



The Mayan fase Guatemalan 21st Century

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LOOKING TOWARDS THE MOVEMENT AMERICAN INDIGENOUS AND GUATEMALAN

When the year 1992 approached, the fifth Centenary of the discovery of America by some Spaniards, a series of political movements began to take shape seeking either the celebration or commemoration of the event or its total rejection.

This is the case of talking about its rejection, motivated by the centuries-old historical awareness of what happened in the years of the Spanish-European invasion of these lands, which was carried out with all viciousness as is known by the so-called conquerors and, with treacherous and abusive dispossession of goods owned by American inhabitants for thousands of years.

The rejectionist protest movement were manifested throughout America,

especially in opposition to the state governments since these responded particularly to the interests of the “mother country” and its embassies in celebrating what the Spaniards claimed as their greatest historical feat. Obviously, such opposition movements were expressed on the basis of indigenous American and popular interests, the latter understood as those of the mestizo and Afro-descendant sectors that clearly functioned in opposition and political resistance.

This is how the three International Congresses of American Indigenous Peoples were conceived, in Ecuador in 1990, in Guatemala in 1991 and in Nicaragua in 1992. In advance, allusive meetings of indigenous peoples in other American countries were organized and carried out; Cuba, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, etc. And, as the date approached, the people demonstrated en masse, causing violent repression in certain cases.

The ethnic debate had already begun in the eighties when the anthropological schools of the continent discussed it in their academic environments as a result of indigenous developmental policies that had been put into practice in the sixties and seventies and that had ultimately become paternalism that did not solve the real problems of poverty and its consequences that the indigenous American peoples have suffered since the colonialist invasions of the 16th century.

Hence memory and historical awareness

functioned in tune with the consequent rejection of the event that political and social elites of the American states intended to celebrate. Consequently, any expression of social, political, economic and cultural oppression by the ruling elites was rejected by the indigenous leaders and intellectuals. It was also evident that certain European countries, politically opposed to such interests of the Spanish nation, financed these movements demanding authentic American indigenism in millions. National and international tourism, the businessmen of the system and all those expressions that meant old fashioned social and political oppression and the capitalist leadership of their bourgeois and petty bourgeois interests were systematically rejected, I repeat, by the indigenous leaders since these movements began vindictive.

It has always been obvious that if it were not for European capital invested in this way, indigenous claims would have been little or none.

Thus we arrive at an awakening of indigenous historical consciousness in Guatemala. It is clear that these indicated circumstances were not the only causes of what was said. There were many more, hidden deep in the social and political processes of each nation, although they all had a homogeneous historical expression: the secular cultural resistance of the American indigenous peoples.

In Guatemala it was brewing since the

years seventies an attitude of opposition and resistance to the local capitalist economic and political powers established since colonization. In those years there were few sources of political resistance among the indigenous people, but, even so, there were some. The *Kekchí Antonio Pop Caal* established in the mid-70's¹ the political and social guidelines of the indigenous resistance not yet known as Mayan in those years. Very few indigenous intellectuals were recognized as such by Guatemalan society, among them **Adrián Inés Chávez**, author of a specific version of the *Popol Vuh*. In the Academy, a debate was developing between intellectual constructs like those of **Carlos Guzmán Böckler/Jean Loup Herbert**², **Severo Martínez Peláez**³, **Joaquín Novar**⁴. The advent of 1992 and its political contradictions began to predominate and foster the emergence of more indigenous intellectuals whose political positions gave them significant relevance in the political debate that took shape from then on. The indigenous **Rigoberta Menchú** had been a victim with her family of the bloody genocide that arose during the armed conflict and she defended indigenous rights in European countries, taking her cause to the internal debates of the UN. **Demetrio Cojtí** did his thing since



1. Pop Caal, Antonio. Réplica del indio ante una disertación. Ponencia ante el XLI congreso. International de Americanistas. México, 1974.

2. Guatemala, Una Interpretación Histórico Social.

3. La Patria del Criollo. EDUCA. Varias ediciones.

4. Diversos artículos y ensayos de J. Noval sobre los indígenas guatemaltecos en Guatemala Indígena y otras revistas indigenistas internacionales y universitarias.

his pedagogical position as a UNESCO official. Throughout Latin America, internal war conflicts were brewing that sought the overthrow of the capitalist governments of the time, promoting socialism following the examples of revolutionary Cuba or Allende's socialist Chile.

