

THE ISSUE OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS: FROM GEOPOLITICS TO GEOPOLICIES

Executive summary

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The indigenous issue is a challenge to obsolete social, political and economic paradigms, but it can be used as a powerful lever of reform to change and make more competitive and liveable a whole country, freeing it from the cost and weight of old and burdensome conflicts and opening new, sustainable paths of development.

In order to manage this change one has to take into account not only the crisis of the nation state, but also of the financial capitalistic system and reassess strategic interests and political priorities in a new paradigm. The necessary conceptual and strategic shift requires to go from classic geopolitics to "geopolicies": i.e. the deliberate projection of a set of social projects on a geographic space. Putting human societies at the centre helps in overcoming the evident limitations of both the geopolitical and the geoeconomic approach.

In operational terms this means:

- Reassessment of infrastructural projects in view of their real usefulness in a region where short logistic chains are the majority and long logistic chains become economically non viable; thorough re-evaluation of major mining projects both in their ecologic/overall impact and in their profitability; reconciliation and re-engagement processes vis-à-vis the local/indigenous communities enacting the necessary land reforms;
- Moving from old centralised organizations towards a state that exploits fully the flexibility and resilience of networks, while retaining essential decision making capabilities (networked state);
- A new social market economy, managing common goods and balancing the public policies between social needs, reasonably regulated markets and multi-level political interests;
- Reorganizing markets around social market economy rules allowing the competition and profits of a sustainable real economy, while curtailing shadow and open financial capitalism and its extra profits.

The nature of the issue

A snapshot of the issue can be given by these three different events:

- Colombian indigenous groups blockade for more than a week the military base of Tres Cruces (Three Crosses) in the Cauca region, just three months after its set-up. The natives oppose this structure because they argue that it intensifies war and violence in the area, while the militaries say that the installation is strategic for the pacification of the region (15/6/2012);
- During the Mexican political campaign the representatives of 57 indigenous populations from 23 different states, convened by the Movimiento Indígena Nacional (National Indigenous Movement), published a political declaration in nine points (26/6/2012);
- After Ecuador had accorded diplomatic asylum to Mr. Julian Assange (the chairman of Wikileaks), the Aboriginal Nations of Australia provided him with a passport, taking issue with the government of Australia for failing to protect her citizen vis-à-vis the US pretensions to put to trial an Australian without human rights guarantees (15/9/2012).¹

At first glance the question posed by the activity of indigenous groups can be perceived as a new/old challenge against the state in its three manifestations: monopoly of violence, political processes and its very legitimacy. Yet to look at the issue only through these lenses would be politically narrow minded, a recipe for perpetuating an issue lasting since more than 500 years and moreover choosing a geopolitically elusive target as the following maps and charters show.

Ethnic groups in LatAm with 100.000 units and more

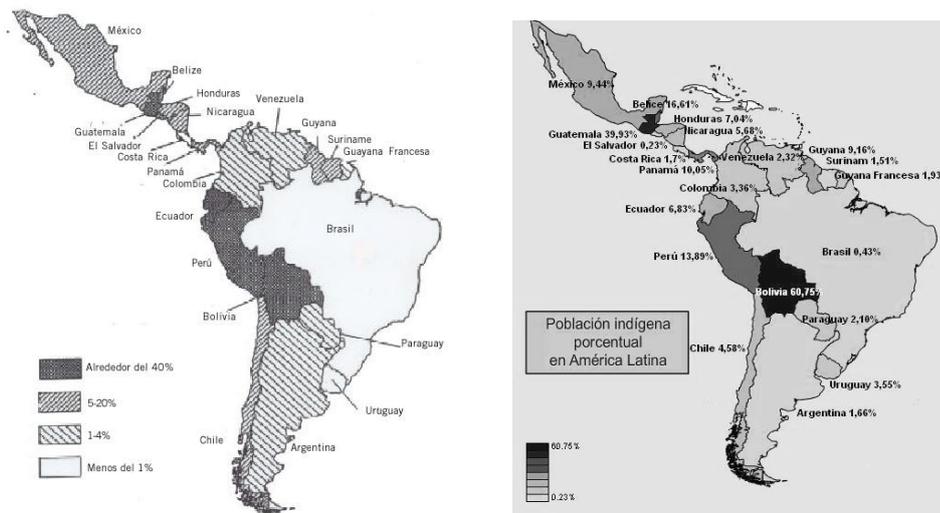
Grupos étnicos en América Latina con 100,000 o más personas		
Grupo étnico	Ubicación	Población
Quechua	Perú, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina	12'581,114
Maya	Guatemala, México, Honduras, El Salvador	6'509,000
Aimara	Bolivia, Perú, Chile, Argentina	2.296.000
Náhuatl	México, El Salvador	1.197.328
Mapuche	Chile, Argentina	988.000
Zapoteco	México	403.457
Wayúu (Guajiro)	Venezuela, Colombia	297.456
Misquito	Nicaragua, Honduras	285.000
Otomí (Nahñil)	México	280.238
Garifuna	Honduras, Nicaragua, Belice, Guatemala	220.000
Lenca	Honduras	220.000
Totonaca	México	207.876
Paez	Colombia	140.000
Ngöbe (Guaymí)	Panamá	123.626
Su bitava	Nicaragua	100.000

