Indigenous movements in Guatemala and Bolivia- different experiences in making the multicultural democracy work

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"From resistance to political power" This was the name of the third summit for the indigenous civil movements' organisations in Latin America, which took place in Ixichimche, Tecpan, Guatemala in 2007. I was participating as an observer at the summit and some of the ideas for today's short presentation come from there. In this summit indigenous groups from all over the continent shared their experiences, and it was very clear that there were quite large differences between the groups when it came to levels of empowerment. The indigenous groups representing Bolivia were both highly admired by their sisters and brothers and they themselves were also eager and proud to present the large steps made in Bolivia, when it comes to indigenous rights, participation and the current situation. The starting point for my research was 'what lessons could the Mayans in Guatemala, as well as other indigenous groups, learn from their sisters in Bolivia'? Additionally what are the reasons for these differences between the two countries, Guatemala and Bolivia?

Has there been a development from resistance to political power among the indigenous movements' organisations?

During the past two decades we have seen the emergence of various political actors in Latin America for whom indigenousness is their basic social identity; in my two cases we see it in the Peace Accords from 1996 marked with a multicultural accent in Guatemala and the intense mobilisation of Aymara and Quechua organisations in Bolivia via the Movimiento Pachakutik and the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS). What has happened to make this "awakening" come up?

Salavdor Marti I Puig comes in a newly published article in Latin American Perspectives with some external explanations for the awakening. The first aspect is linked to the theory of governance. Governance reflects a new scenario in which the way of dealing with public matters and satisfying social demands is no longer controlled by government because policy making is increasingly the result of the interaction of a wide variety of actors.

Examples of governance politics can be the implementation of:

- Territorial decentralization
- New public management
- The market economy
- In some cases outsourcing and privatization of services

All of these aspects have produced a displacement of power and state control *upwards* (to international organizations, transnational networks, and big global companies), *downwards* (to local governments, departments and regions) and *outwards,* (to communities and non-profit organisations "delivering" public services as NGOs and quasi-autonomous NGOs).

The emergence of the political actors based on ethnicity has been to a great extent the result of the structure of political opportunities produced by governance, which have crystallized alliances that have given these actors greater capacity for applying pressure through relationships.

Another highly important aspect that has influenced the awakening of the indigenous movement is coming from outside. The presence and support of outsiders might be said to be an element of social capital that was necessary for the empowerment of indigenous movement.

It was the pressure made by advocacy networks that made the rights of indigenous peoples transnational!

However it is important to be aware of the enormous gaps that exist between nominal rights and effective rights and the policies designed to put them into practice.

Let's get started on my two cases Guatemala and Bolivia. First, some numbers so that you can get the general picture; Boliva and Guatemala are two quite unique countries in the world since both countries have indigenous majority populations. Numbers are hard to find however, because there are large differences in censuses, but we know that there is an indigenous population of between 50-75% within the two countries. Bolivia has an indigenous population of 55% mainly Queschuas and Aymaras, and Guatemala is believed to have similar numbers, although the censuses do vary. In Guatemala the indigenous population is divided into 23 different ethnic groups. The two countries have also been through large periods of dictatorship and military regime, as has the whole region, but in the 1980's democratic regimes were installed; in 1982 in Bolivia and in 1986 in Guatemala. Both countries are also known for high levels of poverty among their populations and the situation is even worse among indigenous peoples, with high levels of analphabetism and a small elite that are very powerful both politically and economically.

However, I am not going to focus on these similarities today, but try to understand the large level of differences that one can see when it comes to level of influence and political power among the indigenous movement in the two countries. In Bolivia the last three presidents have been forced leave office as result of large social unrest organized by the indigenous movements and other representatives from the civil society, mainly workers' organizations. When Evo Morales became the first indigenous president in Latin America it was because of the support from the indigenous movements together with the large sector of the civil society. In Guatemala on the other hand, the impression is that the Mayan movement is fragmented and divided, lacks organizational structure to secure good dialog with the groups that they are supposed to represent, and have been accused of corruption. One of my informants, Leandro Yax, representing Fodigua, a semi-state development agency, describes the civil society including the indigenous movements in Guatemala in the following way:

"I know of many cases, and I regret it, where indigenous organizations have sold their soul so that some of their leaders could "climb up" in political position in national political institutions."