But the Latin American indigenous movement sympathized to the pro-socialist movements of the American continent, since they also defended and fought for their causes, they were guided by motives even deeper than political and social demands. There was a consciousness of cultural and spiritual resistance that held them up as ancestral identification and that gave them the right to be the inhabitants of the oldest ancestry on the continent and also for having been stripped of those inalienable rights with impunity. Such purposes were evidenced especially in the International meetings held in *Ecuador, Guatemala and Nicaragua*.

That decidedly specific, as it showed that it had always been, (The determined resistance of the *Kakchikel* leaders *Cahi Imox* and *Beleheb Qat* against the Spanish during and after the Spanish invasion of 1524 must be taken into account, and the numerous mutinies perpetrated during the colony) began to permeate all areas of the indigenous peoples of America and in *Guatemala* it acquired a certain presentation after 1991, when the Second International Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples of America was held, which, given the numerous

participation of delegations of workers and Afro-descendants from all over the continent who were also present, ended up calling themselves in the final plenary assembly: "...of the Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance" and together with the general proclamation of *Rigoberta Menchú* as official candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize:⁵ Prize she won the following year, in 1992.

With this immediate background, what we have known as the Guatemalan indigenous movement was born. Here then it is necessary and essential to take note of other antecedents that, due to their documentary nature, had remained hidden but latent in the Guatemalan historical horizon.

Since the middle of the 16th century, it is now known, a series of texts that revealed stories and worldviews relevant to the peoples recently subjugated by the Spanish invaders were written with idiomatic characters from Castilian, but with mostly indigenous content.⁶ These texts, now called indigenous chronicles, relate lists of ancestors, geographical places and spirituality manifest in language and in stories with metaphorical and symbolic details, typical of a very particular worldview and wisdom corresponding to this continent. These texts were somehow saved in



5. Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 1991

6. Recinos, Adrián, *Crónicas Indígenas de Guatemala*. 2ª. Ed. Soc. of Georg. And Hist. De+ Guatemala. 1984.

brotherhoods or by private hands in such a way that they remained somewhat hidden for about three centuries, until in the mid-19th century they began to be discovered by academics. *Fuentes* and *Guzmán* mentions that he consulted some but also reports their disappearance and lost when he writes *Recordación Florida* in the second half of the 17th century. More than a hundred years later, at the beginning of the 18th century, the parish priest of today's Municipality of *Chichicastenango*, *El Quiché* Department, discovers, studies and translates into Spanish the *Popol Vuh* manuscript, later called and, in the middle of the 19th century, another newly established manuscript in the *Achi* language with Spanish characters called *Rabinal Achi* is also discovered. As the years passed between the 19th and 20th centuries, more indigenous manuscripts continued to be discovered, such that at the beginning of the 21st century, we know of the existence of more than twenty of them.

The fact is that all these documents, with a latent existence unknown to many social science academics for many years, are now beginning to be taken into account given their historical relevance, since they constitute the alternative historical testimony to the official history that Creole society has imposed since its appearance on the social scene during the 16th century and throughout the subsequent 2 centuries until the present day. Its current importance is limited by the fact that it recounts the events that occurred previously and during the Spanish invasion from the perspective of

the descendants of those who fought or directly experienced said invasion.

On the other hand, the Guatemalan indigenous movement intellectually resists the imposition of the canons corresponding to other invasive religions such as Catholic and Evangelical Christianity, despite the syncretism produced during its evangelization in colonial times, tending towards the reinstatement of the canons of a now called Mayan spirituality typical of their ancestral religion. Religion almost disappeared due to the Christianization of societies contemporary to the invasion. From this awareness, its purpose has been to reinstate ancient worldview ideas, going to the extreme of substantiating them for the sake of returning to a pure but non-existent mayism.

