

FROM INDIGENISM TO INDIANISM:

a review of indigenous empowerment in cultural spaces and in education in the highlands of Chiapas

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ABSTRACT

This document is a historical analysis of cultural and educational events of the 20th century in the Región Altos de Chiapas. This is important resource to analyze in the discussion between indigenous and indianism. The proposed is to understand the indigenism and indianism as a change in ideology and policy of indigenous, induced by the pressure of the same Indian peoples. This is necessary for access to the processes of development, without the need to be homogenized and strengthen their wealth with their implicit and explicit differences. Analyzes the historical evolutionary process of attention to indigenous peoples in educational and cultural spaces of the first half of the 20th century, subsequently analysed three decades over the second half of the same century, reviewing the creation of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI). In the count of the history of these peoples, the written word has had great impact to give value to indigenous languages, strengthening the writing to disseminate their memories through stories, legends, poems and various literary works, where we sought to give beauty to the indigenous Word. But it also seeks the clear statement of needs in regard to indigenous identity and the search for their own ways of harmonious development.

Keywords: *indigenous, indianism, 20th century, education.*

We can begin by considering **indianism**, not only as a form of manifestation of indigenous issues in literature and painting, associated with forms of representation that established a folkloric, exotic and idyllic expression of the indigenous world, but it is also a protest ideology, it is the search, the identity and re-encounter with our history.

Meanwhile, **indigenism** is considered a set of ideas and concrete activities undertaken by Latin American states in relation to indigenous peoples. It is a practice exercised to produce cultural and socioeconomic changes in indian villages, a set of government policies aimed at assimilating the national integration through policies to transform society. Favre (1998) defines indigenism as a current of thought and ideas that are organized and developed around the image of the Indian.

The **Indianismo** is not a new term in the literature (Warman, 2003), and was used in the colonial era which highlights the indigenous as the main protagonists in the works of writers, which explains the tendency of a focus on literature. This Latin American trend encourages independent life of the countries. In the novel *Netzula*, written by Mexican José María Lafragua in 1832, the figure of the Indian was reflected in a timely manner. This Indianist current is pushed forward in parallel in the countries of Peru and the Dominican Republic.

The concept of the indian is recovering as a sign of identity and struggle, this indianist manifestation is reflected in the texts published by indigenous as an authentic expression of thought stemming from ancestral knowledge and from the construction of historical memory. It is a protest ideology and its struggle against colonialism is the search for the reunion with our identity and history.

Therefore, and throughout this document, it is proposed not only to be seen as a semantic change-indigenism and indianism- but as a change in ideology and indian policy, induced by the pressure from emerging indian peoples themselves; with

emerging policies and ideologies that are greatly needed for access to the development process without the need to homogenize and strengthen its wealth with its implicit and explicit differences.

It is therefore one of the objectives of this paper to analyze the historical evolution process of the attention for indigenous peoples in cultural and educational areas. The partial analysis of the proposals made by anthropologists of the early twentieth century are followed by the analysis of the three decades after the first half of the twentieth century, where the assimilationist policies of the National Indigenous Institute (INI) were established. The previous is the understanding that the project of national education bases for the awakening of the indigenous peoples who seek to be subjects that build it, propose and take decisions for their population, at to stop being served by others in order to start taking care of themselves.

Finally, an overview of the last two decades of the twentieth century, where the indigenous movement is initiated by the vindication of the people, is where indianismo is broadly manifested but not limited to the exhibition of literary or artistic works, but also exposing ideological strokes through the struggles for land and occupying important spaces where they can express decisions aimed at improving social conditions. It was therefore important to give value to indigenous languages, making it necessary to strengthen writing to spread the values of their memories through stories, legends, poems and various literary works, where they sought to give beauty to the Indian word.

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF INDIGENOUS EMPOWERMENT IN CULTURAL SPACES IN THE HIGHLANDS REGION OF CHIAPAS, AS THE BEGINNING OF NEW IDEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO DIRECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR PEOPLES

Generally, indigenism in Mexico can be distinguished by three periods, the pre institutional- ranging from the discovery and conquest of the New World, until the Mexican Revolution. The second period is the one corresponding to the institutionalization of indigenism, beginning in the revolutionary period, and which gathers momentum with the Congress of Patzcuaro in 1940 and the creation of the Inter-American Indigenist Institute and National Indigenist Institute (1948). The last period marks the events of the institutionalized indigenism crisis, with the adoption of neo-liberalism as the official policy of the Mexican State (Korsbaek and Samano, 2007).

