holes, but they managed to notice that the wind, the sunlight, the full moon, the night among others, are forms of life as each and every one of them, the necessary weaving made by the artistic hands of nature nourished the diversity of forms of life to celebrate the coexistence of each and every one of them, the necessary weaving made by the artistic hands of nature to celebrate the diversity of forms of life, the full moon, the night among others, are forms of life as each and every one of them, the necessary weaving made by the artistic hands of nature nourished the diversity of forms of life to celebrate coexistence, community and respect.

When we were educated through the endless family dialogues around the banquette (small table) during and after the meal, we were told that the world is like a human body that can be strong if it is healthy but can be very weak if it is sick, that to maintain its health it has to eat and must be cared for, while doing the same with us and with others like animals and birds. We notice its health when the forest is green and full of flowers caressed by butterflies, bees and hummingbirds. The water of the cenotes must be clean, without garbage, with its fish, turtles and dragonflies drinking it; so must be all the forms of life that exist in the territory, healthy, healthy so that humans, who are also just one more of the forms of life, are healthy.

Thus we have learned from generation to generation to believe, to think, to feel, to listen, to create, to share as one body with all forms of life that grow even in the stalactites that keep the water of the cenotes together with the bats that find in them a house that they transform into a home for their children who are the poly-nizers of the next generation, just as it happens with the Mayan families that live in community.

This look of the Maya boy and girl unfortunately declined with the first invasion, with the beginning of the colonization that does not tire, that does not end, with the first prayers of the evangelization of the sword that have been transformed today into progress and

development implemented on the corpse of thousands of trees killed and grown as dead human bodies of covid-19. The cenotes of the

The Mayan territory has been sickened, they have been infected by a pan-demia, in the bottom of their bodies they carry thousands of plastic waste, broken glass, pieces of metal, it is almost possible to affirm that the "fourth transformation" has reached them; but also the pain of many boys, girls, women and men that the Mayan territory has formed, has created with the corn, with the rain, with the strength of the sun, with the affection of the moon.

The relationship of spirituality between the Maya and the water of the cenotes, forged over millennia by our grandfathers and grandmothers bore certain marks such as respect among equals, love among life forms, the celebration of coexistence with food and drink among other daily practices, but began to fall ill when the understanding of the colonizer affirmed that water, trees, land and animals are only a resource, then the Maya, because they did not reach the colonizing phenotype, are also resources, that is to say, saleable objects, attractive merchandise for the development of civilization.

Today in Yucatan hundreds of pig farms are built over our cenotes, each farm has up to two hundred thousand pigs, the water from the cenotes bathes them and cleans the pigsties, since the water mixes with the shit, then all that waste is directed back to the cenote, this is how the water gets sick, the air gets sick, the plants get sick and we who take the water to our body and spirit, we also get sick.

Our efforts as Mayan peoples to care for and protect the water of our cenotes have been unsuccessful since the structure of the colonizing understanding converted into laws, governmental environmental secretariats, political parties, schools, churches, companies, legislative, judicial and especially executive power, affirm that this way of treating the water of the cenotes is part of a project of sustainability and generation of clean energies that mitigate the poverty of the Mayan communities of the Yucatan Peninsula.

The official disqualification of our word, of our opinion, of our experience, of our understanding, is so categorical, our voice has come up against the "I have other data", that powerful noise that greatly undermines the environment from the northern border to the southern border of the country. Also the big hotels and huge restaurants are enormous pipes that absorb the water from the cenotes and in the same way, once the water is corrupted, even with traces of cocaine, they spit it back into the cenotes. The soybean monocultures that occupy thousands of hectares of Mayan peninsular land, after destroying important patches of jungle in which they kill animals, birds, bees and other insects with their aerial spraying, erect large metallic and plastic irrigation structures that flood thousands of hectares with a plant foreign to our corn, which is defeated by the power of the colonizing and transgenic soybeans.

Some results that have been achieved by these promoters of this kind of sustainability is that children take glyphosate from their mother's nipple, breast milk is already a formula with glyphosate for the inoculation of newborn children in the middle of a space that had been Mayan territory where water was a way of life, that was a sister, that was a mother, that was a woman of the community, but that today from the understanding and the colonizing treatment it is a resource, it is a merchandise just like everything that is Mayan territory.

The homes of water have been raided by developmentalism, water suffers what many Mayan families suffer, the kidnapping of their children, servitude, corruption, the disappearance of a family member, violence, manipulation, exploitation and extractivism. The cenotes, the lagoons, the water holes, the water eyes, the chultunes and the clouds are houses and homes of the water, all have been impacted in the name of progress, they have been stolen, they have been trampled, they have been contaminated, they have opened wounds in their bodies as shown by their bleeding skin.

Water is the blood that runs through the Mayan territory of the Peninsula, and when we say that this water is Mayan, we do not mean it in the western

sense and meaning of property, but rather because of the relationship that is established with the Mayan people.

It is not a resource but a brother, a mother, a grandfather and is treated as human to human and relative to relative, so it is respected and not only because it is fresh, clean and thirst quenching, but also because it is a commodity.

The Mayan rites around water are linked to all the parts that integrate life, abundant, healthy and free life. Our grandparents offered the sakab (pozole) to the cenotes because they are alive and they are like us, they feel, hear, speak and even work just like or more than every Mayan farmer in the production of food; that is why the rites of Ch'a'acháak (bringing rain) are fundamental for the time of sowing in the milpa, if the rain does not come, no seed makes sense, that is why our grandparents join the multitudinous pilgrimage of the butterfly contingents of different shades of yellow that go south for the rain all day long for a few weeks to meet it, to ask Yuum iik' to put his strength to bring it to the dry dust, to the weathered earth and paint green what the brown color dominates during the drought.

The Mayas who still conserve our corn heart, where political parties have no place, where colonizing evangelization is a threat and where development megaprojects are denounced, have the commitment to be water from cenotes, water from lagoons, water from the sea, rainwater although we are being reduced to teary-eyed water by an ethnocidal megaproject that is legalized with cynicism in the environmental impact study that states that this type of "ethnocide can have a positive turn" if the construction of a train is involved, so contrasting are our views on a territory that until now continues to be Mayan but if we fail to resist, a train will be the only Mayan thing that perseveres.

The "leftist" government of the right wing that "governs" this country continues to allow businessmen to appropriate the water of the cenotes, of the lagoons and at this rate it could also become the rain, the dispossession of our territory is the dispossession of our waters with which we have lived as a family for centuries and millennia, today.

reduced to resources for the accumulation and multiplication of money of a few modern conquerors in the name of democracy, sustainability, development and progress for the marginalized, poor and uncivilized indigenous people.

Without Mayan water there is no Mayan territory, the Mayan territory is dying of thirst, the monsters are taking control of the veins of the territory to take the blood of our soil, of our red and black earth, of our salt, of our cloud, they are drying up the body of our territory to conserve only its image so useful to exhibit in the museums of the "Mayan world", that commercialization of dried and dead bodies of thirst dressed in regional costume, with old shoes, with red ribbons on their heads and even playing the role of guides who exoticize and disfigure history with the foreign interests imposed by the dominant arm.

The cenotes of the Mayan territory are not uninhabited houses, they are not empty, neither are they warehouses of decomposed liquid, they are the home of other forms of life, the cenote is a life that feeds other lives, it is also a territory and it is Mayan, there the fish nest, there the turtles celebrate, there the dragonflies color their wings, there the lizards learn to swim and in their environment the Mayan community is born to make the milpa. The cenote is the habitat of other beings, those that have been denied by the West, those that sometimes are called mythical beings, those that do not pass the test of the epistemology of the prestigious universities that decide what is true and false, but that has never worried us as Mayan women, children and men, our truth was disqualified long ago, five centuries ago, just like the song says.

To mention some of our grandmothers and grandfathers who live there or at least come in procession for their celebration, there is X Kiik, X Táabay, X Ch'eel, Yuum Cháak, Yuum Iik', Yuum K'áax, and K'ulub Cháak among many others; in their watershed we celebrate the word, we celebrate life, we celebrate the sowing, we celebrate the harvest. In the cen- te we also find history, there is our memory, there is our joy, there is our pain, our language, our rage,

our dream, our strength and our hope. Unfortunately, the big corporations have arrived and have made them into sinkholes, they have endrogated them and filled them with debris and cement to make them look like sinkholes. However, in the last few days, some men and women have been talking about the appearance of some native corn plants with very green leaves that point to hope.

Rethinking Autonomy from the Communality of the Sierra Norte, Oaxaca

Norihisa Arai*

The concept of Communality emerged in the heat of the indigenous movement of the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca in the eighties of the twentieth century, with the main presence of two anthropologists of Zapotec and Mixe origin; Jaime Martínez from Guelatao de Juárez and Floriberto Díaz from Santa María Tlahuitoltepec (respectively). Despite its transcendence, this current of thought-practice was neglected by the main currents of anthropology in Mexico (Nava, 2009), and today it could be said that it is situated in a new context, where it has gained greater importance with the passage of time, revaluing its postulates and approaches.