Source: http://www.centrogeo.org.mx/atlaslatinoamerica/pobl_cultur/ame_hoy.htm (10/9/2012).²

¹ See <http://avn.info.ve/node/117629/> the mobilization against the base was still continuing in September 2012; <http://alainet.org/active/55969&lang=es>; <http://correiodobrasil.com.br/assange-recebe-passaporte-aborigene-dos-povos-originaarios-da-australia/512950/#.UE2hda5Gh8E> (20/9/2012).

² Numbers are based on data collected by year 2000.

LatAm indigenous population in percentage per country



Source: left, World Bank 1992,

http://coleccion.educ.ar/coleccion/CD9/contenidos/sobre/pon2/index_imprimir.html (8/10/2012);

right, <http://atlas pueblos indigenas.files.wordpress.com/2010/05/poblacion-indigena-porcentual.jpg> (15/9/2012)

LatAm indigenous population: the numbers per country



Cuadro II.3 Población indígena y pueblos indígenas por país en América Latina y el Caribe

PAÍS	POBLACIÓN TOTAL NACIONAL	PUEBLOS INDÍGENAS	POBLACIÓN INDÍGENA	% POBLACIÓN INDÍGENA
Antigua y Barbuda (2005)	81.479	1?	258	0,3
Argentina (2001)	36.260.160	30	600.329	1,6
Belice (2000)	232.111	4	38.562	16,6
Bolivia (2001)	8.090.732	36	5.358.107	66,2
Brasil (2000)	169.872.856	241	734.127	0,4
Colombia (2005)	41.468.384	83	1.392.623	3,3
Costa Rica (2000)	3.810.179	8	65.548	1,7
Chile (2002)	15.116.435	9	692.192	4,6
Dominica (2005)	78.940	1?	2.099	2,6
Ecuador (2001)	12.156.608	12	830.418	6,8
El Salvador (2007)	5.744.113	3	13.310	0,2
Guatemala (2002)	11.237.196	24	4.487.026	39,9
Guyana (2001)	751.223	9	68.819	9,1
Guyana Francesa (1999)	201.996	6	3.900	1,9
Honduras (2001)	6.076.885	7	440.313	7,2
México (2000)	100.638.078	67	9.504.184	9,4
Nicaragua (2005)	5.142.098	9	292.244	5,7
Panamá (2000)	2.839.177	8	285.231	10,0
Paraguay (2002)	5.163.198	20	108.308	2,0
Perú (2008)	28.220.764	43	3.919.314	13,9
Santa Lucía (2005)	160.750	1?	775	0,4
Surinam (2006)	436.935	5	6.601	1,5
Trinidad y Tobago (2000)	1.114.772	1?	1.972?	1,7
Uruguay (2004)	3.241.003	0	115.118	3,5
Venezuela (2001)	23.054.210	37	534.816	2,3
América Latina y El Caribe	481.190.282	665	29.496.894	6,1%

Source: UNICEF Atlas indigenas 2010, http://www.movilizando.org/atlas_tomo1/pages/tomo_1.pdf (15/9/2012).

