

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH  
METHODS continued...

***Indigenas, Indigenistas, Tinterillos,  
and Marxists***

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In May of 1929, a group of Indigenous workers from the Zumbahua hacienda in the central highland Ecuadorian province of León arrived at the offices of the Ministerio de Previsión Social y Trabajo in Quito with complaints of abuses that they were experiencing at the hands of the hacienda's bosses and mayordomos. Alberto Moncayo, the renter of the hacienda, claimed that he had made very favorable concessions to the peons, that accusations of beatings and abuse were false, and that the leaders who were in Quito were the only Indians unsatisfied with a proposed resolution to the conflict. If left alone, these "ignorant Indians" would not be causing these problems. Therefore, it must be outsiders who were manipulating the situation for their own gain. Under pressure from the central government, provincial governor G. I. Iturralde arranged for the Indigenous workers and the hacienda's renter to agree on a series of reforms. "Now the situation is absolutely calm," the governor concluded. "I have discovered the *tinterillo*, the instigator of this situation, and he will be punished severely."<sup>2</sup>

On December 30, 1930, Cayambe's *Jefe Político* in northern Ecuador sent a telegram to the Ministro de Gobierno noting that Indigenous workers on the Pesillo and Moyurco haciendas had revolted. Augusto Egas, the director of the *Junta Central de Asistencia Pública* program that administered these haciendas, denounced the presence of Bolshevik instigators, whom he believed were imposing communist ideologies and manipulating the Indians into attacking the haciendas. Claiming that the

Indians had been "exploited by false apostles," elites created a scenario with a chain of command through which instructions flowed from Marxists in Quito to local non-Indigenous communist leaders in Cayambe to Virgilio Lechón and other local Indigenous leaders at Peñillo and finally to the peons on the hacienda: this was a Bolshevik attempt to disrupt the social order of the country and create *una revolución comunista indígena*.<sup>5</sup>

On September 14, 1943, a group of urban intellectuals founded the Instituto Indigenista Ecuatoriano (IIE) as the Ecuadorian branch of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano. IIE director sociologist Pío Jaramillo Alvarado labored energetically to disseminate the indigenist ideal: "to liberate the Indian from the slavery in which he lives."<sup>6</sup> Their 1964 *Declaración Indigenista de Quito* states that the "integration of indigenous groups into the economic, social, and cultural life of their nations is an essential factor for development."<sup>7</sup> The presence of a small Indigenous delegation that observed the drafting of this document shocked the white organizers. "The interest which those aboriginal delegates demonstrated for the items discussed," the *indigenistas* reported, "was a true revelation."<sup>8</sup>

*Tinterillos*, Marxists, and *indigenistas* approached Indigenous struggles in fundamentally different ways, engaging different issues and seeking to achieve different ends. The *tinterillos* were opportunistic and exploitative intermediaries from neighboring towns who because of their Spanish-language and education skills, were able to draft legal petitions and provide other similar services. Unlike *tinterillos*, *indigenistas* usually lived and worked in urban areas at a distance from Indigenous communities with which they had little if any contact. Almost exclusively the domain

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of white intellectuals, *indigenistas* paternalistically pontificated on solutions to rural poverty, solutions which often involved assimilating Indians into a homogenous Mestizo culture.

Although contemporary elites denounced Marxist activists in Indigenous communities as abusive *tinterillos* who exploited their marginalization to stir up social conflict, and subsequent scholars spurned them as *indigenistas* who paternalistically attempted to assimilate ethnic populations into western notions of class struggle, in reality their relations with Indigenous communities were much more complicated. Like *indigenistas*, they were from distant urban centers, but like *tinterillos* they had direct and occasionally intimate knowledge of Indigenous communities. Like *tinterillos*, they helped Indigenous peoples bridge the wide gap between rural communities and central political structures, but, like *indigenistas*, they brought an ideological agenda to these interactions, rather than merely seeking personal profit. Indigenous and leftist struggles became intertwined in ways that had never happened and could not happen with either *tinterillos* or *indigenistas*. Because of the nature of their contacts, Marxists gained a degree of legitimacy in Indigenous eyes that *tinterillos* or *indigenistas* never were able to accomplish. In their interactions with each other, the Indians and Marxists began to influence each others' ideologies, with the Indians becoming communists and the Marxists acquiring a deep respect and understanding for multi-cultural societies. Their initial motivations for interacting could be seen in turn as mutually exploitative and mutually beneficial, but in the end the two groups had dramatic impacts on each other.<sup>10</sup>

### Indians and the Internet

Today no respectable social movement would be caught dead without email and a web page. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the problems Indigenous activists encounter in accessing the Internet are often similar to those that limited their predecessors' access to state institutions in the first part of the twentieth century. The range of interactions of Indians and intermediaries are similar in both periods.

Language continues to be one of the main problems facing Indigenous communities. In the early twentieth century, mediators were needed to bridge the linguistic gap between the mono-lingual Kichwa world and that of the dominant Spanish culture. Today, many Internet resources and tools are difficult to access without English-language skills. Indigenous activists often rely on European or North American academics to translate their documents for a global audience.