In order to understand this transformation of the theoretical-practical proposal that is exercised in the daily life of the peoples of the Sierra Norte and other indigenous communities in Mexico, it should be mentioned that, as

* D. student in Latin American Studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Invited researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: splitz.e.bellini23@gmail.com

As a result of the global economic crisis of 2008, there has been great concern about alternatives to the financial policy/economy that has global control. As a result of this situation, the negative effects of the neoliberal model have been experienced since the end of the 20th century and concerns have arisen worldwide, mainly in academic currents, about models that offer an alternative to this hegemonic project of capitalism.

In Latin America, in some countries that led as a precursor of these discussions at the academic and even political-administrative level, we find the experience of Bolivia (2009) and Ecuador (2008), through the incorporation of the concept of Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir in their respective Constitutions. These alternative proposals for harmonious coexistence are original to the indigenous practices of the continent. On the other hand, researchers from the Mesoamerican region (Mexico and Central America) focused during this period on rethinking their own expressions of organization and practices. As a consequence, some representations of the communitarian philosophy of the indigenous peoples were "re-discovered" and therefore re-interpreted, among them Communalidad.

From Floriberto Díaz's perspective, communalidad is constituted through the territory, the autonomous political entity, the cargo system, the collective work (tequio) and the festivity/religiosity (Díaz, 2007: 40). Likewise, it should be mentioned that all these fundamental elements of community life require the active participation of its members. Therefore, communalidad has an empirical and pragmatic character, since it requires from the community members a great dedication of time and effort for its realization. In this sense, Jaime Martínez describes the nature of the concept as follows:

Communalidad is the political behavior that reproduces social organization and is explained as a process of obtaining prestige; a citizen has to respond from a very young age to the patterns established by his or her community. This respect is basically demonstrated through work, not discourse, and is shown through participation both in

the structure of political or operative positions as in the participation in the assembly and in the tequio (Martínez, 2013: 99).

Thus, when we review the community praxis related to the concept of communality in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, it can be seen that community autonomy is the central element that sustains the structure of these Zapotec/Mixe communities. One of these manifestations is found in the political mechanism based on uses and customs that legally enables the construction of the autonomous project based on the cargo system and the communal assembly. This last element is considered to be the maximum executive power instance led by the community itself to govern its territories.



Credit: Norihisa Arai

However, the region is currently facing a series of threats to the continuity of its construction, given that it has been undergoing profound cultural transformations in recent decades.

One of these factors is migration, the consequence of which results in the gradual depopulation of the communities, since many of the migrants do not return to their hometown, which in the end, implies the loss of the young and adult population to assume the political, economic and cultural responsibilities of the group (Aquino, 2013: 16).

Likewise, the migratory tradition brought with it the dependence and monetization of the community economy, substituting the practice of mutual support (faena) to the simple monetary transaction. In relation to this phenomenon, the political, economic and cultural scope of the cargo system has expanded significantly, since nowadays it is not only enough to lead the internal situation of the municipal territory and the authority has to manage monetary resources coming from outside, for example, the contribution of migrants who are abroad or in other cities of the national territory.

In this scenario, to add, the State participates as a fundamental actor that intervenes in municipal governance. Although these communities have traditionally received financial contributions from the state, in the current administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, various projects have been presented related to the improvement of infrastructure in the area, which in turn generate spaces for exploitation by some companies and members of the municipal authority of interest. This situation represents a growing need for a new and rigorous form of accountability for the community members at the time of the annual handover of office, in order to avoid the hoarding of resources originally allocated for the collective purpose.

The points mentioned above are only a part of the varied problems faced by the communities of the Sierra Norte. However, these risks do not rule out the capacity for adaptation of these peoples, since one of the qualities of communality lies in "resistance-adaptation" (Martínez, 2013). In this sense, this flexibility of collective responses to the waves of changes that arise in community life, according to Mario

Source, even represents the direct link with the concept of social resilience (Source, 2012).

One of these responses can be seen today in the midst of the crisis caused by the Covid-19 bread crisis, where young people returned to their respective communities and, faced with the shortage of basic products, began to resume the milpa plantings that had been decreasing over time. This experience shows the importance of securing the means of production for the autonomous projects of indigenous and even non-indigenous peoples, while at the same time it leaves us with a reflection on the need for a flexible disposition to respond to different political and economic situations, since autonomy is a permanent construction.

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Autonomy Today

The Case of the Zapatista Caracoles

Raúl Romero Gallardo

The time to practice

On various occasions the Zapatistas have explained their different organizational moments. The first of these is the period from November 17, 1983 to December 31, 1993. This is the time of the formation and consolidation of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Subcomandante Marcos (2003a) wrote that this period was composed of seven stages: 1) selection, 2) implantation, 3) survival, 4) first contacts with the peoples, 5) explosive growth of the EZLN, 6) war vote and 7) the day before January 1, 1994.

The second period is brief, but crucial. It runs from January 1 to 12, 1994. The Zapatista uprising generated much national and international sympathy: the cause and the "social subject" were not only legitimate, but also had a narrative that emphasized the problems of the new world order and the globalization of capital (Romero, 2015). Thus, after 11 days of bloody fighting, on January 12, a massive march in Mexico City demanded a halt to the war. The then president, Carlos Salinas de Gortari was forced to decree a ceasefire.

• Academic Technician, Institute of Social Research-UNAM. Invited researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: raul.romero@sociales.unam.mx



Credit: Colectivo Transdisciplinario de Investigaciones Críticas

The EZLN read civil society's message well: it supported the demands, but not the war. This is how Subcomandante Marcos narrated it years later (2000): "(...) those people who took to the streets were against injustice, against authoritarianism, against racism, against war, they were for dialogue, for peace, for justice, for the peaceful solution of our demands. That is what we read and that marked our subsequent path.

The third period runs from January 12, 1994 to 2001. It is a period of much greater interaction between the Zapatistas and civil society, but also of exponential growth in the organizational process of the communities.

The Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ), erected on the recovered territory since 1994, are consolidating. From the first days of the struggle, the EZLN announced that, given that it did not aspire to

In the exercise of government, the MAREZ would govern themselves through Autonomous Councils. The EZLN would only provide protection against military or paramilitary attacks. During this period, the advances achieved by the armed struggle were also reflected in the political, economic, health and cultural spheres. Autonomy, in a word, was what was maturing in Zapatista territory.

In an interview granted to journalist Gloria Muñoz (2003b), Subcomandante Marcos said that he highlighted three major axes in this period:

1. The axis of fire: which refers to military actions, i.e., training, preparations, combats, recovery of territories, etc.
2. The axis of the word: meetings, dialogues, communiqués, "where there is the word or the silence, that is, the absence of the word".
3. The axis of the peoples. Marcos refers to this as the "backbone", since it implies the "organizational process or the way in which the organization of the Zapatista peoples is developing" and which articulates and determines the other two.

At the same time, Zapatismo finds in national and international civil society its main interlocutor. It is the time of dialogues, national and international meetings, caravans, consultations and many other initiatives.

The period reached a climax in 2001, when 27 members of the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Clandestine Committee - General Command of the EZLN, representatives of the Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol, Zoque and Mame ethnic groups, toured the entire country and demanded from the Congress of the Union the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights and culture, signed in 1997 and popularly known as the San Andres ^{Accords}¹.

¹ These are commitments and joint proposals that the federal government agreed in 1996 with the EZLN to guarantee a new relationship between the country's indigenous peoples, society and the State.

The "March of the Color of the Earth", as the mobilization was known, generated the participation of thousands of people throughout the country and many expressions of solidarity around the world. However, the legislature, with the complicity of all political parties, refused to recognize the Accords.

Thus, the EZLN moved to a new organizational stage. The refusal they received from the political class led them to a new moment, that of the de facto exercise of autonomy. The *time of asking* and *demanding* was followed by the *time of exercising*, the *time* of de facto autonomy, the time of consolidating material and cultural change.

In August 2003 the EZLN announced the birth of the *Zapatista Caracoles*, thus beginning, said Comandanta Esther (2003), the time of "exercising our rights ourselves. The *Caracoles* did not come alone, they were born with the Good Government Councils (JBG) and were the maturation of the Zapatista Rebel Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ) throughout 10 years of struggle. The Zapatista indigenous peoples thus began an autonomous exercise in which they had territories, their own government, and an army ready to defend the interests of the peoples.

Material change and cultural change

Between 2013 and 2015 the EZLN carried out several courses and levels of "Escuelita Zapatista", an interesting initiative in which the support bases showed thousands of people around the world the results of their organizational process.