As said, a geopolitical approach yields very partial results:

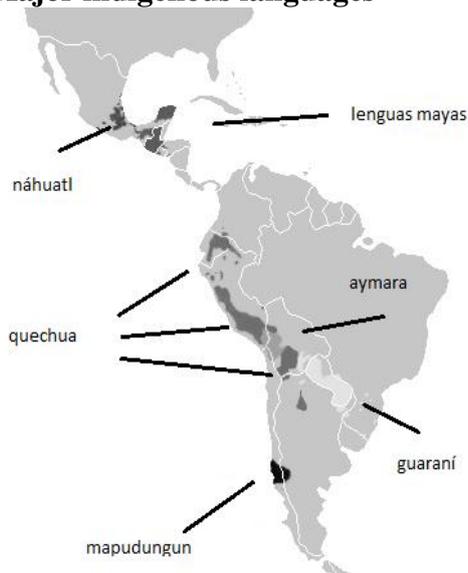
- The most important indigenous nations are in descending order: Quetchua, Maya, Aymara, Nahuatl, Mapuche (with a range from more than 12 million to 988.000 units)
- These groups straddle across the borders of different countries like: Peru, Bolivia (Quetchua and Aymara), Ecuador, Colombia, Argentina (Aymara and Mapuche), Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Chile;
- The groups that enjoy some territorial continuity are the Maya and Nahuatl in Central America, whereas in Southern America Quetchua and Aymara are contiguous;
- If one roughly assumes that critical social integration conditions can emerge when a minority represents around 10% of the total population, the countries in descending order may present these conditions are: **Bolivia** (where indigenous populations are the majority), **Guatemala, Belize, Peru, Panama, Mexico** and **Guyana** (these two have respectively 9,44% and 9,16% of native population);
- In conclusion there is **no conventional geopolitical indigenous block**, whose problems can be tackled by an equally traditional geopolitical approach;
- There are instead diffuse areas with variable concentrations of different indigenous nations that are the tenacious heirs of older civilizations (see following map), overrun by the conquistadores and apparently tamed by half a millennium of violent discriminatory racial and class politics.

Actual natives and old Pre-Colombian empires



Source: World Bank (2001-2004 data), <http://www.economist.com/node/2446861> (8/10/2012).

Major indigenous languages



Source: <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero45/lengindi.html> (9/10/2012).³

Are these repressive politics still viable in the short-medium term? No, although the indigenous renaissance and awakening is not irreversible, as every socio-political phenomenon; in other words the use of violent means both public and private is still envisageable in theory, but their effectiveness is limited in time and the cost are very high.

Contrary to North America, where natives were almost completely assimilated and confined into reserves, the “indios” are still around in sizeable numbers to claim their own rights. The first resistance wave rose during the Sixteenth Century, followed by a second one at the beginning of the Nineteenth century and the third at the beginning of the Twentieth. In the 'Seventies began the fourth wave, that is still lasting today. It is remarkable that this one started precisely when the Plan Condor ravaged political and social opposition groups in most South American countries.⁴

From a security point of view a better angle to the problem is provided by a synoptic view of different social disturbances, conflicts, political clashes, riots that characterize the area. Although each country has its own problems, it appears that on one hand land enclosures, deforestation, massive mining operations, land contamination, forced migrations, intensive monoculture are connected with social resistance movements and on the other military/paramilitary activities or consistent police deployments are linked to social protest movement and/or narco-conflicts.