These ideas have crystallized in a resistance to the use of "ladino" customs, in the insistence on the use of Mayan costumes by women and by some male sectors, in the trade of traditional crafts which are currently being transformed with globalized designs., in the persistence of the use of Mayan languages and in the increasingly incisive presence of intermediary characters and transmitters of said Mayan spirituality

At the same time, it is important to note that the word "Maya" is appropriated by the indigenous movement to the point of transforming the concept of "indigenous" that characterizes it into that of "Maya" and beginning to call itself the "Maya movement" as we will call it. in this article from now on. It is our criterion that

The word “Mayan” is a legitimate appropriation that evokes the civilizational ancestor of an ancient society distinguished for its knowledge in many areas of life and that permeates the entire historical process originating from the native peoples of Southern Mesoamerica prior to the European Hispanic invasion. from the 16th century. Such ancient society is universally known as The Mayan Civilization.

As a result of this political and social movement of the 1990s, a media debate was also carried out by some mestizo and Mayan intellectuals in the academic circles of Guatemalan society, in which social scientists, the writer *Mario Roberto Morales*, the pedagogue *Demetrio Cojtí* and the anthropologist and journalist *Estuardo Zapeta* among others of no less relevance. This debate lasted several years and provided a basis for the analysis of our society with a view to building a better future that resolves the ethnic and racist differences of all kinds that exist in it. As a result, several texts were published whose importance is now invaluable since they reflect critical and uncritical, historical and ahistorical thinking, as well as the surprising emotional variety that this discussion continues to provoke in the academic and media environments of our contemporary society. At the same time, the bibliographic production on these topics is now surprising and for the most diligent reader, topics related to the Mayan religion and to the pre-Hispanic knowledge still existing in

Traditional Medicine, Mathematics, Mythology, Architecture, Linguistics, Art, Cosmology, Cosmogony, Ritualistics, Crafts, Ecology, etc., which refer to its knowledge at all times and today.

The impact obtained from all this background is that a much stronger Mayan movement is currently taking shape. A particular awareness of Mayan identification moves in the social and political environment in general. Many Mayan intellectuals, men and women, have acquired a relevant presence both in the written and image media and in the social sciences, so that a certain awareness of being Mayan spreads in all environments where circumstances allow it. In turn, the latest governments, no matter how *ladino* and entrepreneurial they have been, have allowed the presence of indigenous Mayans and Afro-descendants in some relevant positions in their administrative functions, specifically in the areas of Education and Culture. This Mayan presence is already noticeable in different sectors of Guatemalan society. In some way, the Peace Agreements signed in December 1996 related to the Culture of the Mayan, *Mestizo*, *Xinca* and *Garifuna* peoples have influenced these procedures, although Mayan consciousness has been strengthening long before.

However, it seems that the movement Maya contemporary lacks of appropriate guidelines to better consolidate its future. In other words, if it suffers from many and varied orientations that correspond, as is to be expected to the individualities

of its components; it is still noticeable the naivety with which it responds to the incentives of the political difusión of the presidential campaigns of the sectors that have traditionally held economic, political, social and cultural power is still noticeable. The most dramatic example is the recent presidential campaign in 2007, whose interpretative analysis we offer below.

That President *Colom* has promised in his campaign a Mayan face in his government upon winning the elections in Guatemala is one thing. It must be interpreted what that assertion means. All things have one, several or many faces at the same time. The president went to the rallies that he held throughout the country promising precisely a Mayan one for his government. Then it must also be correctly interpreted what the Guatemalan conglomerates of Pre-hispanic descent who received and accepted that message for such a thing understood.

It turns out that one thing is to participate in government decisions in high-level spheres - in the cabinet precisely -, another is to participate in the secondary spheres, the vice-ministries and general directorates, as another is to participate in the coordination positions of the administration in the level of the offices and positions in that order, and a very different one, perhaps the most innovative, to participate in the cosmetic level of presenting young hostesses with native colonial costumes, to initiate the government protocols with the originally traditional but appropriated by *Jesus Castillo* titled The *Quiché* King instead

of *La Granadera* and hearing the national anthem in ceremonies in Kaqchikel adding propitiatory ritual ceremonies co-led by elders who profess unofficial religious conceptions.