On that occasion they explained that there are four territorial instances for the organization: village, region, municipality and zone. These have three levels of autonomous authorities: community, municipal and JBG. However, the highest authority is always the people and their assemblies.

There are seven principles that govern autonomous governments, the "principles of commanding by obeying", which are: Serve and not serve, Represent and not supplant, Build and not destroy, Obey and not command, Propose and not impose, Convince and not conquer, and Descend and not ascend.

Zapatista militiamen do not participate in the different levels of government, they are prevented from doing so. The government is for civilians only. The JBGs are governed by three maxims: rotation of tasks, revocation of mandate and accountability.

The authorities elected at any level do not receive salaries; their maintenance and that of their families is the responsibility of the communities. There are different positions: police, agents, commissaries, etc., and men and women participate in all of them. In an exercise of reappropriation and reconstruction of the language according to gender, the Zapatistas have feminized some terms; therefore, we hear some such as *jóvena*, *agenta* and *comisariada*.

Each JGB can last for two or three years -depending on the zone-. No member may be re-elected to the same position.

One of the main bases of the Zapatista project is land. In the words of Subcomandante Moisés, it is "the basis of the economic resistance of Zapatismo. It is the one that guarantees their self-management capacity and on which they test a *post-capitalist* world.

Collective work is key in their process, through which they are able to finance the organization, form bread, livestock and shoe cooperatives. They have even built banking institutions, such as the Autonomous Community Bank, which supports families in emergency situations. This is also done in accordance with the territorial organization and functions as a point of convergence between the different families.

The thousands of hectares that were recovered in 1994 are now used to grow food for self-consumption, sale or exchange. Over the course of two decades, corn, bean, etc., collectives have been formed, always

according to the type of land and climate of the community. There are also pig and chicken farming collectives, coffee cooperatives and bakeries.

The self-management built by the Zapatista peoples has allowed them to build their own systems of education, health, communication and other areas. Bruno Baronnet (2010) points out that the Zapatistas have built with their own means "local networks of alternative schools to the official public education system", which have only been possible due to the political autonomy they have managed to build. There they implement "emerging educational policies adapted to local cultural, political and economic priorities" that guarantee the cultural and linguistic reproduction -education is bilingual- of the immersed native peoples, in addition to reproducing the "rebel conscience".

Those responsible for providing education in the Zapatista schools are the "education promoters," young men or women from the communities who have been trained to guide the students in the collective learning process. The promoters do not receive a salary; the communities are in charge of supporting them - and their families if they are the breadwinners - by contributing part of their harvest. The community is also responsible for providing the necessary materials: books, pencils, infrastructure, etc.

In the area of health, the Zapatistas have also generated important achievements. The knowledge of the people, conserved and reproduced as part of their own culture, was combined with the knowledge contributed by people and organizations in solidarity with the Zapatista peoples. By 2003, with the creation of the *Caracoles*, it became evident that the Zapatista clinics, hospitals and health promoters were providing better and greater attention to those who needed it than the clinics of the National Health System in the region.

Health for the Zapatistas is a complementary part of the autonomic project. In the assemblies, men and women are appointed as health promoters and coordinators, who are also unpaid;

The costs of the clinics and hospitals are also absorbed by the communities through collective work.

In the area of gender, the changes are also explained by the Zapatista women themselves. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the EZLN already had women commanders in its General Command and other ranks occupied by women. On December 31, 1993, in the document the Revolutionary Law of Women, it also incorporated many of their demands.

The new generations of Zapatista women no longer knew much of the violence to which their grandmothers or mothers were subjected, violence that came from the landowners as well as from their families and partners. They have referred to this phenomenon as the "double standard", that of the hacienda and that of the home.

Conclusions

In recent years, the Zapatista peoples have held several meetings that give special interest to the sciences and the arts. The process of material and cultural change that the Zapatista peoples are going through, according to Subcomandante Galeano, spans five generations. This process has translated into challenges, errors and problems that, with imagination and persistence, they have been able to resolve.

The Zapatista project confronts not only capitalist exploitation, but also racial and gender domination. Autonomy has become the strategy to confront and from there rehearse the other possible world that they have proposed to build. In addition, with the *Cara-coles* and the JBG, the Zapatistas realize a form of democracy that is characterized by the construction of popular power and an equitable redistribution of wealth. The very different world they have built is a reference of organization and resistance; a concrete example that worlds outside of capitalism are possible... and urgent.

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Photo Essay First International, Political, Artistic, Sporting and Cultural Meeting of Women in Struggle

Nayeli Moctezuma Perez* Nayeli Moctezuma Perez* Nayeli Moctezuma Pérez

Thousands of women (from more than 30 countries) participated in the First Encounter - which took place on March 8, 9 and 10, 2018, at the Caracol de Morelia, in the Tzotz Choj area.

"We are all women. But we know that there are different colors, sizes, languages, cultures, professions, thoughts and forms of struggle. But we say that we are women and also that we are women who fight. So we are different but we are the same. And although there are women who fight and are not here, but we also think about them even if we don't see them.

Words of welcome- Insurgenta Erika

• Trained in Sociology, PhD candidate in Latin American Studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico - UNAM. Member of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and extractive projects.

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NAYELI MOCTEZUMA PÉREZ





Indigenous territories and autonomies in Paraguay

Rodrigo Villagra Carron

In Paraguay there are currently some 20 indigenous peoples grouped into five linguistic families, distributed in more than 800 indigenous communities, distributed in 14 of the 17 departments - administrative divisions - into which the country is divided (Table 1). These communities are organized under the authority of leaders recognized by the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute (Instituto Paraguayo del Indígena - Indi) and are settled on lands claimed, demarcated and legally restituted through the now archaic Law 904 of 1981 - whose guarantees were extended with Chapter V of the 1992 Constitution and the ratification of ILO Convention 169 in 1993. The communities are located mostly, around 90%, in rural areas. However, since the beginning of this century, a good number of them and family groups have migrated to cities such as Asunción and surrounding cities in the Central Department, as well as to other cities and departmental capitals in the Eastern, Western and Chaco regions, mainly due to the decrease in access to their lands and resources as a result of the agro-export model.

* Lawyer and PhD in Social Anthropology. President and researcher of Tierraviva, level I of PRONIL-CONACYT of Paraguay, member of CEADUC and university professor at UNILA, Brazil. Researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: villagrarodrigo@hotmail.com

and the consequent advance of land grabbing for intensive cattle ranching and the cultivation of *commodities* such as soybeans on these territories.

The outlook for territorial autonomy, taking into account all these determinants, is not flattering: of the 1,143,945 hectares that are today titled or secured to indigenous peoples - barely 3 or 4% of the extension of their traditional territories - about 37% are still affected by conflicts with third parties such as land rental, invasion, deforestation, contamination of soil, water and forests with agrotoxins and even expulsion and eviction by civil authorities and/or private guards (Villagra, 2021, p. 284-286), all circumstances that violate and grossly contradict the recognition "to the communal ownership of land, in sufficient extension and quality for the conservation and development of their peculiar ways of life" established by the indigenous peoples (Villagra, 2021, p. 284-286). 284-286), all circumstances that violate and grossly contradict the recognition "to the communal ownership of the land, in sufficient extension and quality for the conservation and development of their peculiar ways of life" established by article 64 of the Constitution.

In this sense, neither the superior legal framework of indigenous rights progressively enshrined by the Paraguayan State - to which were added the signature by Paraguay of the Declaration of Indigenous Rights of the United Nations of 2007, the American Declaration of the same tenor and object of 2016 and the questionable presidential decree No. 1.039 of 2018 of Protocol of Consultation Processes - nor much less the actions of the powers of the State from the perspective of a historical and procedural analysis of the contemporary era - covering the Stroessner dictatorship (1954-1989) and then the democratic transition (1989 to the present) - have reversed but encouraged this situation of "structural denial of rights" (Ramírez, 2007, p. 415).

Table 1, Paraguay's indigenous population, general data, population, gaps and percentages

INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF PARAGUAY						
20 villages distributed in 15 of the country's 17 departments (administrative divisions)	711 communities, Villages and neighborhoods organized under the authority of leaders recognized by	5 language families Guaraní with six villages: Guaraní Occidental, Guaraní Ñandeava, Mbya Guaraní, Ava Guaraní, Paĩ Tavyterã, Ache, Zamuco with three villages: Yshyr Ebitoso, Yshir Tomarãho, Ayoreo Guaikurú with one village: Qom Mataco-Mataguayo with three villages: Nivaklé, Manjuí, and Maká Enlhet-Enenlhet with six villages: Enxet, Enlhet, Enenlhet, Sanapaná, Angaité, and Guaná				
POPULATION, GAPS AND PERCENTAGES (Reference year 2017).						
122.641 people indigenous 1.8% of the population national (6.953.696 people)	91% habitants of rurales, 9% of areas urban	66.15% under poor-poor line and 34.41%, in poverty extreme	Eco-population nomically active Indigenous (PEAI) 43,326 persons, and Indian population gena Busy 39,101 people, 41.17% asala-flood and 58.83% worker independent, 68.13% in the primary sector (agriculture, livestock, hunting and fishing).	Average of men's income suals of the population indigenous salaried Gs. 1.479.000 (USD 267) and indepen- Gs. 529.000 (USD 95), both by below the Minimum mo Current Gs. 1.964.507 (USD 340.7)	Average of years of study by person indigenous 3.39 years, 4,06 years for men 2.74 years for women res vs. 9,12 years for population non-	Population indigenous with physician 14,95% vs. Population non-with physician 26,96%
					Indigenous illiteracy rate 25.49% vs. Non- 5,96%	Indigenous population with access services of health 26,5%

Source: General Directorate of Statistics and Census 2015, 2018, National Institute of Statistics 2021.