In Mexico, the need to give attention to indigenous populations was felt and in some way served starting in the sixteenth century through *encomiendas* and ecclesiastical institutions, which managed to formalize after the Mexican Revolution when indigenous groups were listed as priority on government agendas and it was sought to establish institutions that responded to their demands. The main idea was the integration or civilization of the Indians, who have historically been a marginalized population.

In 1917, officially institutionalized indigenism was established with the task of educational and cultural integration of the indigenous population. From this moment was born indigenist politics and education for indigenous people as the main instrument for homogenization in both the educational and the cultural aspect.

One of the drivers for the establishment of a department that knows and processed the problems and needs of indigenous

peoples was Moises Záenz, who in his book entitled “Carapan” mentions that:

... Mestizo Mexican insurgency to political and social life and economic liberalization has left the Indian to the margin of the benefits, for though the natives have wielded the rifle or were cannon fodder, the claims have been for the mestizo, for him the law and the power; the land and the ejido ; the schools. Our own Revolution barely escapes from this guilt. Only a very little. We have talked about and sentimentalized the Indian; Some schools have been established, and if he had already reached the condition of being a peon, have would have received some land. But neither the educational program has been drafted with special views to the native, or the agrarian statutes have remembered him much (Záenz, 1936).

In 1936 President Cardenas created the Autonomous Department of Indian Affairs. Cardenas, who was governor of Michoacan, knew about the project that proposed the creation of a department that addresses indigenous issues and it was precisely necessary to avoid bureaucracy that prevails in government institutions.

For President Cardenas, this project was an opportunity to respond to the demands of the population. Until this time policies directed to the indians had had little effect on improving living conditions. With it there was slow advancement in the development of a situation that his presidential predecessors had favored.

Within the powers of the Autonomous Department of Indian Affairs are: 1) to study the fundamental problems of the aboriginal races and order measures and / or actions to be taken in agreement with the President of the Republic; all to make the coordinator of government action redound to the benefit of indigenous people; 2) promote and negotiate with federal and state authorities, all measures and provisions concerning the general interest of the aboriginal population centers (Bonfil, 1992).

However, there was little interest in the practice of carrying out this position of President Cardenas, contrary to what was supposed to be the Autonomous Department of Indian Affairs- This organization dedicated itself to the performance of administrative functions and governance (Vazquez, 1961; Bonfil, 1992).

Indigenous groups have been excluded from the system of capitalist development, and the government has not given the necessary guarantees for indigenous people to be integrated into this system from their worldview and assist in the establishment of educational policies that are conducive to overcoming the lag in community conditions.

The change of education in the communities must start from the assessment of knowledge, experiences and worldview of indigenous communities without radically transforming them, because what has happened to the assimilationist policies is that the dimension of Western culture is still not well understood and parallels a loss in the important values of their own culture, a fact that has been going through educational institutions where the first cultural shocks are generated among indigenous children.

It was not until 1936 when formal education began to recognize bilingual youth as able to bring education to indigenous communities under the understanding that their capacity is increased when considering the management of two languages and allows for the juxtaposition of two cultural worlds. This allowed not only the facilitation of educational processes in these indigenous populations but also ushered in a cultural syncretism. The integration of indigenous peoples to one language and one culture, so that bilingualism was a need to consolidate and clarify its national policy objective.

This power of penetration can be explained, no doubt, in the same way they conducted the Spanish colonization in Mexican and Mayan territories, where a new religion, a new structure of social organization and a western culture was established. This

mechanism was repeated, following the same form of colonization, into the twentieth century.

In this regard, Light Olivia Pineda (1993) analyzes the reflections of Vicente Pineda in the preface to the book *History of indigenous uprisings that have occurred in the state of Chiapas*, as follows:

- a) Notes education as a vehicle of social control of the indigenous, of “taming them” (in the words of the author).
- b) Notes that education is required to produce workforces that require farms and estates, in other words relating education with the ability to work.
- c) Speaks of the need for teachers to educate the Indians, that is, it considers the link between teaching and learning with productive work represented by agriculture.
- d) Suggests that education-training should be given in the indigenous language, an idea that will be the basis of bilingual education many years later.
- e) Finally, it suggests that violence is not used in the capacitive-indigenous educational process, rather persuasion should be used.

