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ESSAYS

RESEARCHERS

WITHOUT A COMPASS

“LADINIZATION”: MIRAGE OR SLOGAN?

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Some researchers of the situation of the Guatemalan Indian have invented a therapy to cure their ills. Which simply consists of not listening to their authentic voice. That is, they try to cure them by correspondence. Refusing to consult the patient. This allows them to design a false image of the Indian. Reduced, for convenience of analysis, to an abstract, metaphysical being. Easily manipulated like any "fetish". This conceptual deviation leads them to elaborate and suggest absurd strategies for struggle. In which traces of racism and sectarian simplifications are easily discovered.

It is therefore convenient to abolish this biased lack of communication by collecting the faithful diagnosis that the concrete Indian, the Indian himself - not Heideggerian - has traced of his authentic situation.

To achieve this clarification, we will reproduce below, paragraphs extracted from the conclusions and recommendations adopted at the Congress of Indian Peoples of Central America, Mexico, and Panama held in the last of these nations, from January 24 to 28, 1977

In synthesis, the declarations expressed in the Congress proclaim and demand:

- 1) Respect for their traditional myths and rites;
- 2) An education that is not aberrant and discriminatory and is transmitted bilingually at different academic levels.
- 3) Participation of Indians in archaeological and tourism programs so that the treasures of their culture are not subjected to foreign exploitation.
- 4) Effective national and international markets that truly benefit Indian artisans, respecting the cultural and traditional value of their products.
- 5) Supervision, by Indian groups, of the exploitation of the natural resources of each country with the possibility for Indian groups to participate in it.

To further clarify the situation of the Mesoamerican Indian, the political and administration commission presented the following considerations at the Congress:

The Indian nations of Central America share the sad history of the conquest of America, the wave of deaths, the destruction of Indian cultures, and domination with the consequent submission and exploitation of the indigenous people, forcing them to live within foreign molds and cultural patterns that violate their dignity and reduce them to a thing or object, using them as cheap labor for private enrichment to trade with their cultural and traditional identity, ignoring all their rights.

Within this framework of historical reality is where we, the indigenous nations and peoples of America, must today seek the analysis of indigenous organizations at the regional level, **the right to land tenure which is the raison d'être of the indigenous people.** (Emphasis added).

The indigenous problem of the groups participating in this congress faces the following:

1. Lack of strong and adequate organizations representative of indigenous groups.
2. Denial of the existence and problems of the Indian, equating them with peasant groups (emphasis added), ignoring their culture and identity.
3. Betrayal by trained indigenous people who sell themselves to institutions or pressure groups.

RESOLUTIONS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Denounce before international public opinion the permanent dispossession of their assets, the denial of human rights, and the continuous displacement from their own land.
2. Request that the United Nations (UN) and other institutions in charge of investigating indigenous reality carry out their studies through existing indigenous authorities or organizations, which are the only ones knowledgeable about the lived reality.
3. Guarantee the organization of indigenous people at the national and international levels, independent of any foreign interest.

This is, undoubtedly, the authentic diagnosis. The honest intellectual must thus recognize it. Respecting it. Using it as a guide. Becoming a faithful ally of the Indian to collaborate in their struggle to achieve the stated purposes. This attitude will save the researcher from any ethnocentric, racist, neo-colonialist deviation, etc. And, in particular, from the literal mechanical application of imported theses without any modification to the Guatemalan problematic.

As some intellectuals, prone to sectarian simplifications, point to the case of Mexico as a paradigmatic and positive example of mass "ladinization," we add recent statements by Ignacio Ovalle, coordinator of the plans adopted regarding the dramatic situation of the Mexican Indian. Who, due to the deviations - not to say traditions - of those who have led the integrationist, post-revolutionary development in Mexico, has become an alienated, reified being. This harmful action is what we have denounced on other occasions, calling it true ethnocide.

Ovalle - spokesman for the new Mexican government - affirmed, among other considerations about the problem, that:

"The failure of numerous integrationist attempts derives from an orientation - programmed or not - tending to assimilate ethnic communities into a structure that denies their most basic rights and in which the

indigenous person has been condemned to play a subordinate and hopeless role, or else, as in the past, to seek new areas to take refuge in physical or cultural isolation." The official then specified that Mexican Indians "have been incorporated or assimilated into an economic system that subordinated them to the level of objects, of which they can dispose as persons and of patrimony, expelling them from their lands, relocating them, annihilating them when they cling to their rights, degrading their culture, and abusing the problems derived from their lack of communication."