There are of course several reasons for these differences, but since time is limited in this presentation I will focus on three of the key aspects that I analyze when trying to understand the differences. The first one is in the literature called **maturity of the civil movements' organization**, the second one focuses on what is called an **inclusive indigenous discourse**. And the last but perhaps not the least, is the role of **international donor community**.

Maturity of the civil movements' organizations

Maturity of indigenous organizations is a key factor for being an important political actor. One evident method of measuring the maturity of an organization is to look at the years in existence of the highest level of an organization. Another way to measure organizational maturity is through the unity of organization (however this is sometimes hard to measure). When comparing Guatemala and Bolivia the differences in organizational maturity are quite obvious and large. In Guatemala up until the end of the civil war in 1996, it was very hard if not quite impossible to organize civil society and the indigenous movement. Most activists in Guatemala fled the country or were killed during the 36 year long civil war. The indigenous population was not acknowledged as a people until the 1986 constitution in Guatemala. In Bolivia on the other hand, because of the mineral activity and early industrialization, workers organizations were established as early as the 1960's. The first farmer organization was created as early as 1936. At the end of the 60's it became clear that the route of liberation for the indigenous peoples in Bolivia was not through making the indigenous population into farmers, and as a result of this the Katarisimo movement evolved. One of my informants, Luis Mack, says this when comparing Guatemala and Bolivia:

> *"In Bolivia, to make Evo Morales win the election they had a whole process of constructing the social movement and negotiations between the social movement and the political parties… a work that was developed over many years with the final idea of getting political power. In Guatemala we have never had this kind of work, I would rather say on the contrary we have had a fragmentation of the social movement after the peace accords. The movement has lost their strength."*

Inclusive indigenous discourse

According to Marti y Puig, for an identity to be successful an inclusive "indigenity" must be created. One of the aspects that is often mentioned when analyzing the Bolivian civil societies' success is the red thread that has been made between ethnic claims, proletarian claims and anti neoliberal claims. In Guatemala one often gets the impression that everyone is eager to destroy the others so that one's own group might gain power and money. Rigoberto Queme Chay, the first indigenous mayor in Guatemala and a Mayan activist, says this about his and others' work in the indigenous movement:

"I have come to the conclusion that we as the Maya movement, the only thing that we are doing is looking for funding and money to make any kind of event, reunion etc. As I see it we have fallen into the economical trap, we use the indigenous flag just to do superficial stuff… having meetings and make general declaration. But we do not have any political agreements, no political organizations, nor visions."

International donor community

The last aspect that I find very fruitful when analyzing the awakening or lack of awakening of the indigenous movements in Guatemala and Bolivia is the role of the international donor community. As mentioned earlier the international network has been important for the indigenous movement all over the world, but I am now speaking about the economical support given by international donor to development programs for indigenous movement organisations and in indigenous communities. After the Peace Accord in Guatemala in 1996 the whole world of NGOs and state-to-state agencies were in Guatemala. For example in Quiche, more than 24 international NGOs started developing some sort of development programs in the area. This I will argue had large implications on the possible development of civil movements in Guatemala as opposed to in Bolivia. Of course, in Bolivia there has also been international donors supporting programs, but not to the same scale as in Guatemala. One of my informants says this about the international community in Guatemala:

"The international communities have been very bad for us... it has generated a whole sector of NGO functionaries that only moves in the direction where there is money, very pragmatic. And to gain this economical support we have to make social development projects, not political ones. In a way the donors stops us from making any proper political agenda."

"From Resistance to Political Power" was the title of this paper, and I will sum it up by saying that the road from resistance to political power is long and that there are several aspects such as organisational maturity, openness in the "indigenous" discourse and the role of international donors, that influences how steep and at what cost the road to empowerment is going be. However, it is not possible to copy a model from one country to another, so the Mayan in Guatemala need to find their own formula.

Thank you very much.