Certainly, over the last decades, there have been positive exceptions in the indigenist acts, policies and measures taken by successive government administrations - with different nuances, but under the almost everlasting monopoly of the Colorado Party in government. These include, beyond the deficiencies and contradictions of institutional and regulatory policies, the achievements attained through the pressure and struggle of indigenous peoples, specific communities and their allies; deficiencies, moreover, that have even been questioned by three judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-

American Court of Human Rights.

Human Rights in favor of indigenous communities, which ordered the Paraguayan State to reverse and repair its effects with changes in regulations, institutions and specific public policies (Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2005, 2006, 2010).

With this background, determinants and general context, we present here how the self-determination of indigenous peoples in Paraguay is reconstituted in Paraguay from four articulated autonomous processes - following Burguete Cal y Mayor (2018, p. 17-18) - which, of course, are not exclusive of other own and unique manifestations of indigenous autonomy in this country.

1. Defense and reconstitution of Territories: Despite the outdated Law 904/81 as a framework for the restitution of rights to the communities and the failed attempts in Parliament for its repeal or negative reform, despite its normative and procedural insufficiency to recognize indigenous peoples as subjects of rights and holders of their territories, and despite, likewise, the recurrent shortage and/or misappropriation of Indi funds intended for the purchase of indigenous community properties in the hands of individuals, there have been initiatives on the part of said peoples claiming larger extensions. Among them are:

- i) the territorial claim of the Ayoreo Totobiegosode people (with part of the people in voluntary isolation);
- ii) the claim for physical and complementary continuity of the lands already restituted separately as communities demanded by the Yshir people through the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Yshir Nation (UCINY); both claims are located in the Department of Alto Paraguay;
- iii) the incipient claim of the Guaraní Ñandeva people to their ancestral territory bordering Bolivia in the Department of Boquerón;
- iv) self-demarcation - with its own ancestral and contemporary toponymy
- of the Nivaclé people from their ancestral habitat on the left banks and adjacent areas of the Pilcomayo River; both

claims in the Department of Boquerón and the last one also extending to the Department of Presidente Hayes;

- v) the claims of communities of the Angaité, Sa-napaná and Enxet peoples of the Lower Chaco, which include both contiguous and separate lands also in the Department of Presidente Hayes;
- vi) the territorial claim of the Tekoha Guazu of the Mbya Guaraní people of the Departments of Itapúa and Caazapá of the Eastern Region,
- vii) the claim for restitution and reparation of the Ava Guaraní people of the areas flooded on both banks of the Paraná River by the binational hydroelectric dam of Itaipu (Paraguay-Brazil), The Tekoha Sauce community's struggle to recover its habitat in an area designated as a biological reserve on the edge of the lake of the aforementioned dam is a reference and a concrete example. All these territorial claims - and the multiple claims and demands for defense, recovery or access to habitats of individual communities, including urban groups - go against the process of voracious land grabbing and excessive land exploitation promoted by large producers, agricultural multinationals and landowners supported by various state agencies and agents, ranging from the Attorney General's Office, through the Police to the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development (MADES).

2. Re-indigenization: The process that "comprises the will of a people to reconstitute itself in order to remain" (Ibidem), and is expressed in Paraguay in a diverse but clear way in the different peoples of the country, as for example, in the promotion of the productive self-management of communities of the Aché people (Aché Kuetuvy Community, 2020), who suffered genocidal persecution in the recent past; or in the rearticulation, ethnic definition and organization of urban indigenous men and women, particularly in Asunción and its metropolitan area, demanding recognition and specific care policies from the State (CONAPI, 2017).

3. Strengthening identity: autonomous process in which linguistic revitalization is one of the fundamental initiatives, such as

the recent creation of the Academy of the Language of the Nivaclé People (Secretaría de Políticas Lingüísticas, 2019), as well as the process of recovering the memory, oral tradition and cosmopolitical reflection of the Enlhet people of the Central Chaco through the *Nengvaanemkeskama Nempayvaam Enlhet* initiative "Making our Enlhet language grow" (Nengvaanemkeskama Nempayvaam Enlhet, 2021).

4. Reconstitution of their own institutions. This implies reaffirming ancestral or alternatively autonomous modes of political, cultural and cosmo-ecological organization, which can be carried out in conciliation or in contradiction and beyond the forms pre-established by the law and the hegemonic practices of national society. Thus, the expansion and dispersion of communities and the reconquest of traditional habitats or alternative lands can be understood as a manifestation of such reconstitution (e.g. The search for the *yvy marane'y* of the Guaraní peoples), as well as the complex inter-community reorganization in secured lands but with diverse origins, populations and leaderships, such as the Mainumby Organization of the Angaité people in the lands known as exCoraí; or even the efforts of inter-ethnic organization at the national level, bringing together various peoples and their respective organizations such as the "National Indigenous Articulation for a Dignified Life" (Tierraviva, 2021).

So far we have made a brief outline and preview of these different processes, which we will refer to individually and in greater detail in the following bulletins of our WG on Indigenous Peoples and Autonomy Processes.

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Indigenous peoples in the struggle for territorial recovery in Costa Rica

A decade of violence, State
and autonomous power, 2010 - 2020

CICDE research team*.

The problem of usurpation of indigenous territories in Costa Rica is not a new situation of this 21st century, but a structural problem with antecedents in the 20th century and since the end of the country's independent life as a legacy of a colonial past characterized by the dispossession of lands from native peoples (Guevara and Romagosa, 1987). However, in the last decade, between 2010-2020, this problem has had a period distinguished by the struggles of the indigenous peoples.

* Academic and community researchers from the Centro de Investigación en Cultura y Desarrollo (CICDE) of the Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED) of Costa Rica. César Moya Aburto, BA in Anthropology from the University of Costa Rica and Master's degree from the National University. Contact: cmoya@uned.ac.cr - Juan Antonio Gutiérrez Slon, Master in History from the University of Costa Rica and Sociologist from the Universidad Nacional. Contact: jgutierrez@uned.ac.cr - Mariana Delgado Morales, Indigenous leader and member of the Ditsö Ajkónuk Wakpa Council of the Bribri territory of Salitre. Contact: mariana0morales1@gmail.co - Pablo Sibar Sibar, Major Brörán, member of the Council of Major Brörán and indigenous leader. Contact: psibar2008@gmail.com - Xinia Zúñiga Muñoz, Licentiate in Social Work from the University of Costa Rica and Master in the Study of Social and Family Violence from the Universidad Estatal a Distancia. Contact: xinia.ziga@gmail.com. Invited researchers of the CLACSO Working Group Indigenous peoples, autonomies and collective rights.

territorial recovery that different indigenous peoples in Costa Rica have been carrying out since then. These struggles, protected by the national and international legislation in force in the country, have been the cause of celebrations, tensions and violence of various kinds (Mackay and Morales, 2014). All this, guided by the slogan of asserting autonomy from the indigenous territories themselves.

The usurpation of indigenous territories causes not only the loss of the land, but also of its value for the indigenous families and clans, whose tenure enables them as a means of subsistence, home, continuity in the practice of their language and the world of knowledge that constitute the identity of the Cabécar, Bribri, Brörán and Mau-Leku peoples who are mobilized in the recovery of their lands/territories. This struggle, which began in 2010 in the Bribri territory of Salitre, has been extended to other territories such as the Bribri of Cabagra, the Brörán of Térraba, the Cabécar of China Kichá and the Maleku of ^{Guatuso}¹, and has resulted in the return of different indigenous families to their ancestral territories and the loss of their original cultures.

However, the struggle for the defense of indigenous land has been going on since at least the 1970s with evident proposals and mobilizations that the native peoples have been carrying out in Costa Rica through struggles against oil exploration, hydroelectric dams and logging in their territories, as well as the initiative of a bill against the usurpation of their territories in 1985; To which we can add the struggle for the cedulación of the Ngäbe people between 1990 and 1991 and the mobilizations and pressures of 1992 for the Costa Rican State to ratify Convention No. 169 that the International Labor Organization had issued since 1989 (Gutiérrez and Moya, 2018, 185).