The official emphasized the new attitude of the Mexican Government for which "the colonizing attitude that has sought to instill in the indigenous person a vision of themselves as migrants, a feeling of incapacity and contempt, a situation that has also been favored by the colonizer for their benefit," is unacceptable. (**El Universal**, April 20, 1977).

Thus, the errors of the bureaucratic "ladinizing" and "developmentalist" indigenism - in the neighboring country - are clearly and honestly recognized. The logical deduction is that this has occurred by attempting to solve the problems of indigenous populations from a unilateral and ethnocentric approach.

To conclude this, perhaps lengthy but convincing sequence of quotes, we will include others from Venezuelan researchers. Authorized researchers who have not refused to listen to the heart of the people. Valuable representatives of the intellectual movement allied with Indian groups. The authorized professionals say the following in these days published in "América indígena" (Vol. XXXIV).

Esteban Emilio Monsoyi (*head of the linguistics section, Central University of Venezuela*): *"Indigenous liberation cannot be achieved by decree, under any sociopolitical regime. First of all, it is opposed by a series of developmentalist interests, determined to dissolve indigenous communities, in order to facilitate to the maximum an expansive policy based on the conquest, expropriation, and colonization of new territories. And it should be borne in mind that many indigenous areas are characterized precisely by their strategic and economic importance, sometimes combined with great subsoil wealth. To exacerbate the situation, the excessive urgency to incorporate these lands into the scope of the national economy is often wrapped in the patriotic halo of national aggrandizement, an ideological framework within which indigenous groups are viewed as enclaves of barbarism, separatism, ignorance, and backwardness."*

Furthermore, even the weakest and most decultured peoples - including those subjected to the greatest misery - possess their integrated cultural models and in many cases are still perfectly salvageable, without neglecting any of the universals of culture: material culture, social organization, regulation of the life cycle and daily routine, magic and religion, ideology, aesthetic creation, language. We must particularly highlight language, since it alone is capable of uniting, structuring, expressing, and summarizing the rest of the specific culture of a human group. We would venture to affirm that, even if the only real creation of each human group were language, humanity should still exhaust all efforts to maintain the living use of each language among its speakers, given its immeasurable value as a collective and millenary creation. With the new open and progressive scientific conceptions that are prevailing over the phenomenon of nationality - which can be perfectly pluralistic, multicultural, and multilingual - there is no valid justification for advocating the disappearance of minority languages and cultures, which would not only impoverish humanity in the abstract, but above all would deprive the nationalities themselves of a whole range of very interesting values. For all this, the indigenous confederation must fight tirelessly for the immediate implementation of intercultural bilingual education and cultural autonomy at the national level, while opposing any attempt at ethnocide, however disguised it may be."

"The fact is perfectly documented, both in Venezuela and in other American countries, that the acculturated indigenous person, integrated and even partially assimilated into the surrounding non-indigenous population, far from enjoying the economic, sociopolitical, and educational advantages that the national culture presumably should bring, tends to become, for an indefinite time, a subproletarian, superexploited, marginalized, and discriminated against, already devoid of the protection and solidarity that their own communal organization previously provided. The typology based on the greater or lesser degree of acculturation presented by different indigenous communities seems to totally ignore the true nature of social classes and of all the prevalent social stratification in dependent capitalist countries, and is therefore based on false and inadequate foundations."

Gerald Clarac N. (Indigenous Program, National Agrarian Institute): "If we review the majority of programs, projects, draft projects, advances, programming, planning, and so many other things that have been structured, elaborated, and applied with a view to 'promoting the development' of the indigenous population, we note a great variety in the generality of these: the absence of the thinking of the subject man (or rather, object) of these decisions and subsequent actions. It has been thought and decided for the indigenous man, because the idea that 'the Indian' is incapable of rationalizing and deciding about his future is deeply rooted in

us - the naive ones used as intermediaries for foreigners. As a product of this Westernizing conception, we assume the 'responsibility' of defending, protecting, and guiding him towards the path of 'civilization' when we have not finished understanding what this attractive word 'civilization' has meant and means for us: intellectual submission, economic dependence, and conditioned freedom."

Professor Clarac N. also mentions the following Fundamental Principles of the Indigenous Confederation of Venezuela:

"1º. The firm American conviction that the diverse indigenous societies can and must contribute numerous elements in the sociocultural and economic-ecological order with a view to the construction, consolidation, and strengthening of a national culture. It is not that it has been absent, but that it remains in a submissive, interfered with, and divided manner."