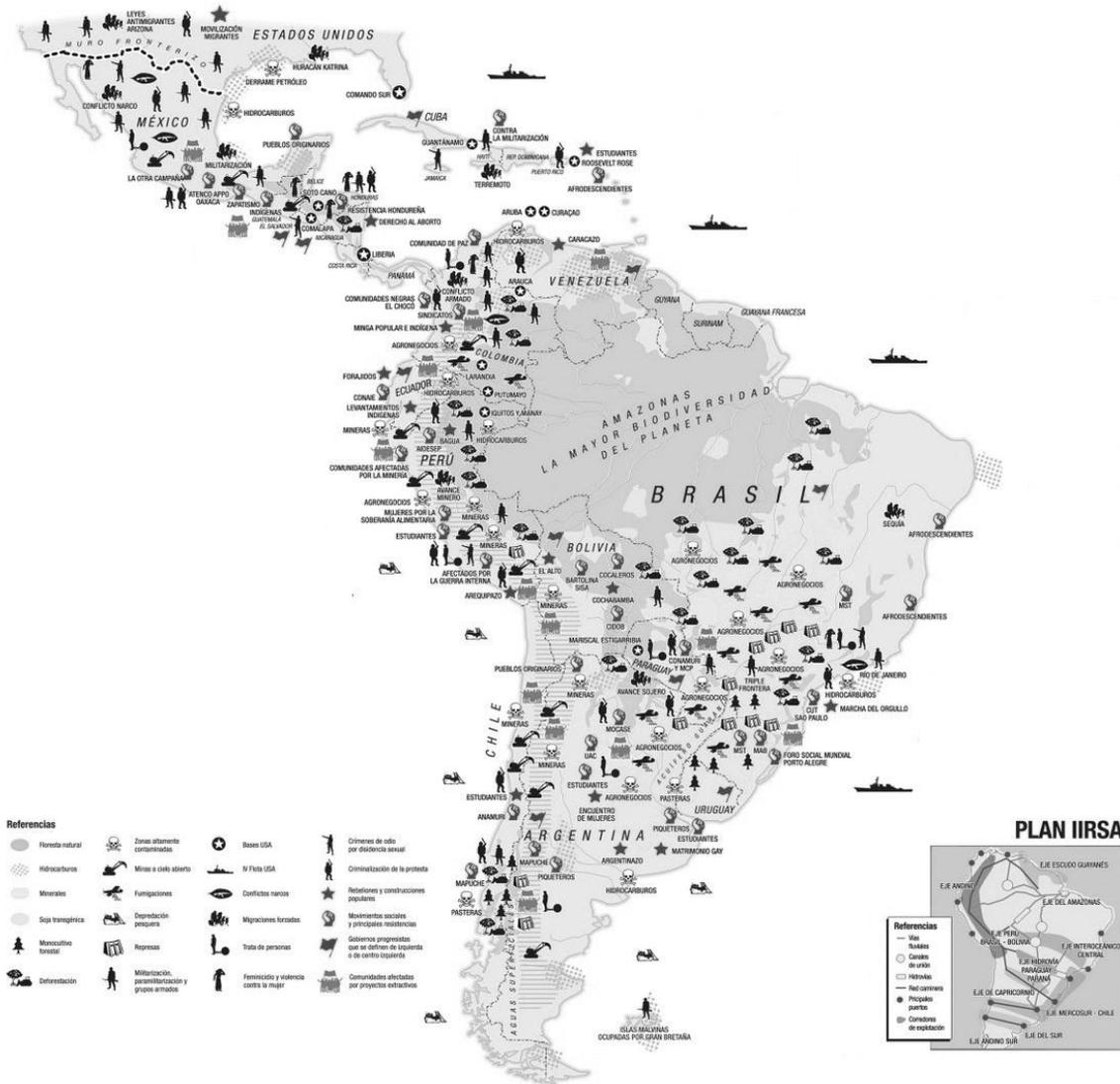
It is not by chance that even socially antagonistic movements correlate their monitoring of social protests with agribusiness, mining, forest exploitation and the massive infrastructural plans promoted by IIRSA (Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana).⁵

³ Mapudungún is the language of the Mapuche.

⁴ The Plan or Operación Condor was the repressive co-ordination among military dictatorships, carried out in the '70 and '80 of the past century with the assistance of the CIA, in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay with sporadic participation from governments in Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. The dictatorships in Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, Peru expressly repressed indigenous movements and identities following the doctrine of national security (Amazonian populations, Mapuche, Pacahuara, Waimiri Atroari, Aché).

⁵ The Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (IIRSA) is an institutional mechanism that co-ordinates the intergovernmental action of 12 South American countries with the common agenda of developing energy, communication and transport infrastructural projects. It was created after a meeting of the South American presidents in Brasilia (August 2000) in order to modernize regional infrastructures and develop underdeveloped regions.

Map of Latin American social conflicts (2010)



Source: <http://forajidosdelanetwar.blogspot.it/2011/12/cartografia-colectiva-de-las-luchas-de.html> (8/10/2012)

What is interesting to notice, from the open source background regarding the events that are behind the symbols, is that in general indigenous populations are not the actors of violent conflicts (guerrillas, narcoguerrillas, death squadrons, paramilitaries etc.), but more often than not the victims.

Recurring information regarding forced recruitment, indiscriminate mining of native territory, armed intimidation and raids, collective and individual killings, tortures, risks of extinction due to protracted conflict between state and non-state actors, show that it is illogical to designate more or less numerous indigenous communities within a state as a serious challenge to the monopoly of violence. The following table illuminates a subtler reality, regarding instead political processes and relevant aspects of the legitimacy of the existing nation states, not just in the area.