All these struggles were based on a logic of pressure on government authorities and the State, which led to the formation of an indigenous movement to defend their lands, culture, and culture, and to defend the rights of the indigenous people.

¹ All territories located in the southern part of the country, with the exception of the Maleku people located in the north.

and rights that were gradually acquiring greater prominence in the very definition of Costa Rica's indigenous agenda. Thus, between 1993 and 1994, the indigenous movement favored the idea of a law that would support the legal autonomy of native peoples in Costa Rica, which would imply an advance in the fulfillment of rights, as well as degrees of autonomy in the way they would relate to the Costa Rican State. This autonomy did not involve the creation of a state within a state, but rather the possibility that indigenous peoples could have autonomous organizations in their territories.

This situation led representatives of the country's eight peoples (Cabecar, Bribri, Brörán, Brunca, Ngäbe, Maleku, Huetar and Chorotega) to jointly formulate the Autonomous Development of Indigenous Peoples Bill (PDLDAPI), which in 1994 entered the Legislative Assembly under file No. 12 032. This will initiate another cycle of collective actions that, between 1994 and 2008, led different indigenous leaders to exert political influence for the approval of the PDLDAPI. Pressure that included walks from their territories to the Presidential House and the Legislative Assembly (both located in San José, the country's capital) in 1998, 1999 and 2000; as well as a series of vigils and marches between 2001 and 2008, but without the Autonomous Development Bill making progress in the legislative stream (Gutiérrez and Moya, 2018, 178-182).

With this in mind, and following the logic of leaving their territories to demonstrate for the fulfillment of their rights and the approval of the PDLDAPI, once again going to the Legislative Assembly, on the night of August 9, 2010, different indigenous leaders took over the Hall of Former Presidents of the Congress building, as a means of pressure so that the deputies would approve or reject the PDLDAPI. This demonstration was forcefully repressed by the First Power of the Republic, which that night/morning forcibly expelled the organized indigenous people. This fact sadly

remembered as "La Arrastrada"², generated that the indigenous peoples changed their strategy avoiding returning to the Capital to request what is theirs and what has been taken from them, to settle from their own territories and assert their legal and legitimate right to land, starting with the struggles for territorial recovery (Zúñiga et al. 2017, 293)³.

Given this scenario, the possibility of the Costa Rican state recognizing the rights of organization and territorial control expressed in the draft Autonomous Development Law was eliminated after more than two decades of Congress refusing to approve it. In the course of those years, the bill was consulted on two occasions and more than 37 workshops were held with the direct participation of more than 2,300 indigenous people. As a result, there was an important indigenous contribution in the consultation, drafting and proposal of the articles of the bill, and where each territory designated a delegate to finally hold the National Indigenous Forum in 1997; being another expression of the indigenous struggle for their autonomy (Arias et al. 2015).

Due to the above, autonomous territorial recuperations seek to be a solution to the delayed action of the Costa Rican State, which for at least 70 years,⁴ has been denying the right to indigenous territory and exercising few actions against the usurpation of these lands by non-indigenous farmers. In this way, direct actions of territorial recovery have been the most effective way, up to now, to restore the indigenous territories. A struggle that for 10 years

² A video reference of this act of violence by the State against the indigenous population of Costa Rica can be seen at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=25uETmvQXMc&t=12s>.

³ For more on autonomous community recovery actions in Salitre, see: Zúñiga Muñoz, Xinia, Juan A. Gutiérrez Slon, César Moya Aburto, Pablo Sibar Sibar and Mariana Delgado Morales. 2018. The territory of Salitre: Memory, Rights, Violence, 2010-2017. Research report. Universidad Estatal a Distancia. https://cicde.uned.ac.cr/images/investigaciones/informe_salitre.pdf.

⁴ According to an official report of the state entity Instituto de Tierras y Colonización, ITCO, which since 1964 warned about the problem of illegal penetration of non-indigenous people into indigenous territories (Instituto de Tierras y Colonización, ITCO. 1964. Study of indigenous communities. Zonas: Boruca - Térraba and China Kichá. Costa Rica: ITCO Press).

has involved 45 recoveries in Salitre, 10 in Térraba, 6 in Cabagra, 4 in China Kichá and at least 6 in Guatuso; all of them being struggles of the indigenous families and clans themselves who have undertaken them despite the high cost paid with the integrity and safety of the indigenous recuperators who have suffered various manifestations of violence⁵.

Despite the violence (physical, psychological, sexual, patrimonial and cultural) with which non-indigenous farmers have attacked indigenous women and men hundreds of times, and the lack of action by the Judiciary and the Executive Branch in condemning and taking action against the offenders, the struggle for territorial recovery continues, legitimate and with a view to continuing to strengthen the autonomy of the peoples. A struggle that allows indigenous families and clans to return to the lands of their grandfathers and grandmothers, enhance the return of their own cultural practices, their worldview, as well as the regeneration of forest areas and water sources highly intervened by the extensive livestock practices by the usurpers. (Zúñiga et al. 2017, 98).

As a result of overt violence with the use and intimidation of firearms and bladed weapons, the burning of houses, crops and cultural houses, the persecution of women, verbal or written threats in virtual networks, the destruction of belongings and direct physical violence against the bodies of indigenous recuperators, Costa Rica has two regrettable indigenous people murdered by bullets: Sergio Rojas Ortiz (March 2019), a Bribri leader with a long history in the struggle of indigenous peoples; and Jhery Rivera Rivera (February 2020)⁶ a young Bribri leader and defender of the rights of his people. Both assassinated for defending the possession of territory for indigenous families belonging to their respective ethnic groups. The situation continues to worsen in the

⁵For more information on violence against indigenous families reclaiming territory and State inaction, see: Universidad de Costa Rica. 2020. "La persistente violación de los derechos de los pueblos indígenas costarricenses". Accessed May 11, 2021. <https://www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2020/08/09/voz-experta-la-persistente-violacion-de-los-derechos-de-los-pueblos-indigenas-costarricenses.html>.

⁶For more information on violence against human rights defenders, see: Chacón, Vinicio (2020).

2021 with the multiple attacks and death ^{threats}⁷ against indigenous women and men recovering the original territories.

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⁷According to the Coordinadora de Lucha Sur Sur (Facebook), at least 12 indigenous people have been registered as having received death threats, belonging to the territories of: Salitre, Cabagra, Térraba, China

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Kichá; including Pablo Sibar and Mariana Delgado, co-authors of this writing.

In-Fore-Contra or State

A brief encounter with the indigenous movement of Ecuador

Marina G. Santos*
Maria Luiza Muniz**
Maria Luiza Muniz**
Marina G. Santos

1. Introduction: the emergence of a movement

In the territory we now call Ecuador, creative ways of re-existing, re-existing and co-existing have been developed particularly since the colonization of "America" or *Abya Yala*¹. In this text, we present some of the most recent indigenous autonomous creations, which are developed within *and in spite of* the State, through the movement

* Doutoranda no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social (PPGAS) da Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Invited researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: marina.ghiroto@gmail.com.

** Doutora em Sociologia pela Universidade de Brasília (UnB), 2016. Mestre em Ciência Política pela Universidade Federal Fluminense (2010). Docente da *Universidad Central del Ecuador e da Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja* (UTPL). Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3072719021446343>. Invited researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: muniz.malu@gmail.com.

1 Terra em plena maturidade, segundo o povo Kuna - denominação evocada no sentido de outros horizontes históricos (Porto-Gonçalves, 2009).

indigenous Ecuadorians and their political projects/processes. This cutout dialogues with what we understand to be the search for *autonomy*: a complex and trivalent "*inside-outside-against*"² relationship with the Ecuadorian State, creating fissures, acting on its structure and daily *modus operandi* in search of decolonizing it. We understand that despite its supposedly republican character, the Nation State perpetuated neocolonial patterns, with the marks of structural racism, patriarchal and heteronormative character, as well as the paradigm of progress that threaten dysfunctional territories of life to the accumulation of capital (Harvey, 2011).

Going back to the years 1920-1930, we could say that, in the Andes, indigenous resistance was mainly organized in terms of class and labor struggle, unions and indigenous-peasant organizations such as the FEIB³, in articulation with the PC and PSE⁴. Given the limitations of the 1964 and 1975 agrarian reform laws (Simbaña, 2005), in the 1970s the land-territory claims and their political projects were marked by the progressive recognition that, in addition to an explored peasant class, they also brought together subalternized peoples and cultures (Conaie, 1989; Pacari, 1984; Becker, 2008), "externalized" in their relationship with the State (Walsh, 2006).