"2º. This determined and full participation of the diverse indigenous societies, to adequately join the latent elements within the non-indigenous peasant sector, the labor sector, and other groups exploited by foreigners in order to achieve the monolithic conjugation of all of them in function of the satisfaction of the needs of the majorities and the full development of their internal potentialities on their way to crystallizing the solidary freedom of their members."

"Through this determined, conscious, and critical action in favor of the conquest of our cultural identity, the path of solidary diversity is the only one capable of guaranteeing a true process of national enrichment and just respect for both man, who is one, and for his ideas, beliefs, and values, which are many, inexhaustible, and inviolable."

Henry Sarmiento P. (Coordinator, Indigenous Program of the IAN): "If the goal of indigenous development programs is integration, one might ask: is integrating them into this system really a valid solution? If this is the goal, the lived experience leads us to the conclusion of the evident inviability of integral, harmonious, and self-sustaining development, that is, authentic development through the paths of individualism, utilitarianism, and mercantilism typical of the neoliberal theory of development, which presupposes a system of relationships whose ultimate goal is the extraction of a maximum rate of profit

oriented towards accumulation and profit. For the achievement of which capital and technology become essential means."

"The transfer of technology to indigenous communities is manifested in a growing number of equipment, machinery, and inputs that penetrate the field, driven fundamentally by technicians and indigenists, with the consequent displacement of labor. With technological penetration, a style and rhythm of production has been imposed on our indigenous people that does not correspond to their level of development or their non-Western culture. This imposed rhythm of production does not seek to increase the indigenous person's productive capacity by raising scientific, technical, and technological levels, but rather seeks to increase their dependence on the one hand, and increase the profit share from differential rent that operates indirectly through the appropriation by those who manage capital of an extra margin above the small producer's profit."

This professional considers that, from empirical experience, several principles emerge:

Normative

- a) Respect for the traditional decision-making structure of indigenous communities, which implies self-management in all projects to be carried out.*
- b) Conscious and organized participation of indigenous people in development programs, where the promotion of a critical awareness of an economic production unit administered by the indigenous people themselves is the pivot of development.*
- c) Maximum utilization of the natural and human resources of the area.*
- d) Promotion of scientific knowledge at high levels in order to optimize the ecological relationships of the area.*
- e) Conservation of traditional communal economic structures.*
- f) Promotion of production relationships based on communal ownership of the means of communication.*
- g) Promotion of solidarity relationships that lead to self-help economic attitudes with a view to increasing productivity levels.*
- h) Indigenous development of productive forces as a response to technological independence.*

Operativos

- “h.1 Facing capitalization problems by increasing bargaining power and by integrating production phases not incorporated into the sector. For this, it is fundamentally necessary to scale the indigenous economic process both in production and marketing.*
- h.2 The focus of development programs should transcend community boundaries, working at the level of areas where there are concentrations of indigenous production of such volume as to make their organization viable in the face of problems of inputs, prices, services, etc., that is, the organization of indigenous production in the face of market problems, as an alternative to increase their income level by reducing production costs.*
- h.3 Addition of consumption units that tend to lower costs, allow for self-sufficiency, and ensure the completion of the economic cycle with a certain level of self-sufficiency.*
- h.4 Utilization of prayer time in work for both men and women, fundamentally to increase capital reserves and the production of surpluses.”*

Undoubtedly, it is exactly satisfactory to confirm that the demands of the indigenous people have found receptivity in the thought of progressive intellectuals. Who have gone beyond a stage of literal, automatic repetition of imported slogans.

The set of the above quotes demonstrates: a) the clear awareness that important and growing groups of indigenous people have acquired of their situation of marginalization and subjugation; b) the affirmation of their inalienable right to define their own development goals; c) the confirmation that foreign-style proletarianization ("ladinization") is not a social panacea (case of Mexico); d) the existence of a movement of intellectuals who, before proposing diagnoses and

programs, consult those who suffer, firsthand, economic, cultural, and racist discrimination.

This is the core, the basic. The rest are just ramblings, speculations in a vacuum. Mechanical application of imported schemes. Late echoes of sociological and economic theories that emerged in a specific historical time. Within a social environment absolutely different from ours. Whose authors - with exceptional honesty - asked, or rather, demanded that their concepts not become ossified. That they be developed. Adapting them to any new historical circumstance.

Let young people with agile, healthy minds understand this. Always open to constructive self-criticism. So as not to be pigeonholed in concepts. Always revising them when they confront unexpected concrete situations. This is not recognized by those who, due to mental inertia, prefer to nestle in a paralyzing orthodoxy. Forgetting that orthodoxy undoubtedly means dogma. That is, the most anti-dialectical thing possible.

