

IN FOCUS: THE RISE OF INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

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Latin America is in turmoil. The question of how to deal with those people whom the Europeans first met there centuries ago has caught up with the region. There is talk of a political awakening among the indigenous nations. To be sure, there have been uprisings before, and even signs of a specific 'Indio policy'. But it all ended in oblivion and silence. Public attention began to concentrate on the issue when Xavier Albó, a Jesuit living in Bolivia, published his book *El retorno del indio* in 1999 in which he alerted his readers to the growing self-organization and self-confidence among the indigenous nations in the Andean region. Yet politicians as well as politologists failed to understand that the phenomenon of indigenous awakening is political at its core. Who and what are 'the indigenous nations'? There is no standard terminology; rather, people talk of Indian, indigenous, or ethnic groups. The declaration of Machu Picchu refers to 'pueblos indígenas', but the terms 'campesinos', 'nativos', 'indígenas', 'pueblos originarios', and 'naciones originarias' are also commonly used. In Ecuador they use the term 'nacionalidad indígena', and Mr Albó himself talks of 'pueblos indígenas de origen'. The term that appears most neutral in the positive meaning of the word is probably the adjective 'indigenous'.

Deborah J. Yashar, associate professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University, asks why the rise of indigenous movements did not happen earlier, and why it is confined to a few countries even today. While she acknowledges that poverty and inequality are important factors, she believes that their meaningfulness is limited. Instead, identity is crucial for the awakening of the indigenes. Mrs Yashar says that 'citizenship regimes', as she calls them, essentially depend on three things: inclusion in politics, the possession of civic rights, and the existence of a structured process to mediate between the interests of the citizen and the state. She argues that the polarization of identities was boosted by profound institutional changes, again quoting three factors: the transformation of citizenship concepts, opportunities for political organization, and the existence of a cross-community network.

As far as the first factor is concerned, Mrs Yashar distinguishes between the corporatist and the neoliberal model of citizenship. The first, which originated in Latin America, is characterized by the gradual extension of social rights and the preferential treatment given to collectives by the government. Conversely, the second is typical for countries that belong to Huntington's 'third wave' of democracy. However, both concepts share the assumption that ethnicity is irrelevant and that other identities are more important.

Regarding the second factor, Mrs Yashar believes that the emergence of a capability for organization within the indigenous communities constitutes a sine qua non for the development of a specifically indigenous identity, averring that the churches, trade unions, NGOs, and even the state itself play an outstanding part in the process. Finally, the third indispensable factor named by Mrs Yashar is 'political associational space', meaning the freedom to organize and express an opinion. Mrs Yashar does not fail to point out that her attempts at explanation mainly relate to the 'first generation' of indigenous movements. By now, however, the scene is dominated by the second generation which, having learned from the mistakes of the first, deliberately instrumentalizes the label of ethnicity. Lastly, Mrs Yashar asks about the significance of such movements for democracy in Latin America. Apparently, assuming a national identity does not prevent ethnic groups from retaining other identities, local administrative structures, and cultural loyalties. What is ultimately on the line is the concept of the state itself. Mrs Yashar emphasizes that calling for differentiated systems of citizenship within the state ultimately implies a 'dramatic redefinition of democratic structures'. She does not believe that there is an institutional mechanism capable of imposing a consistent order on the different paradigms of citizenship and government. One way out might be local autonomy, which might enhance opportunities for local participation although it carries the risk of opening the doors to 'illiberal politics'. Very probably, there are some countries where there is no alternative to agreeing on a partial renewal of the institutional structure. She regrets that Bolivia of all countries missed the chance to tackle that challenge jointly and peacefully.

Donna Lee Van Cott, assistant professor of political science and Latin American studies at Tulane University, views the matter from another angle. She holds that the quality of representation and the responsiveness of the party system are crucial for the functioning of democratic institutions. Mrs Van Cott embeds her study of the genesis and rise of ethnic parties in an analysis of the party system. In her opinion, the success of indigenous parties does not depend on the numbers of the indigenous population. There are three separate questions that are of interest: What are the conditions under which indigenous parties develop? What are the conditions under which indigenous cleavages can emerge within the party system? And why and under what conditions do indigenous movements form parties in the first place?

However, the most important questions are these: Why is it that indigenous movements begin to develop only today, and what is the key to their success? She believes in a causal relationship between the decline of the traditional left in Latin America and the development of indigenous parties which, in her opinion, will be successful whenever they are based on a

powerful indigenous movement and incorporate non-indigenous segments of the population.

Mrs Van Cott also glances at the 'second wave of reforms' which failed to boost the dwindling trust in democratic institutions although it purported to do justice to the criticisms of indigenous and other groups. In her opinion, the power factor is important too: After all, there have been developments that resulted from power politics pure and simple although they did produce actual progress.

Other questions are raised as well: Is democracy weakened by inter-ethnic conflicts? Will participation in the political system impair the integrity and autonomy of the indigenous cultures? In Mrs Van Cott's judgement, democracy will be enriched while the indigenous movements will be jeopardized.

In some countries of Latin America, indigenous movements have grown into key players in the social and political field. This is the view of Nancy Grey Postero, assistant professor of anthropology, and Leon Zamosc, associate director of Latin American studies, at the University of California in San Diego. However, they believe that endeavours to establish common causes and tendencies in the Indian question are hampered by the diversity of movements and strategies which makes it indispensable to analyze countries separately. Postero and Zamosc argue that developments run in contrary directions, with political liberalization and democratization confronting neoliberal policies and their consequences.

As the authors put it, one of the key elements in the rise of indigenous movements is the struggle against neoliberalism. As indigenous groups increasingly utilize this struggle to promote their cause, their ability to place themselves and their concerns on the political agenda improves. Consequently, this is not the least among the reasons why the authors distinguish between indigenous players and the pursuit of indigenous demands. The rise of the indigenous question itself, they say, follows three paths, being promoted by direct actions of indigenous movements, armed conflicts, and electoral processes. What should be applauded in this context, according to Postero and Zamosc, is the contribution made by indigenous movements to the democratization of Latin America by integrating previously excluded groups in the process of political participation. However, they caution that no direct causal relationship is discernible.

For Postero and Zamosc, the interplay between ethnicity and class ranks high in priority. The perception of poverty as resulting from membership in the indigenous population was often accompanied by the construction of an ethnic identity' as opposed to the 'Mestizo identity of the modern middle

class'. It remains to be seen whether this political and ethnic hybrid will develop into an ethnoclass. In passing, Postero and Zamosc assert that 'mestizaje' is a reality and not a myth. The point at issue is indigenous citizenship, a concept whose formulation raises a number of complex questions. What is the significance of indigenous groups in society? Should there be equal rights for all, or should individual groups be given special rights? How should the state be organized? And: Could it be that all this leads to an ethnic state?

Despite all criticism, the approaches of the three studies are complementary. This is why they provide such a good foundation for addressing a Latin American problem whose development is far from over. Its very dynamism contributes towards keeping the indigenous issue and its various impacts on the systems of the region in the news.