Andean political actions were subject to the struggles of the Amazonian peoples, who had already been organizing against the expropriation-appropriation of their ancestral territories by multiple neocolonial processes, such as oil extractivism (Sawyer, 2004). The organizational experiences mutually inspired each other in the direction of a broader collective political project: if in Otavalo (to the north of the capital) the indigenous nationality was based on Marxist-Leninist theories (Ospina & Guerrero, 2003, p. 245; Almeida, 1979; Altmann, 2020), in the Amazon the

²We incorporate this expression that Walsh (2001) highlights as a new way of doing politics, a reflection of a continuous flow filtering and articulating positions denoted in Anibal Quijano's metaphor: "*inside-outside-against*". Another possible formulation would be that proposed by Alejandra Santillana (2019), who thinks the action of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement "*with, against and beyond the State*" (p. 257).

³Ecuadorian Federation of Indians.

4 Communist Party and Ecuadorian Socialist Party.

divulgação de um texto da *Federación Interprovincial de Centros Shuar Achuar*, de 1976, demandava de forma inédita "a autodeterminação do grupo shuar em um novo conceito de Estado equatoriano pluralista" (Altmann, 2013, p.2).

In this context of interlocution, the now well-known indigenous federations and confederations were created, with the Andean Ecuarunari (1972)⁵; the Amazonian Confeniae (1980)⁶; and the national Conaie (1986)⁷, from the confluence of the first two, standing out. Through them, what was being achieved was a multiple and plural action of the so-called Ecuadorian indigenous movement, "a living social tissue" (Andrade, 2020) that, not without conflicts and contradictions, has been combining community and communal dimensions, organizational and political-partisan dimensions as ways of "recounting" (Clastres, [1974]2012), "refounding" (Santos, 2010) or "cracking" (Walsh, 2014) the State - depending on the conjunctural moment.

2. Dilemmas in the construction of the plurinational State

The main political project of the indigenous movement organized in its confederations became, since the 1980s, the recognition of the plurinational State - a proposal for the re-foundation of the modern colonial capitalist State based on the combination of different concepts of nation, nationality and difference within the same State (Santos, 2010; Walsh, 2009; Conaie, 1989, 1994; Ospina & Guerrero, 2003; Simbaña, 2005; Macas, 2005; Chancoso, 2014).

⁵Initiatives of *Ecuador Runakunapak Rikcharimuy*. It gathers mainly Kichwa peoples and nationalities from the Ecuadorian highlands.

⁶*Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana*, currently represents 11 indigenous nationalities of the Amazon (Kichwa, Shuar, Achuar, Waorani, Sapara, Andwa, Shiwiar, Cofan, Siona, Siekopai and Kijus). It should be noted that Confeniae is formed by the reunion of previously existing federations, such as OPIP (*Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza*), which played an important role in the struggles for autonomy (see Sawyer, 2004).

⁷*Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador*. In addition to Confeniae and Ecuarunari, Coice (*Confederation of Indigenous Organizations of the Ecuadorian Coast*), founded in 1999, is also part of Conaie.

Between 1980-1990s, the demand for recognition of plurinationality came to combine with resistance to neoliberalism, which has been gaining strength in the region. Successive uprisings led by the indigenous movement, such as those of 1990, 1992 and 1994, definitively transformed the history of the country and made CONAIE the most important political actor of the decade, bringing together a broad anti-neoliberal, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist popular camp (Simbaña, 2020; Pacari, 2020; Becker, 2020).

Nesta trilha, decide-se pela participação na esfera política-eleitoral, que culminaria na criação do *Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik - Nuevo País* em 1995, described less as a political party and more as the "political arm of Conaie" (Becker, 2015). In its origins, *Pachakutik* sought to bring together all social and political expressions that opposed neoliberalism from the indigenous movement (Simbaña & Fernández, 2019). However, the correspondence between community and plural deliberation and its concretization through political and electoral choices is not automatic. On the contrary, it can reveal discrepancies and armillaries between the prioritization of the political struggle, not necessarily state, and the various political tendencies and projects in dispute within Pachakutik (Santillana, 2006).

The plurinational character of the State would only be incorporated in the Constitution of 2008, after decades of struggle by the movement. In Ecuador, the resulting text was a hybrid of the modern-western legal universe and a whole non-colonial lexicon, marked by philosophical-epistemological and ontological influences of indigenous peoples and nationalities, particularly the Kichwas. In addition to plurinationality, the incorporation of indigenous justice, the rights of *nature-Pachamama* (*Mother Earth*) and *Sumak Kawsay* (*Good Living*) also stand out. As concepts that confront the pillars of the modern capitalist nation-state, they emphasize the need to overcome the human-nature dualism, progress and development as exploratory forms of life in favor of the valorization of the collective and communitarian dimension of the earth-territory,

far from the western idea of private and individual ^{property}⁸. According to CONAIE's proposal of 2007-2008, these concepts demand a regime of autonomy and recognition of self-determination over/with the territory.

Alongside Bolivia (2009), new constitutionalisms presented new horizons for Latin America (cf. Ávila, 2011; Schavelzon, 2015; Prada, 2011). However, as in other so-called progressive governments in the region, the then president Rafael Correa prioritized projects of capitalist modernization, giving continuity to patterns of extractivist, rentier and dependent accumulation, supported by a centralizing, mediatic and personalist apparatus, which acted by delegitimizing and criminalizing social protests.

3. Recent flows and permanent challenges

It would be difficult to inventory here all the different processes that make the Equator a 'test tube' for creative and conflictual combinations, aimed at the coexistence of different modes of existence. We can, however, identify some of the main movements and flows of recent years. At the local and community level, there are mobilizations with significant potential that seek to fend off mega-extractive offensives against the territories - whose global ownership was one of the conquests guaranteed to the claimant indigenous nationalities, mainly from the great Levant in the 1990s. In other cases, using organizational and media capital, and cooperation with non-governmental organizations, intellectuals and urban sectors, mobilizations and campaigns in defense of water and against mining projects developed by the State stand out, in partnership with foreign companies (Muniz, 2019), which have found broad support to be installed in the communities (largely peasant and indigenous population),

⁸For *sumak kawsay* see, for example Hidalgo-Capitán, García & Guazha (2014); Simbaña (2011); Viteri (2002); Acosta (2012). For the rights of nature, Acosta & Martínez (2012). On indigenous justice, see Guartambel (2006).

promoting forced relocations, contamination of water resources, as well as intra- and inter-community, intra- and inter-family conflicts. It is worth mentioning the case of the San Felipe de Molleturo Commune (Azuay)⁹; the Fierro ^{Urcu} Cor- dilheira¹⁰ in the south of the country (provinces of Loja and El Oro); and the ^{Intag} Zone¹¹ in the north (province of Imbabura).

Some mobilizations take place through social networks, in the streets, but also in courts and legal institutions, disputing versions, facing the judicialization of conflicts as a necessary and possible way to reaffirm constitutional and international rights. Nes- te caso, encontramos vitórias emblemáticas, como a do Povo Kichwa de Sarayaku contra o Estado equatoriano na Corte Interamericana de Direitos Humanos (2012) (Melo, 2018). And, more recently (2020), the victory of Waorani communities in a judgment of the Constitutional Court of Ecuador that ratified the violation of the right to self-determination and free, prior and informed consultation, in the case of the XI round of oil bids, within block 22, located in the province of Pastaza, central Amazonian south. An example of the importance of the media appeal for these campaigns, both controversial and crucial, is the presence of the leader of the Waorani nationality, Nemonte Nenquimo, among the ten most influential people in the world in 2020, according to Time ^{Magazine}¹².

With the slogan "*Shuar People Arutam Already Decided*"¹³, communities representing the Shuar nationality, located in the south of the country, indicate another way of self-affirmation and self-determination in the face of the in-consultation and taxation of mega-mining projects on their territories. Evidencing previous disagreements that marked the debates on consent *versus* consultation at the time of the Constituent Assembly, PSHA recuses the possibility of a consultation governed by institutions and

⁹ See more: <https://www.ocmal.org/molleturo-defiende-el-agua-la-vida-y-su-territorio/>

¹⁰ See more: https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/conflicto/view/990

¹¹ See more: https://mapa.conflictosmineros.net/ocmal_db-v2/conflicto/view/19

¹² Vermais: <https://es.mongabay.com/2020/09/indigenas-waorani-ecuador-nemonte-nenquimo-revista-time/>

13 See more: <https://gk.city/2019/09/24/indigenas-oponen-consulta-previa/>

regulations that, manipulated by the State, would prevent a binding solution to their collective voices. Betting on the "*boomerang effect*" (Keck and Sikkink 1998, pp.12-13), and against the obstruction of dialogue for the resolution of internal conflicts, PSHA is one of the organizations that appeals to international bodies, such as the International Labor Organization,¹⁴

In other areas, there is a rather complex scenario due to the political-partisan disputes in the electoral context. In the protests of October 2019, against economic measures of the Lenin Moreno government, the prominence of the indigenous movement was evident in the streets of Quito and in several cities paralyzed by urban popular sectors and farmers. After several days of repression¹⁵ and the televised Dialogue, mediated by the UN and the Episcopal Conference, a question remained in the air: would the indigenous movement manage to consolidate a unified project to capitalize on the legacy of October 2019 around a presidential candidacy with real chances of victory in 2021? Who would be the person capable of bringing together supporters from the various strands of the indigenous movement¹⁶.

