

The indigenous peoples in Mexico under the “transition” government

Francisco Guízar Vázquez

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México / fguzarv@uaemex.mx

Hernández, Rosalva Aída, Paz Sarela y María Teresa Sierra [coords.]
(2004), *El Estado y los indígenas en tiempos del PAN: neoindigenismo,
legalidad e identidad*, México: Porrúa, CIESAS, Cámara de Diputados
LIX Legislatura. ISBN 970-701-524-1

The book gathers a series of texts where the situation of the indigenous peoples of Mexico is analyzed after the three first years of a government from the National Action Party. The long-expected "Political Transition of the Mexican Government" was a relevant event in the recent history of the country because of different factors: the change of the party in power, National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN) managed to electorally defeat Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI), which had governed the nation for more than seventy years; the advancement, in terms of the democratic consolidation of political processes, as the 2000 election showed important progress as for the strengthening of democratic institutions, which in previous elections lacked the faculties to grant the minimal democratic legitimacy; the setting into motion of a new way to exercise power by means of public and governmental policies, which at first were offered as plural and open to civil participation.

A large share of Mexican society put into PAN its expectations for the improvement of the country in terms of economy, social security, employment and state of legitimacy. As time passed, reality showed that said party mainly responded to the interests of the oligarchic groups that had supported it with economic resources and mass media in its presidential electoral campaign. The consequences of this alliance became the aggravation of the negative effects of a series of radical neoliberal policies, which the elite in power had been carrying out.

The first symptoms of such acting are the object of study of this book, as for the relation of the indigenous peoples with PAN. The book is composed of an introduction and thirteen chapters, even if they, as a whole, show an analysis of the situation at national level, it is on the States of Oaxaca and Chiapas where most of attention is paid. The chapters are grouped into three sections; the first one refers to what the authors call "Neo-indigenism" or the new way to design and implement policies for the indigenous people; the second section refers to the legal reforms that in relation to indigenous rights have been performed in the new political regime; and the third part inquires into the effects neo-indigenist policies and the new legal framework have on the identity processes of the involved peoples.

The introduction, in charge of the coordinators of the book, concentrated its analysis on two principal aspects of the relation between the State and the indigenous peoples:

a) The new integrationist mark, whose ideological foundation is to be found in the concept of “free individual”, where the indigenous individual is willing to sale their labor force or lands in the neoliberal market, thus disarticulating the immediate social networks of the indigenous communities.

b) The strategy to fragment indigenous oppositions through a decentralized governmental system with a multicultural ideology, which in the facts atomizes the indigenous demands in a limited territorial sense.

They propose to concentrate attention on the construction of proposals on multiculturalism which have as a fundament the recognition as a political factor of mobilization, inside a framework of the struggle for hegemony and headed to attack old corporativist barriers still unsurpassed. At the same time, recognition must conjugate the notion of retribution of material goods and the principle of equality.

From the section on neo-indigenism, the chapter by Natividad Gutiérrez Chong offers an analysis of the actuating of the new indigenist model and its relation with new punctual aspects, such as the legal reforms as for indigenous law, the solution of Chiapas conflict and its chronic defenselessness. The author proposes to interpret public action of the governmental indigenist sector from the point of view of political marketing. With this, it is understood that the main intention of the governmental actors is that of strategically positioning themselves in the political hierarchy by means of propaganda and marketing referring to irrelevant actions at the level of social facts. From the indigenous peoples, she criticizes the fact that the evident prevalence of intermediaries in the most transcendental negotiations with governmental agents and the rest of society; these intermediaries usually are not indigenous individuals.

Paloma Bonfil, from a perspective proper to “official” indigenism, offers a series of reflections on the rights of indigenous women and the difficulties they face to access the institutions that provide them with help.

Salomón Nahmad warns on what he considers the most disintegrating threat against indigenous peoples, orchestrated by international institutions such as the World Bank; the author finds in PAN an ally of said neoliberal policies.

Neil Harvey presents us with a perspective on "the zopilote that does not come down: Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP)"; the author pinpoints some of its main aspects, as well as the sides which promote it and those which oppose. Obviously, entrepreneurs and groups in the political power are interested in implementing it, whereas the bulk of poor population in the south is unconfident, not to say totally opposed to a plan that does not seem to land.