Patterns of States-within-states in Latin America

	Coercive power	Territorial control	Resource extraction
Indigenous communities	low	yes	yes
Liberated zones	high	yes	yes
Military autonomy	high	yes	partly
Organized crime	high	partly	yes

Source: GIGA Research Programme: Violence and Security State-Building, War and Violence: Evidence from Latin America, Sabine Kurtenbach, No 181, November 2011.

In other words, indigenous communities are a multifaceted political issue, exactly as Catalonia in Spain, Scotland and Wales in the UK, South Tyrol or the inchoate “Padania” in Italy, Flanders in Belgium, the Åland Islands in Finland, Greenland in Denmark and similar territories around the world.⁶

In this sense they are party (or, according to some political circles, opposing party) to the political process that is redefining world-wide the traditional Nineteenth and Twentieth Century nation state. Bolivia is a good example of the indigenous issue, precisely because indigenous populations are a majority, the president is an Aymara, the state is expressly multinational and the traditional coca leaf consumption is preserved. The main friction points between the government and its indigenous constituencies are:

- The **road cutting across the TIPNIS** indigenous area and park (Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory - Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro-Secure), designed to connect Villa Tunari to San Ignacio de Moxos. The controversy started in 2011 when the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (Bolivia’s Indigenous People Confederation – CIDOB) organized a march that in the end obtained a specific law protecting the TIPNIS. Successively the Consejo Indígena del Sur (Southern Indigenous Council – Conisur) fought for and obtained from the government the promulgation of the Ley 222 de Consulta Previa (Law 222 of Previous Consultation). Despite a law that obliges the government to consult the indigenous populations before any major project affecting their life and territory (be it mining, energy, infrastructure, forestry, etc.), the CIDOB had to organize the Eighth March for the defence of the TIPNIS (September 2011). The 24th of October 2011, president Evo Morales enacted a law declaring the park inviolable, promising that by 4/12/2012 the relative regulations would be completed. On 6/10/2012 Mr. Morales signed the contract for the construction of the first trunk of the road, arguing that 45 of the 69 local communities had accepted the project, numbers that are disputed by the indigenous organizations that say that 32 of the 63 communities are contrary.⁷ If the road will not be built, then the indigenous coca farmers’ constituency will withdraw its support from the

⁶ The mentioned cases are expressly those where in recent times there have not been armed struggles regarding autonomy or independence. The author understands that the expression “state-within-state”, used by the quoted German researcher, must be interpreted in its wider political sense, but argues that, at least for the classic definition of state or nation state, a high degree of coercive power is one of its essential characteristics. The creation of an independent Padania in Northern Italy or at least a federal Italian state, featuring a big Northern state, has been since 1991 the main aspiration of the corresponding party Lega Nord per l’Indipendenza della Padania (Northern League for the Independence of the Po River Region – in short Lega or Lega Nord).

⁷ EFE, 6/10/2012, Morales firma un contrato para reanudar las obras de una ruta resistida por los indígenas http://www.google.com/hostednews/epa/article/ALEqM5jGVB_SOThefXGLdznumJFVFCAlw?docId=1883859 (11/10/2012).

MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo), the president's party, jeopardizing the political future of Mr. Morales.

- **The Corocoro copper mining project**, against which the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ – National Council of the Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu) is raising the issue that previous consultation was not carried out. In October 2001 the South Korean firm Kores (Korea Resources Corporation) ended a two-year exploration phase that should now be finalized in a massive extraction activity to be carried out in collaboration with the local mining Comibol company (Corporación Minera de Bolivia). The local communities state that: they were not consulted; there was not an ecological impact evaluation before starting mining activities; the Ponce de Leon river was diverted to start copper mining and damaging the nearby villages and that the mining companies' personnel threatens systematically the natives.
- **The San Bartolomé silver mining project**, against which the communities of Ayllu Jesús Machaca have started an appeal against the illegal expropriation of 400 hectares of land in 2004 by the extractor Empresa Minera Manquiri SA, a wholly owned subsidiary of Coeur d'Alene Mines Corporation of the US, in co-operation with Comibol. The issue is still unresolved while the mine has reached full production in 2008 and has expanded activities in 2012.
- **The cocaleros connection**. Evo Morales started his political career as coca producers' unionist (cocalero) and he still keeps strong connections with this constituency. Indigenous groups complain that this group is more supported than other sectors of society, allowing it to exceed internationally agreed quotas for traditional coca consumption at the expense of other agricultural activities. The cocaleros are among the strong supporters of the TIPNIS road project because this would open new lands for the cultivation of coca.
- **The highlands-lowlands divide**. Morales, despite assuring that he is the president of all Bolivians, is accused by the lowlanders (who are in minority vis-à-vis the Quechuas and Aymaras) to favour highlanders, who are considered more important and worthwhile than the Mimasas, Moxeños and Yurakarés i.e. the same groups damaged by the TIPNIS project.