During the pandemic crisis, dissenting voices about Conaie and its political-partisan arm, Pachakutik, converged around two names: Leónidas Iza, president of the Indigenous and Peasant Movement of Cotopaxi (MICC), and Yaku Pérez Guartambel, ex-prefect of Azuay. Contrary to tendencies that indicated Iza as the ideal name to reach the Carondelet Palace - center of executive power - through the electoral route, Yaku Pérez achieved an expressive vote in the pre-presidential elections of 2021, even competing in the dispute for the second turn with banker Guillermo Lasso. Invalidation of fraud allegations

¹⁴ See more: <https://es.witness.org/2020/11/pueblo-shuar-arutam-anuncio-que-iniciara-demanda-ante-la-oit-en-contra-el-estado-ecuatoriano/>

¹⁵ For a report on human rights violations in the October protests, see https://www.inredh.org/archivos/pdf/informe_final_alianza_%202019_oct.pdf

¹⁶ After the Dialogue, the *Parliament of the Peoples, Organizations and Social Collectives* was established, during which various sectors met to elaborate an alternative political-economic proposal. See <https://conaie.org/2019/10/31/proposal-for-a-new-economic-and-social-model/>

encamped by MUPPK (cf. Schavelzon, 2021), and with an electorate quite marked by anti-correísmo, a lead of almost 5% was opened in relation to the candidate of progressismo, Andrés Arauz, leading to the victory of Lasso. The post-electoral panorama marked a very challenging period for the reorganization of the popular sectors throughout the country, whether in terms of territory, political-partisan or organizational dynamics. In the case of the latter, the elections for the new Conaie presidency - previously prevented due to pandemic restrictions - took place in June. The candidacy of Maria Andrade - the first woman to hold the position - is opposed to the strong influence of Leonidas Iza, consolidated after the dissociation between Yaku Perez and MUPPK.

Finally, the possibilities of autonomy continue to flow among the different dimensions of action of the historical indigenous equatorial movement, in its efforts to transit - not without difficulties and counter-conditions - inside and outside the State. The majoritarian election of Iza represents the escalation of a new generational and ideological trend that will confront, perhaps with new strategies, the armory that distances the institutional political agenda from the horizon, community and daily deliberations, with and from the indigenous territories.

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Interview with Mixteco lawyer Francisco López Bárcenas

Waldo Lao*

Fábio Márcio Alkmin** Fábio Márcio Alkmin**

May 2021

Dear Francisco, thank you for your time. To begin with, at some point you wrote We are living in times of indigenous autonomy, there is no going back to the past! Where do you think the construction of these processes is taking us? What balance can you make of these times?

* D. from the Graduate Program in Latin American Integration of the University of São Paulo - PROLAM/USP. Researcher of the CLACSO Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, Autonomies and Collective Rights. Contact: waldolao@gmail.com

** Brazilian geographer graduated from the Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Currently, in his PhD in Human Geography (USP), he researches processes of indigenous autonomies in the Brazilian Amazon, with support from the "Fundo de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo" (FAPESP), process nº 2018/22226-4, and from the "Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel" - Brazil (CAPES) - Funding Code 001. Researcher of the CLACSO Working Group Indigenous peoples, autonomies and collective rights. Contact: fabiogeo@usp.br



Credit: <https://www.franciscolopezbarcenass.org/>
Francisco López Bárcenas is a Mixteco lawyer, doctor in Rural Development and currently a researcher at the Colegio de San Luis, A. C.

Well, we must take into account that these processes are of very recent impulse in Mexico, practically after the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and the San Andres Larrainzar dialogues, which took place two years later. In this sense, it seems to me that the autonomous processes in Mexico question the legitimacy of the liberal state in which we live. The first thing that is noticeable is that, as the constitutional design of the Mexican state stands, it is very difficult to establish true autonomies or that the right to autonomy of the peoples can be exercised; in principle because Mexico has a federal government and its base is the free Municipality. There are three orders of government, the Municipal, the State and the Federal, however, most of the indigenous peoples have their territories divided among several States or among several municipalities of a State. Institutionally, it is very difficult to

The second article of the Constitution, which recognizes the autonomy of the peoples, is very clear in that this autonomy cannot go against the federal pact. So we have these problems and some others, such as covert racism, where apparently everyone agrees on the rights of indigenous peoples, however, no political party or actor takes this into account. The current government came to power with popular support promising changes but continues to act with the welfare policies of previous governments, in this sense the autonomous processes in Mexico are very diverse: there are those who defend their territories, those who promote their own governments, those who promote their own schools for their education and there are others who promote food sovereignty, depending on what their needs are, but they go against the grain of institutional policies. All these processes confront capital because the capitalist model is, by definition, contrary to the collective rights of peoples.

Indigenous peoples have made an immense effort since the end of the twentieth century in the struggle for constitutional recognition of their rights. In some cases, the [necessary] refounding of the States has proven to be not so effective, due to inefficiency or bureaucracy in the application of the laws. It seems to us that at present, the struggle of indigenous peoples is constantly going through different fronts: whether for constitutional recognition, for the defense of their territories and resources, or for the struggle for the construction of their autonomies. What do you think about these permanent processes?

After 1992, in our continent, the denunciation of the European, Spanish or Portuguese invasion was strongly promoted; from that date until approximately 2010, there was a process in which the peoples promoted the recognition of their rights, of a collective nature, as we know; in many cases some governments, or some officials of those governments, saw it with good eyes and supported these processes. Even capital saw them as good because they avoided a social-political problem - the fact that they were always protesting in the streets - and the capitalists thought they could negotiate with the indigenous peoples.

However, as these years passed, it became clear that the indigenous peoples did not want to be functional to capital, or rather, the recognition of their rights was not functional, and they stopped supporting those processes, the governments and the power groups that maintained them abandoned those recognitions. I believe that at present, at least in Mexico, there is a backward march in the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples. There is a great deal of legislation in Mexico, but if one analyzes it, it is legislation that does not speak of collective rights, but of individual rights, that refers a lot to cultural rights, which do not affect the sphere of the incidence of capital - such as the recognition of languages, intercultural education, handicrafts, etc. But they do not go into regulating indigenous territories or governments. Preferential access to natural resources is also not regulated: although we have a provision in our Federal Constitution, consultation is not regulated. I believe that some traits of openness that were seen in the courts, such as the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, the Federal Electoral Tribunal, are going backwards; this is worrisome, because the peoples are being left without legal bases on which to anchor their demands. So the autonomous processes will continue, not against the law as such, but on the margins of the law.

One case that constantly arises in relation to the effective right of indigenous peoples is the manipulation of their right to consultation.

The right to consultation in Mexico arrived a little late, its use in politics and in the courts is very recent. It has been promoted more by non-governmental organizations that support indigenous processes than by the peoples themselves. I believe that consultation is technically a procedural right, not a substantive right, some say it is a substantive right, but I believe it is not and, as I said before, in Mexico it is not regulated, so what applies are the international standards, which include the provisions of ILO Convention 169, the Declaration of the Indigenous Nations on Indigenous Peoples, the Declaration of the Organization of American States on this subject, but above all, the jurisprudence issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human

Rights.

Human Rights. In Mexico, it is almost a daily practice that consultations are not carried out, or only when the work is about to be executed. In this sense, the consultation loses its character of being prior, free and informed, with the purpose of reaching culturally appropriate agreements, as stated in international standards. When the government consults, it is because it has already decided on the work and is only going, almost, to notify and see what they are asking for because of the effects they are going to suffer, or that they can be saved from some of the negative impacts that the work to be carried out may have. In this sense, the people see that the consultations do not serve to defend their rights, and when they use them, it is because they have no other recourse, they are not strong organizationally or politically, they cannot confront the mega-project and they resort to it as a form of contention, or to gain time, or to see what can be done. Evidently there are some exceptions, some peoples have used the consultation in such a way that they have been triumphant, but they are few and the interests at stake are not so strong that the project can be stopped. Currently there is a process that seeks to regulate the consultation and it is very bad, it says that the peoples should not be consulted, but the authorities, that it should not be done through their mechanisms, but that regional assemblies should be held, or even teams of advisors from the peoples themselves, these who are popularly known as the "permitted indigenous", who are indigenous in their origin, but because of their formation and their relations with the power, they act more on the side of the State, that is what they want to legalize in this process, we will see what results.