Setting off from the experience of two cases of redefinition of municipalities in Chiapas, Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor evaluates the capabilities of the local population to attain *de facto* autonomous statutes before the governmental strategies, which tend to limit the faculties of local governments through the homogenization of institutions and the atomization of their fighting fronts.

Opening the second section on Legality, Magdalena Gómez carries out a succinct analysis about the constitutional reform process related to indigenous law; she offers a sketch of the 2001 constitutional reform, and explores the vicissitudes of the constitutional controversies presented to the Supreme Court of Justice critically showing the argumentations of the directly involved parts.

Francisco López Bárcenas makes a broader study, in chronological terms, for in his chapter he summarizes the construction of the juridical order of the Mexican State in its relation to the indigenous peoples, from Independence to our times. The author states that there is a continuity stance from the State that gravitates around authoritarianism, anti-democracy, exclusion of multiculturalism and in favor of homogeneity.

Juan Carlos Martínez links the recent process of constitutional reform with the State of Oaxaca; related in a systematic way are the juridical and political aspects which gravitate around legal transformations.

Consuelo Sánchez carries out a study on the same reform at national level; she criticizes the official impetuosity for indigenist or assimilationist notions in opposition to autonomy. It is justified in relation to the

“marginalization” the indigenous peoples experience. The resulting reform is judged unfair and offensive to said peoples, so the creation of an autonomist movement, which surpasses the very indigenous peoples, is urged, thus making the notion of autonomy an issue related to every citizen.

Aída Hernández commences the section on identity; she studies the policy of identities PAN has boosted through its discourse. As a counterpoint, she exposes the demands from indigenous peoples and the results of this clash of demands, promises and failures. She emphasizes the role of indigenous women in enriching the debate with their contributions to their recognition rights.

María Teresa Sierra reflects from a personal experience of teamwork on the design of a proposition of constitutional reform to recognize indigenous rights in the State of Puebla. Critically assuming the paradoxes on the liberalizing capacity of indigenous rights, such as liberal stances that warn on the coercive quality of collective rights by means of autonomy, as well as those of the radical pluralists, who see indigenous rights as concepts of occidental origin, alien to the reality of the peoples whereupon they fall, the author supports juridical concepts that, besides guaranteeing the autonomy of the peoples, recognize the right of the lower-ranked voices inside the communities, such as those of indigenous women.

Héctor Díaz Polanco points out that the first crass failure of President Vicente Fox, from PAN, was the unsuccessful attempt to recognize the indigenous rights. The author lists the demands of the indigenous side and the official responses as well as the consequent strategies that were headed to develop communities, not indigenous regions. The author warns on the need to conjugate criteria both of cultural recognition and socio-economic equality when stating the proposals to recognize the autonomy of indigenous peoples.

Sarela Paz Patiño offers us a study on corporatism in indigenous regions, in its classical expression as *casiquismo*. She performs an analysis on Oaxaca and Chiapas and on the dilemmas said situation brings along for communal consensus and recognition of indigenous rights.

As a whole, the chapters are valuable documents for those interested in the subject, since independently from the different viewpoints on punctual aspects, their critical and creative approach enriches the debate on the

directions of the indigenous movement, the tendencies that public policies will have to follow with the governments from PAN and the possibilities to channel the longed indigenous autonomy. It would have been indeed interesting however, to add a chapter of general discussion with the authors so as to specify coincidences and underscore disagreements on crucial aspects, such as the role of political intermediation in indigenous movements, the possibilities of alliances with political parties and with social movements in society.

Francisco Guízar Vázquez; Fulltime professor of Institute of Agricultural and Rural Sciences, Autonomuos University of the State of Mexico. He has a degree in Philosophy, from Universidad de Guadalajara and a doctorate in Social Sciences on Rural Studies from El Colegio de Michoacán. Currently, he is responsible for the project: "Consuetudinary law among Matlazincas and its relations to access and management of natural resources" (*El derecho consuetudinario entre los matlatzincas y sus relaciones con el acceso y la gestión de los recursos naturales*).