

and open to broad interpretations, has been nearly impossible. Attempts to broaden the concept of "indigenous" to capture the multifarious experiences of indigenous peoples across the globe make clear that although the concept is not as problematic when it is used in specific local contexts, it is problematic when used to generalize unrelated historical experiences into a universal theme. Its very generality makes "indigenous identity" susceptible to arguments for greater or lesser inclusiveness.

While there is a need for a more precise conception of indigeneity, the absence of a definition that is both universally acceptable and applicable has not been a significant hindrance to indigenous peoples themselves or to their political activities, nor has it significantly undermined or limited the legitimacy of indigenous claims in national and international institutional processes. Yet the lack of a universally accepted definition may allow states to delay ratifying and implementing the indigenous rights framework that is emerging in international law, as states and their legal frameworks require specificity.

SAIIC

The South American Indian Information Center (SAIIC) was established in 1983 as a project of the South American Indian Council (CISA) to provide information on and international support for CISA and the indigenous rights movement in South America. The SAIIC represented the first attempt to unify indigenous struggles across the Western Hemisphere.

The center was formed at the Second Conference of Indian Nations and Organizations of South America, held in Tiwanaku, Bolivia. Delegates at this meeting sent Nilo Cayuqueo, a Mapuche from southern Argentina and one of the founding members of CISA, to Oakland, California, to coordinate the SAIIC and its activities. Founded with the support of North American solidarity activists, SAIC became an organization led and directed by native peoples.

The SAIIC supported self-determination and the unification of the indigenous rights movement on a continental level through a series of projects and programs, including the publication of a quarterly journal, production of a radio program, an indigenous visitor and cultural exchange program, human rights and urgent action alerts, and public presentations. The center began publication of the *SAIIC Newsletter* in 1984 to broadcast information on indigenous struggles across the Americas. The newsletter grew in size and importance, and in 1993, it was renamed *Abya Yala News*, using the Kuna word for the Americas as the name of the journal.

In July 1990, together with the Confederation of

Moreover, the lack of a universally accepted definition of indigenous peoples facilitates a dynamic discourse involving its various meanings, levels, and actors. So while different participants in the discussion hold different views about the meaning of "indigenous," the dialogue eventually may lead to more stable shared meanings as those entities produce, enforce, reinforce, and institutionalize their ideas through action. More important, such a process facilitates the social act of creating intersubjectivities by which those who identify themselves as indigenous create meaning out of what they understand their role to be as both participants in and subjects of international relations.

Examining Identity

Since the 1960s, the increase in identity-based claims, such as gender, ethnic, and sexual identity, has generated an upsurge of interest in identity as a concept. The word *identity* is derived from the Latin term *iden-*

Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador and the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, the SAIIC sponsored the First Continental Conference on 500 Years of Indian Resistance in Ecuador. Four hundred delegates from 120 indigenous nations and organizations across the Americas joined in defense of common interests. The meeting helped galvanize unity against the upcoming quinquennial celebration of Christopher Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Subsequently, the SAIIC helped lead an "Indianist" or ethnic wing of international indigenous organizing efforts against a popular movement centered on Guatemalan Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú.

In 1986, the SAIIC changed its name to the South and Central American Indian Information Center in order to include Mexico. In 1994, the name was changed once again to the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center, pointing to a turn toward ethnic advocacy. (However, it always retained the acronym SAIIC.) Also in 1994, the organization helped create the Abya Yala Fund, the first foundation founded and run by indigenous peoples to work on development and advocacy issues in rural communities.

In 1998, internal divisions caused the journal to cease publication and the organization's offices to close. Subsequent efforts to revive an organization with the SAIIC's political outlook and hemispheric reach have been largely unsuccessful.

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