In your opinion [in a very general way], has the arrival of the so-called progressive governments to power strengthened or weakened the rights of indigenous peoples?

Progressive governments have not created conditions conducive to the exercise of indigenous rights and, therefore, to autonomies. In general, progressive governments have a very general discourse, which can be said in your country or in any other, because they are empty of content. In the Mexican case, it is even more regrettable, because there are two positions: one is that of the President of the Republic,

who clearly does not agree with the rights of indigenous peoples, and the other is the

of the indigenous people, who joined their government and thought that they could do something from within. But, what prevails is the presidential will, and they have remained doing no longer what they did with the previous governments, but less. In that sense, I think that we must also consider that the governments we call "progressive" are an upper middle class, representing the interests of those classes. In Bolivia, for example, during the Evo Morales era, in many cases the rights of indigenous peoples were not respected; the TIPNIS Park dispute is one example, the projects to exploit lithium is another. In Mexico, there is another problem that we are experiencing: it is already clear that the current government is not in favor of indigenous rights, it is more in favor of welfare, however there are many indigenous organizations that realize this and do not dare to criticize it, because they think that this way they are playing into the hands of the right wing. This is a weakness for the movement.

Do you consider that the right wing has tried to appropriate the discourse of indigenous autonomy to benefit its projects?

The right has historically sought to appropriate indigenous demands. Indigenous demands have to do with tradition, with the conservation of uses and customs, which is not easy to change overnight. Besides, why change it? Historically, some indigenous peoples in Mexico supported Ferdinand VII in the war of independence because the leaders of the insurgency were liberals, landowners who had been their bosses and had exploited them. In the 19th century, a large part of the indigenous people supported the French invasion of Mexico and the arrival of Emperor Maximilian, because the liberals were dividing their territories and did not recognize their governments. Today, the right wing seeks to appropriate the indigenous discourse. Fortunately, the right wing in Mexico today lacks ideas, in that sense, the very few indigenous people that the National Action Party - PAN - has managed to co-opt, or even in the Institutional Revolutionary Party - PRI -, have only served to folklorize the indigenous peoples, because none of them has contributed any important idea in relation to the rights of indigenous peoples. They have tried to appropriate the course, but they have not succeeded. I must also say that there is a

sector

of the indigenous movement - which is grouped in the National Indigenous Network - that their ultimate goal is to come to power in any way and they have come very close to the right. They supported Vicente Fox - the first PAN president - and in the past elections of 2018, they offered their support to the PAN candidate, Ricardo Anaya, but he did not accept them, because he already knew them. In short, I think they want to, but cannot, appropriate the indigenous discourse.

There is a region in our continent that is not often mentioned when we talk about the issue of autonomies, Central America. What could you tell us about it?

The situation of the people in Central America is very much marked by the liberation wars of the eighties. Nicaragua was a revolution that promised a lot, it was not dogmatic, many young people and women participated, there was Liberation Theology, but as the years went by, it became a family dictatorship; this is very disenchanting for the people who fight. In El Salvador, there was a very hard civil war, and the same in Guatemala. In this way, I believe that there is a disenchantment of the indigenous peoples that has not been reflected much in the autonomies towards the exterior; they concentrate their struggle more on their own internal aspects, such as cultural and spiritual ones. I understand that these peoples are looking for an internal reconciliation of themselves and their communities, and that is the reason why the autonomy struggle is not seen so much in those places. Panama is another situation, it was one of the first autonomies that existed, and also a regional autonomy. I believe that the Panamanian indigenous people did not go through the trauma that the indigenous people of the other countries I mentioned went through.

Mexico is a country that shows an increasing diversity of new autonomous experiences. What is the reason for the proliferation of these processes or what do you consider to be the characteristics in the Mexican case, for the construction of this mosaic of autonomies?

It is surprising, I have the perception that the Mexican State is quite strong, one of the most consolidated in Latin America. But,

Despite this strength, there are some niches and regions where their strength is not so great, because historically, power has rested on the cacicazgos, and when these are weakened, state power is also weakened. On the other hand, the indigenous peoples of Mexico are very diverse, there are 68 indigenous languages, but they also invented a type of property that did not exist in the world, which is communal property - ejidal property. This was the way that the Constituent Congress of 1917 found to restore land to the people, who had been dispossessed in the 19th century. There was a strong agrarian distribution with this, 52% of the national territory is in the hands of agrarian communities and ejidos, which are forms of communal property. This type of property has its own dynamics, let us say that they are not completely in the market, in spite of the 1992 reform that sought to incorporate them, they are not completely in the market and this allows the peoples a certain freedom in their management and land control. There are also indigenous governments which, although they are not recognized, have always functioned and I believe that when it comes to making autonomous claims based on international law, this gives them a new dynamic. Finally, I believe that there is another point of great importance, which are the indigenous intellectuals; in the last two or three decades, there has been a formation of indigenous intellectuals who do not bow to the State and who are returning to our communities to support their strengthening and reconstitution processes. It seems to me that these are some of the factors because the autonomous processes are strong in Mexico.

In relation to the government of the Fourth Transformation and its relationship with indigenous peoples, do you consider it to be a present dressed in the past, that is to say, that it applies great modernizing projects, which it claims to be for the benefit of indigenous communities, but which, at the same time, uses the discourse of the old indigenist and assistance policies of the past, where there were no autonomous experiences? What do you think about this?

Regarding the current government, it is clear to me that the president does not believe in the rights of the indigenous peoples, those who believe are the

indigenous people who joined the process thinking that something could change. I believe that they are effectively going back to the past, in fact they were told so - the president of

the Republic - in a meeting with indigenous peoples that took place in the north of the country last year. He expressly told them that he was going to attend to them as in the 70's - when the PRI was strong - and when there were still no claims for indigenous rights, no claims for autonomy, territory, self-government. That is what he said, and that is what he is doing. And the indigenous people who are in government, who say that they can still make an important reform or that they can change the correlation of forces, I believe that they are deluding themselves, or very cynically they want to deceive us.

Finally, with respect to these moments we are living through, how have the indigenous peoples solved or are they solving the pandemic problem?

There has been everything, some were caught unawares and suffered the consequences, many deaths, although it is not reported in the press. There are other towns that are more organized and took their own measures. In general, what the people did was to close themselves off, it is something that historically happens when people see themselves in danger, they close themselves off. There were people who even accused of violating the right to free transit, but they locked themselves in and did not allow anyone to enter. In other words, they faced the pandemic alone, putting their own resources at stake, the government did not even provide good propaganda in their language. But for many people that has already happened, what is coming now are the consequences. Because of being immobilized, many people did not prepare the land, they stopped planting, their backyard animals decreased, some of them who had jobs in the cities lost them and returned to their communities unemployed, trying to survive with their families. That is the problem they are going to face now. Surely alone because there is no government program to support them. But they will get ahead, they have many resources that if they combine them correctly will be a great support. Migrant remittances, which are quite high, are a good instrument; the sense of family and community solidarity is another one of them. What they need is a guide to design welfare programs; here, again, indigenous intellectuals can be a very important factor.

The fire of our memory Tribute to Comandanta Ramona

Comandanta Ramona was born in the community of San Andrés Sacamch'en de Los Pobres, Chiapas, Mexico, in 1959 and died on January 6, 2006.

An embroiderer in her Tzotzil community, she was one of the first women to join the small group (at that time) of the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (CCRI-EZLN). Responsible for the organization in her region, she still represents today a symbol of dignity and resistance for the movement.

In her work for the struggle for the rights of indigenous women, together with other women insurgents, she promoted the drafting of the Revolutionary Women's Law, approved on March 8, 1993. On the day of the armed insurrection (January 1, 1994), she was present at the taking of Jovel and in February of the same year she participated in the Cathedral Dialogues - between the federal government and the Zapatistas. She broke through the military siege and arrived in Mexico City in 1996 to participate on October 12 as a delegate of the EZLN in the founding of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI). In front of more than 600 representatives of 30 indigenous groups, Comandanta Ramona synthesized in one sentence the rejection of social exclusion that the indigenous peoples of the country have lived through: "that is why we want to unite our small voice as Zapatistas to the big voice of all those who fight for a new Mexico. We came here to shout, along with

We want a Mexico without us, never again a Mexico without us. That is what we want, a Mexico where we all have a dignified place.



From bastian (Heriberto Rodriguez)

In August 1997 she participated in the First National Congress of Indigenous Women in Oaxaca and passed away as soon as the *Other Campaign* took place. A year later, in 2007, the Comandanta Ramona Women's Gathering was held in her memory in La Garrucha, Chiapas.

For more information:

- About the Revolutionary Women's Law: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1993/12/31/ley-revolucionaria-de-mujeres/>
- Comandanta Ramona's speech at the inauguration of the CNI:
- http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1996/1996_10_12.htm