The formalization of the education of indigenous peoples began to take shape from the center of the country by anthropologists from different national ideological currents. Among the noteworthy contributors were Alfonso Caso, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, José Luis Gómez Pimienta, Alfonso Villa Rojas and Ricardo Pozas. In the case of Chiapas, the government strengthened this formalization with the creation of the National Indigenous Institute (INI) in the government of President Miguel Alemán, followed by the creation of then the Tzeltal-Tzotzil Indian Coordinating Center on September 4, 1950 based in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas.

The main reasons for the creation of these institutes was based on the characteristics of the region, which should be addressed in a timely and appropriate manner: indigenous populations in extreme poverty, rudimentary living conditions, poor nutrition, high infant mortality, morbidity for curable diseases, high rates of alcoholism, high illiteracy rates, and poor land management for agricultural production.

In order to strengthen indigenous education policy it was necessary to continue, at times, with the rural schools, Community centers and cultural missions. The INI's retook them as part of a strategy to bring their social welfare programs. In the 80's, some state institutions continued with cultural missions, among them is the Sub-Secretariat of Indigenous Affairs. Education strategies in the early stages of the INI until the 70's were always essential to strengthen the language and Western presentations.

LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT FOR THE VINDICATION OF THE PEOPLE

The last three decades of the second half of the twentieth century were the basis for strengthening the knowledge of indigenous education promoted by the National Indigenous Institute in the State of Chiapas. The epicenter is reflected in the region of Highlands region Chiapas, with the question "why is it in this space that the impact of actions by the INI are reflected?" Much is due to the location of the first Tzeltal-Tzotzil Indigenous Coordinating Center, exactly in San Cristobal de Las Casas, Chiapas.

In the eighties of the twentieth century, as a result of the policy of homogenization and attention to indigenous peoples, a struggle began to strengthen ancestral knowledge and indigenous science in the state of Chiapas; this movement is known in some

debates as the movement of indigenous intellectuals, the claim of indigenous peoples and the indianist struggle.

The indianist struggle has three processes according to Radha Jhappan, as quoted by Bastida (2001): the first is the **symbolic reversal** which is the struggle of indigenous peoples to reverse those negative aspects which are identified from outside, based on the racism of the dominant society. This fight claims to seek recognition of their cultural values and territory for the defense of the land and defense of their ideology.

At this time they begin to consolidate various social organizations. Non-governmental organizations begin to look for an alternative to regain the lost lands at other times and for different reasons. They seek to occupy national land that are not used for production- objectives that led to fight, resist and pressure the authorities of the State to achieve the goals of indigenous peasants. During this time the targets were not achieved, because there was no will to meet the demands of the land.

Land for indigenous people is a space where everything happens. Land is a reference point in the life of the population, it is most important thing to them. It generates the necessary nutrients; it is a security for housing, with the earth we feel wrapped as when we were born, in it we grow, reproduce and die on the same land, we believe that the earth is the mother, creating cultural identity (Aguirre, 1976, Warman, 1970).

The symbolic reversal has a very important tool that is the word, so, it begins with first attempts at writing short stories, legends, stories of their people that although lack scientific rigor, the value of the language is shown. Over the years, writing in indigenous languages has improved (Garagalza, 2002).

This attempt to create opportunities for indigenous peoples in the social and political fields was intense, unable to find the recognition of various social and institutional sectors of the state. Therefore, in the eighties the movement lasted until the Neo-Zapatista Movement of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

in January of 1994, which was the watershed between the attempts to be heard and the strengthening of the struggles of indigenous peoples. This struggle lasted as a process until the early nineties, where we searched intensively the reunion and identity with our history, as a vindicated ideology and as a struggle for recognition in the system of government and the world.

Let us now turn to the second process of the symbolic political theory, which is called **symbolic competence** (Bourdieu, 2000 and 2001), Within this we will start to build solid steps to achieve community building, namely the recognition of the values of indigenous cultures. It is precisely this point which begins to manifest the indianista fight on two levels.

The foreground is manifested with the neo-Zapatista, armed struggle, composed mostly by indigenous groups in Chiapas. With this fight there is not only the search for recognition of the social territory, but also the constitutional recognition of Mexican law, revealed in the various divisions of the San Andrés Larráinzar agreements. The whole process brought important benefits to achieve the rights of indigenous peoples, which so far has not been consolidated, but put into national debate the figure of the indigenous to reach important spaces in Mexican politics, education, culture, economy, and institutions where they worked to direct the destinies of politics and economics of indigenous peoples.