To sum up, Bolivia as a case study shows that there are three major issues mobilising politically and socially indigenous groups: land, major projects and national-social identity. This is, as this very simplified map illustrates, a recurring cluster of themes across Central and South America.

Disputed transport, energy and mining projects

Some key areas of dispute



Source: BBC Brazil, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-17827131> (8/10/2012).⁸

Land is a primary and ancestral political/psycho-political stake; the distribution of land was a primary issue in all ancient societies and agrarian reforms have always been a crucial passage from chaos to order and, later, from archaism to modernity. While in the past Latin American agrarian reforms were the bone of contention between Liberals and Conservatives of the same white and mestizo social class, today they are the essential claim of dispossessed tribes.

In several cases of the past the social struggle pitted the monopoly of violence by the state controlled by the upper white and mestizo classes against the attempt to populate and control territory by indigenous groups. The way territory is controlled is an essential element of legitimacy of any political order, since the times when Romulus killed Remus because he had trespassed a sacred limit (VIII B.C.).

At the same time the claim on a territory is also a claim regarding collective social identity, which gives origin to the contrasts between highlanders and lowlanders, nomads and sedentary peoples, cattlemen and farmers, dominant classes and the rest of the population. Here comes into the picture also the so called racial issue, which is just one of the ways for justifying economic and political inequality.

⁸ Own black and white adaptation of original coloured clickable map.

Reaffirming the “indio” identity poses three distinct socio-political problems to governments and governances that have more or less ethnocentric traits mingled with classic Marxian socio-economic domination structures:⁹

- It is a challenge to the white and mestizo traditional collective identity, very often tracing its origins to the Conquista¹⁰. The separatist clashes during 2008 in order to set up a distinct government in the rich part of Bolivia are a very clear example of this crisis;
- It creates a dissenting view in a “melting pot” society where apparently race is not an issue as long as all cultural components agree to complete assimilation (as it may happen for instance in the USA or in Brazil);
- It reveals that some indigenous groups are more important than others and that discriminatory indigenous nationalism can co-exist with indigenous claims vis-à-vis precedent elites, not speak about the distinct and generally lower class condition of the Afrodescendientes (Blacks and Afro-Indians).

It poses also specific dilemmas to local revolutionary movements because one thing is the classic Marxist-Leninist doctrine and practice of creating wide social and political fronts with all the social components dissatisfied with the old dictatorship and another is to recognize a distinct collectivist non-Communist social order entailing an autonomic form of government.

Long standing guerrillas that have resorted to criminal economic systems to finance themselves and survive, like the Colombian FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), consider indigenous populations as targets for juvenile forced recruitment, land grabbing, requisitions and retaliations against suspected governmental collaborators (often in the form of collective punishments).

From geopolitics to geopolitics: a way out of old dilemmas

The dilemmas that are facing actual elites and governments are momentous: development or ecology; a centralised state or a quasi-federal one; state property or common goods; state or community/ies; public policies or regional-local agreements; positive/common law or a mixture with bylaws; global competitiveness or local balance.

If one wants to find a balance between distinct and sometimes opposing choices, one has to consider the classical glocal approach that requires local engagement, but postulates at the same time a global vision on the fundamentals of the role of politics and the entailing policies.

The nation states in Latin America, as in many other parts of the world, are a fruit of geopolitics, i.e. the deliberate projection of a political project on a geographic space. This projection is the result of the political use of hard power, supported by the means of soft power. This approach has produced the countries as they are today in Latin America, but one can convincingly argue that it is not sufficient to allow them to advance into the future. We shall see that the abovementioned dilemmas and that other critical issues are substantially the same in other continents.