In addition to language, there are also technological barriers. In the early twentieth century, Indigenous activists needed legal assistance to present demands to the government. Present-day cyber activists require technological assistance with coding HTML, acquiring web space on a server, and registering a domain name. It is not an issue of conceptualizing or articulating a struggle, but the mechanics of framing and presenting issues in a way that reach an external audience. Although it is by no means impossible for a social movement to do this alone, the process is greatly facilitated with external assistance. For this reason, Indigenous activists tend either to put off building their own pages, or pass it off to third parties.<sup>12</sup>

Internet communications also involve issues of cost, which raise similar parallels with earlier activists who also had limited access

to funds to travel to Quito or purchase the legal paper on which petitions were drafted before being presented to the government. These costs can present barriers for activists wishing to inform the world of their demands.

Achieving direct Indigenous control and autonomy over these means of communication is a critical goal. Learning to build a web page can be a very empowering experience that allows activists to speak directly to the world without the interference of intermediaries. At least for the foreseeable future, however, it appears that outsiders will continue to play a role in this process while Indigenous activists acquire the necessary skills to design and maintain their own websites. In the meantime, this should not be seen as a limitation, but, rather, as an opportunity to build a stronger movement that draws on the skills and knowledge of outsiders, while at the same time leading to a heightened level of political consciousness.

### Collaborative Research

What is the role of academics in an Indigenous struggle? Depending on how they are negotiated, these relations can be mutually beneficial, mutually exploitative, or a combination of both. Academics become involved in the struggles of other peoples for a variety of reasons, with some being more honorable than others. Often, the most annoying of practices—usually not particularly dangerous and occasionally helpful—are those operating in an *indigenista* mode, and involve well-meaning liberals paternalistically pontificating at length on someone else's poverty without having any extended or direct experience of that person's reality. Websites in this mode abound on the Internet, reflecting the indignation against social injustices that

drove Jorge Icaza's novel *Huaspungo*. While often providing good sources of information or a broader socio-economic context for a political struggle, they do little to give voice to the instigators of social movements.

Much more dangerous, but, also fortunately, much less common, are websites run by cyber *tinterillos*. Operated for the (probably psychological more than material) benefit of the web editor rather than of a social movement, these can compromise or misrepresent Indigenous voices in order to advance agendas that at times can be foreign or even run counter to subaltern interests.<sup>13</sup>

Respectful relationships in which people interact as equals, even while understanding their differences, is often the best model to follow. The initiative and guiding force for these endeavors must come out of Indigenous communities; otherwise, they are bound to fail. This does not negate the important and often invaluable role of outsiders. As with Marxists working with Indigenous activists in Cayambe in the 1930s, it can lead to fascinating and intellectually rewarding exchanges that are also mutually beneficial. Indigenous activists gain access to platforms and audiences that would otherwise be difficult to realize. Academics, Leftists and the public in general gain access to voices and perspectives that otherwise would be difficult to hear given distance and language barriers.

It is, of course, simplistic to boil down motivations into only one of these three categories of *indigenistas*, *tinterillos*, and Marxists. Given the complex nature of human behaviors, a person's actions can easily cross these lines. But as academics analyze their roles in supporting Indigenous struggles, they should strive to move away from acting as *tinterillos* or *indigenistas*, and work toward the goal of assuming more of

the collaborative attitude of the 1930s Marxists.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> J. Alberto Moncayo, "Remitido," *El Día*, May 22, 1929, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from G. I. Iturralde P., Gobernador de León, to Director de la Junta de Asistencia Pública, June 30, 1929, Oficio no. 150, *Comunicaciones Recibidas*, Enero-Junio 1929, Archivo Nacional de Medicina del Museo Nacional de Medicina "Dr. Eduardo Estrella," Fondo Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, Quito, Ecuador, 338-39.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Augusto Egas to Sr. Ministro de Gobierno, January 7, 1931, in *Libro de Comunicaciones Oficiales de la Dirección de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública*, 1931, JCAP, 6.

<sup>4</sup> "Los indios de las haciendas de Cayambe han tornado a sus diarias ocupaciones en el campo," *El Comercio*, February 5, 1931, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Augusto Egas, Segundo D. Rojas V., and Ernesto Robalino to Ministerio de Gobierno y Asistencia Pública, April 30, 1931, in *Comunicaciones Recibidas*, Enero-Junio 1931, JCAP, 900.

<sup>6</sup> Pío Jaramillo Alvarado, *El indio ecuatoriano*, vol. 2, 6th ed. (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1983 [1922]), 264.

<sup>7</sup> Inter-American Conference on Indian Life, *V Congreso Indigenista Interamericano*, vol. 5, Acta final (Quito: Tall. Graf. Nacionales, 1965), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Inter-American Conference on Indian Life, *V Congreso Indigenista Interamericano*, vol. 3, *Artesanía, defensa de la salud, seguro social y poblaciones selváticas* (Quito: Tall. Graf. Nacionales, 1965), facing page 32.

<sup>9</sup> Beate R. Salz, "The Human Element in Industrialization: A Hypothetical Case Study of Ecuadorean Indians," *American Anthropologist*, Memoir No. 85 57:6, Part 2 (December 1955): 133.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> Issues that social movements encounter in using computer technology are discussed in Osvaldo León, Sally Burch, and Eduardo Tamayo, *Social Movements on the Net* (Quito: Agencia Latino Americana de Información, 2001); also published in Spanish as *Movimientos sociales en la red*.

<sup>12</sup> This theme is also discussed in León, *Social Movements on the Net*, 152f.

<sup>13</sup> Larry J. Zimmerman, Karen P. Zimmerman, and Leonard R. Bruguier, "Cyberspace Smoke Signals: New Technologies and Native American Ethnicity," in *Indigenous Cultures in an Interconnected World*, ed. Claire Smith and George Ward (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 60-86.