The second level is the struggle of indianists in the literary and scientific fields, we continued with the construction and dissemination of the memory of indigenous peoples through literature; narrative, poems, stories, legends, stories, chronicles and fables, published bilingually, in Spanish and in different forms of Mexican languages. In the early 90's, there began to be indigenous civic groups with literary interests, which are themselves driven by the Directorate General of Popular Culture to present their work in various settings as part of Mexican folklore.

It is in 1990 when meetings on literary exposure were held in Ciudad Victoria Tamaulipas, 1991 in San Cristobal de Las Casas

Chiapas, 1992 in Hidalgo ; in 1993 meetings intensified in Oaxaca, Yucatan, Toluca and finally in November 26, 1993, a national association known as Writers in Indigenous Languages AC (ELIAC) was constituted in a meaningful and strategic location full of symbolism, the land of the poet and ruler Nahuatl, Nezahualcoyotl.

Within the goals of ELIAC , the promotion of an official recognition of indigenous languages as a vehicle for teaching and learning content in primary, secondary, normal and higher education stands out. This has gradually permeated the educational institutions in Mexico at various levels, marking different eras.

The ELIAC highlighted the importance of language in literature in the following manner: “We believe that the literature we produce in our native language is one of the ways through which we can preserve the word and the memory of our ancient fathers, to give continuity to our cultures and contribute to the strengthening of languages in our country “(ELIAC, 2009).

To strengthen its objective activities were done that were developed by graduates of literature in Mexican indigenous languages, meetings were held, local, regional, national and international conferences were developed, and the journal *Nuni* was published, a space for the expression of indigenous languages and cultures of Mexico . The magazine *La Palabra Florida* has also become a space for the diverse cultures in which the various literary manifestations of indigenous people are promoted.

This stands out for the advocacy of strengthening of the symbolic competencies, an element that leads to constitutionally propose the *General Law of Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the Chamber of Deputies gave as a constitutional order in the second article of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, to reform the fourth fraction of the seventh article of the General Law of Education, published on March 13, 2003. This was an important for the recognition of the Mexican State to the cultural diversity of the peoples of Mexico.

There were important allies in strengthening indigenous literature, such as researchers, groups and institutions that expressed their full support to the construction of ideas. Among those that stand out and have the recognition of the indigenous we find Miguel Leon Portilla and Carlos Montemayor.

To Montemayor we can give the impulse to the memory of indigenous peoples, through the creation of a collection of important publications which initially were called *dzilb'ob Bejla'e* in Maya (Yucatan). Its Spanish translation reads as follows: *Letras Mayas Contemporáneas* (Contemporary Maya Literature).

He had considered that with the publication of this series of works they had accomplished an important goal, but they had not considered the appearance of armed neo-Zapatista movement in Chiapas. It was in 1994 when the world's eyes turned to the territory in southeastern Mexico where the search for an answer that would make sense of what was happening at the time began. The coordinator of the series *Letras Mayas Contemporáneas* had to launch the second series exclusively for Chiapas in 1996.

Contemporary Maya Literature of Chiapas consisted of 15 volumes which highlighted the major works of indigenous heroes, expressions of everyday life of the people, worldviews and forms of religious organization. It is here where you begin to show the first indigenous works, which currently enjoy a reputation in the literary world. In 1998, the third installment of Contemporary Mayan Literature was published in 15 volumes. In this collection a representative sample of poetry, drama, fiction and customs of the Mayan villages of the Yucatan, Campeche and Chiapas was presented and coordinated by Carlos Montemayor, with which closes an important cycle of the literature of the indigenous peoples of the Mayan region .

In the early nineties in San Cristobal de Las Casas, the first writers in indigenous languages were grouped through an association called the Mayan and Zoque Writers Unit (*Unidad de Escritores Mayas y Zoques* , UNEMAZ). In this unit the common

interests of writers converged to create awareness of the values of indigenous languages and culture of the state of Chiapas. It was important to establish a magazine where all literary manifestations of the various languages were published. It was for this reason that the magazine *Nuestra Sabiduria* (Our Wisdom) arose as a space for the dissemination of cultural diversity. In it we can find many literary contributions in indigenous languages.

In various scenarios we would hear phrases like “*we are tired of being treated*”, “*we want to care for ourselves.*” Institutions with philosophies and missions that focus on serving the indigenous population have to be operated by the indigenous people themselves and have the ability to push policies directed to them. This is already part of the symbolic competition, where there is a demand for spaces of various kinds to highlight the capacity created in various media.