The conceptual passage that is needed is a switch from geopolitics to what we call “geopolitics”. Geopolitics take into account the momentous change in the global arena at the transition of a century: the nation state’s deep crisis due to the multiple forces of the globalisation and re-

⁹ Democracies are not at all immune from these problems that constitute a continuum spanning from tolerated racial popular/populist urges to real Herrenvolk democracies, where only the superior, chosen people enjoy real democracy

¹⁰ Code words: Hispanidad and Nacionalismo Ladino (mixed race or Creole or Mestizo nationalism).

localisation; the passage from static power geometries to liquid balances and liquid balance hubs; the dominance of financial capitalism over politics and the crisis of financial capitalism itself.¹¹

The distinctive element of geopolitics is that they place at the centre of their action a human society project whose definition is essential for planning the appropriate politics, economics and economics. Different ideologies (they never died) can offer different concrete solutions for the organization, stability and development of a society, but putting society first means trying to overcome in first instance the usual problems of dominant politics (power play, use of force, corruption, indifference to concrete social needs, etc.). It means also neutralizing the typical disasters that we are experiencing with geoeconomy.¹²

While the local aspect of a geopolitics design has to be calibrated on each concrete situation, the global vision, in order to escape the present dilemmas, has to include a number of synergistic elements, namely:

- Network
- Node building
- Shared principles
- Nonviolence
- Responsibility to promote (Re2Pro).

Network and node building mean essentially leaving pyramidal-centralistic approaches and organizational paradigms in order to embrace a more resilient and flexible organization of the country, which makes the best out of different identities in a common networked state.¹³ A network, in order to function, allowing different degrees of freedom to the different nodes (whose autonomy, integrity, interdependence and good functioning are useful for the solidity of the network itself), needs to have shared and enforced principles that give coherence to the concrete behaviours of citizens and rulers.

Two of these principles are essential to overcome painful legacies transforming the way interests and political differences need to be tackled and transformed: nonviolence and Re2Pro. Nonviolence is a consequence of the “disarming hearts and minds” that is indispensable in many Latin American countries and it is coupled with a responsibility not just to protect citizens but to actively promote their overall well-being, through a really sustainable development not just in ecologic, but also social terms.

What these general principles mean in practical terms vis-à-vis the initial dilemmas can be summed up in the following way:

- Reassessment of infrastructural projects in view of their real usefulness in a region where short logistic chains are the majority; thorough re-evaluation of major mining projects both

¹¹ Liquid balance and liquid balance hub are terms coined Nomisma’s Nomos & Khaos project. A liquid balance is an unstable balance between international state and non-state actors that are presently more unstable than in the past. A liquid balance hub is a centre of multiple balances around a power constellation that organizes unstable balances around herself. See VVAA (A. Politi ed.), Nomos & Khaos 2008, Bologna, 2008.

¹² Geoeconomy is the deliberate projection of an economic project on a geographic space, with evident political and social consequences. During the Cold War geoeconomy was a strategic planning and action mode that followed economic dynamics in the framework of a political logic. This situation changed towards the end of the Cold War and was prepared by the deregulation policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Today geoeconomy is a deliberate projection of an economic project on a geographic space, without really caring about the political and social consequences.

¹³ The networked state is not the neo-Liberal reticular governance that wants to dissolve the state in a cloud of local powers who are easy prey to powerful transnational corporations. The networked state expresses a real government that instead is not centralistic, but has backbone capabilities in a coherent network of local autonomies.

- in their ecologic/overall impact and in their profitability; reconciliation and re-engagement processes vis-à-vis the local/indigenous communities enacting the necessary land reforms;
- A networked state that goes beyond the old federal structure, allowing communities to express their potential in an environment of shared rules and principles that facilitate a smart subsidiarity between different judicial systems;
 - Common goods managed by a new social market economy, where market and economy are expression of social needs that find a synergy with individual interests in public policies where co-decision among different actors and levels is useful and necessary;
 - A virtuous global competitiveness because whole continental markets will be accessible only through the diffusion of the new social market economy rules. The main differences between the actual system and the new one will be the curtailing of shadow and open financial capitalism, together with the attendant extra profits, while allowing the flourishing of a sustainable real economy.

In conclusion, the indigenous issue is a challenge to obsolete social, political and economic paradigms, but it can be used as a powerful lever of reform to change a whole country, freeing it from the cost and weight of old and useless conflicts and opening new, sustainable paths of development. The ways of reform need to be creative and conceptually advanced, precisely because old utopias have proven their ineffectiveness, but the stakes of these reforms are concrete as also the effects of realising them. Without fully integrating indigenous communities in a networked states the future Latin American generations will lose a historic opportunity and will remain paralysed by conflicts that are still tractable, if electors and governments are farsighted enough.