Since the 16th century, the AngloSpanish-Lusitanian invaders Europeans and they usurped lands and powers in America, establishing by force and through religious conversion to Christianity a new and different way of seeing life and work. Thus began a process of anti-colonial resistance that has had various faces throughout the history of these four subsequent centuries. Along the way, new social groups proceeded to the usufruct of economic and political power, such as the criollos and the mestizos, the latter ambitiously clinging to the seats of the economically superior society in all areas of the advances of the culture western colonizer, material, commercial and cultural, especially since the republican periods.

The most oppressed society, the original one, today self-proclaimed Mayan for just reasons of historical-political convenience, has never achieved such powers. Their plurality of interests at the time of the Spanish-European invasion did not allow them to do so. That same political plurality that continued to be expressed in different languages and criteria has not allowed them until today, and now, that new conceptions of the historical process such as the awareness of its pre-Hispanic ancestry led by Civilization Maya and their ancestral knowledge of dispossession drives them to once again participate in power, but not

to take it over. One more disillusionment, one of many, is presented at the present time: the non-inclusion of its Mayan face in the government.

Now, if the opposite were to happen and in the relatively near future, our Guatemalan descendants had the opportunity to see the Mayan face in high-power government decisions, what face would they see? A *Kiché* face? *Kekchi*? *Kakchikel*? *Mam*? *Tzutuhil*? etc. Or a multiethnic team aware of its Mayan plurality but also of its responsibility in the exercise of the government of all Guatemalans?

Something like this is yet to happen. It would inevitably have to arrive gradually in the future historical process. It's what we hope for.

That is in 2008, the utopia of the Mayan face in the current government. This is not the case with the current Bolivian government in which the indigenous people have legitimately come to power and now govern a republic with a high indigenous population like Bolivia, trying to overcome the vicissitudes that in their ideological and political logic are presented to them by the opposition sectors, formerly the usufructuaries of political power.

In the continental historical panorama, the assumption of all levels of political power in our nations by indigenous people continues to be a difficultly achievable utopia, given the social structures that compose them as a product of their own historical processes. However, we consider viable a

reconciliation of interests, of a democratic order that entails the will to understand the differences that the different processes provoked in our societies in the light of the historical truth.

Now, in *genisecular* Guatemala, a new stage of debate is beginning to take shape, when we see that some authors, social scientists and national writers are concerned about the analysis and interpretation of historical facts that the Creole officials have been falsifying based on their own interests of cultural hegemony with which they have always sought to legitimize their economic, political and religious powers, as well as refute the interpretations of the indigenous historical process in its different stages that socialscientists foreign Euro-North Americans seek to establish as "definitive" in an imposing and treacherous way, as if these countries lacked their own possibilities of interpreting their historicalsocial processes.

Within the framework of a new phase of the Mayan movement, now Guatemalan, those national authors have been essentially concerned with the phenomenon and have published their works aimed at all audiences based on the clarification of past and contemporary historical truths, opening new gaps with them for the encounter with our historical and contemporary identities. **Maximón** or **La Articulación de las diferencias** and **Señores bajo los Árboles** of the author *Mario Roberto Morales*, and **Chwa Nima Ab'aj** or **Mixco Viejo, La Máscara de Tekum, Kachiqueta'** and

La Visión Encomendera de la Conquista, these four by *Guillermo Paz cárcamo*, contribute greatly to this process of building a new historical consciousness of our concrete reality of all times, regardless of whether the cited authors belong to the mestizo Ladino world of our contemporary society. It is therefore expected that Mayan intellectuals will develop their own constructs regarding this matter.

The interethnic debate then continues from the perspective of historicizing the concrete truth of the events, drawing on the sources known as indigenous chronicles, on the oral tradition manifested in expressions of art and spirituality, as well as on the academic scientific study of the vicissitudes that occurred to all along a secular indigenous resistance, which is combined with that of poor mestizos and Afro-descendants.

All of this portends a new historical and cultural identity in contradiction with neoliberal capitalist processes and economic and cultural globalization that threaten day by day with the disappearance of one's own identity elements for the sake of a new and alienated society dependent on the thoughtless consumerism of its commercial products.

It is a way, the most suitable, to build our future in this 21st century.

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Colonia La Florida

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