At this time other associations such as the House of Writers and Culture of the Maya Indians (Sna Jtz’ibajom) are strengthened. This strengthening was awarded by foundations, individuals and cultural institutions, and specifically by the support of the poet Jaime Sabines, the linguist Robert Laughlin of the Smithsonian Institution and several anthropologists and national and international linguists who worked as informants and developed the Great Dictionary of the Tzotzil language. There was also the support of Dr. Martha Turok, then head of the General Directorate of Popular Culture, who made possible the publication of a collection of nine books in addition to the ten published by the State Government of Chiapas. The founders and members of the Association of Tzeltal and Tzotzil Actors and Writers set about the task of rescuing, develop and disseminating the cultural values of the Mayan Communities in the highlands of Chiapas.

Sna Jtz’ibajom, with support from the Ford Foundation, Maya foundation and social participation, published manuals in Tzeltal and Tzotzil languages, and a school for teaching those languages was created. Among the notable publications was the

series Ts'ib-jaye , texts of indigenous peoples where various literary texts were manifested.

In 1994 the Fray Bartolome de las Casas series was published- a memory and life of our people- by the Center for Humanistic Research of Mesoamerica and the State of Chiapas (CIHMECH) under the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). This work enriches the literary manifestation of indianists in the highlands of Chiapas. This institution manifests the effort to strengthen the writing of indigenous languages through contests of indigenous stories and tales.

As a result of the negotiations of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) with the federal government, table 1 of the Dialogue of San Andres Larráinzar on indigenous rights and culture, an old demand of indigenous writers and artists of the state was resolved with the creation of the National Centre for Languages, Art and Indigenous Literature (CELALI) in February 1996. The following year its activities officially started, and with this action the symbolic competence of indianists was manifested, as well as the vindication of indigenous peoples, seeking thereby the reunion and reconciliation with themselves to strengthen their right to cultural self-determination (CELALI 1997).

Since then the Centre has become an important symbol for the construction and strengthening of the indianists, where it is manifested and crystallized with its inception as a series of literature in indigenous languages: the anthology of narratives *Maya-Zoque* (1997), the yearbook *Jabil-Ame* (1997), *El Bolom dice* (1997), *Cursos de cuentos K'ox* (1999), painting, poetry, and sculpture competitions among others where the desire is manifested by translating the values of the indigenous cultures.

Finally, we find the **third process** of symbolic policies, **Community Building** (Naparstek et al 1997). This process should be the end of all the struggles of indigenous peoples, where the coexistence with all cultures, races , religions, visions and conceptions of the world are manifested- an exhibition of true

intercultural relations, however, that are currently still in search of that moment.

The situation of the attention of indigenous peoples from indigenous peoples themselves is a process of complexities, of political and social weights, that prevent the progress of the empowerment of these cultures in the necessary spaces for their full and harmonious development.

Within processes that have already been discussed, progress can be seen in during these two decades, the eighties and nineties. They has been noted significant progress in cultural and educational fields, but this does not imply that in certain sectors there continues to be a process of struggle. These processes are not unique to one or two decades, but rather are a constant that involves improving the process of development of indigenous peoples, in this case in the Highlands of Chiapas.

CONCLUSIONS

Indianism can be seen as a process by which it becomes evident the forms, structures, vibrations and indigenous political ideology. It is the mechanism by which indigenous peoples express their identity and differentiate their status in a homogenizing world, where it is not necessary to lose their identity and adopting others is indispensable for achieving the development of the people.

A heterogeneous world contains more richness and depth that homogenization imposed for the triumph of the least above the rest. Through indianism, this wealth is expressed.; The wealth of identity- without ceasing to interact with other cultures and bring genuine intention to find the right way for harmonious development, peaceful empowerment and cultural delight.

Such has been the case in the historical trajectory of these villages, where the written word has exerted great impact by giving value to indigenous languages, strengthening writing to

spread their memories through stories, legends, poems and various literary works, where they sought to give beauty to the indigenous word. But it also seeks to understand legitimate ideologies, hopes for development and cultural beauty.

While it is true that much remains to be done, it is also true that the analysis and search for the consolidation of indianist processes becomes indispensable. This this reason the writing of the memories of the people, told by the people themselves, is required. It is necessary to express the hopes and work for the processes of inclusive formal education, with regard to the diversity of all peoples, indigenous or not, for the gradual construction of forms of harmonious and sustainable development. Everything must grow- knowing, appreciating and respecting each of its parts.

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