Indians in Latin America –
Colonialism and cultural Diversity

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RESÜMEE

Der Aufsatz bietet eine Zusammenfassung der Geschichte der indigenen Bevölkerung in Lateinamerika seit der Eroberung durch die Iberer im 16. Jahrhundert bis heute. Der Beitrag diskutiert die Prozesse der *conquista*, die Struktur der Kolonialherrschaft sowie das Schicksal der indigenen Bevölkerung nach der Unabhängigkeit. Die soziale und kulturelle Heterogenität der indigenen Bevölkerung wird im Besonderen untersucht, ebenso wie die Rückwirkungen auf die Entwicklung des Kolonialismus. Zudem liefert der Artikel eine Analyse der Bedeutung, die verschiedene Akteure – darunter koloniale und postkoloniale Eliten, indigene Bewegungen und Sozialwissenschaftler – der Kategorie „Indio" beimaßen. Die Bezeichnung weist zwar koloniale Wurzeln auf, wurde aber von den Indigenen in den letzten Jahren selbst verwendet.

1. Who is an Indian?

… [an] Indian [indio] is a member of an indigenous community [comunidad indígena]. An indigenous community differs from mestizo communities in this country by virtue of its language, customs, internal organization, social situation and religious beliefs, in a word … its culture.[1]

This typical definition of the category "Indian" is from Alfonso Caso, head of the Mexican National Indigenous Institute INI (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*) in the 1950s. The central importance attributed to cultural criteria reflects the prevailing point of view

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1   A. Caso, Lo que no es el indigenismo, in: SEP (ed.), La comunidad indígena, Mexico City 1971, p. 164. This and all subsequent translations are mine.

among Latin American anthropologists and social scientists in the mid-twentieth century. Compared to earlier definitions, which stressed the pre-Hispanic origin of indigenous cultural traits, Caso's attempt at clarification was an important advance: by pointing out that many of the traits considered "indigenous" today are by no means ancient but the result of the clash between the pre-Conquest indigenous people and the Iberians, he succeeded in introducing a historical perspective. He made clear that several costumes worn by Indians and regarded as typically "Indian" were indeed of European origin. This is true, for example, of the *rebozo*, a coloured woven shawl worn by indigenous women in Mesoamerica, the conical hat and wide woollen skirt so typical of peasant women in the Andes, or the knee breeches worn by men in the Guatemalan lowlands. Beyond this, many materials used in the production of Indian costumes today, such as sheep's wool or synthetic dies, are of post-Conquest origin, as are a number of motifs employed in textile designs (e.g., chickens, horses, donkeys or sheep).[2]

Like most of his colleagues in Latin America, Caso was convinced that the indigenous communities were doomed to disappear in the course of modernization, that is, that they would acquire the cultural traits typical of white or mestizo villages. Consequently, the political aim of the INI and similar institutions in other Latin American countries in the first half of the twentieth century was to integrate the indigenous population through modernization, while preserving some of the "noble aspects of their ancient cultures", such as arts and crafts.[3]

In fact, Caso did not provide a definition of the term "Indian" but (implicitly) referred to the members of indigenous language categories or ethnic communities as such, since common cultural traits could only be found for these groups. "Indian", however, is merely a collective name that disregards the cultural and lifestyle differences of the people it refers to. The drawback of definitions such as Caso's are obvious. They leave no room, for example, for inclusion of the growing number of Indians living in the cities or those who are well-educated and work as teachers, lawyers or technicians.[4] Beyond this they neglect that the cultural differences *between* indigenous groups are frequently more significant than those to their direct mestizo neighbours.

The approach of many critical intellectuals to the Indian question in Latin America changed decisively at the beginning of the 1970s. They did not attempt to define who was or was not an "Indian" in terms of physical or cultural criteria, but considered "Indian" an analytical category. Hence, the Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfíl Batalla remarked:

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2   See A. Caso, Definición del Indio y lo Indio, in: La Nueva Democracia, 30 (1950) 2, p. 82.

3   See A. Caso, Definición (note 2), p. 85. This evidently referred for the most part to heirs of the ancient civilizations of Mesoamerica and the Andes, and less to the lowland Indian groups, frequently considered "primitives".

4   In the early 1990s, more than half of the one million Mapuche living in Chile resided in the urban areas. More than 500,000 members of this indigenous group lived in the capital of Santiago alone. The number of people (over the age of four) who speak an indigenous language and live in Mexico City rose from 350,000 in 1980 to 1.6 million in 1990. See G. Muñoz Ramírez, Su lucha en vivo, in: Ojarasca, (2005), no. 100; M. Nolasco, Migración indígena y etnicidad, in: Supplement to Antropología, 31 (1990), pp.3-5.

> *When we understand the Indian [indio] as the colonized, we consider him a historical phenomenon whose origin and persistence depend on the emergence and continuity of the colonial system. Thus, by necessity the category Indian includes its opposite – that of the colonizer. … The Indian does not exist as such but only as part of a contradictory dichotomy, whose overcoming – the liberation of the colonized – means the disappearance of the genuine Indian.*[5]

Bonfil Batalla belonged to a circle of Latin American intellectuals who pleaded for the integration of the Indian struggle for liberation into the broader social conflicts and class struggles in Latin America. They assumed somewhat optimistically that Indians and the Latin American lower classes objectively had the same interests due to their shared economic exploitation and political marginalization, and that common political action would easily be possible. Hence, in spite of his otherwise detailed analysis of social differentiation among the indigenous people, the anthropologist Stefano Varese concluded at the beginning of the 1970s "… that any heightening of [ethnic] group consciousness is accompanied by the intensification of class consciousness in Latin America today".[6] While Bonfil was correct in stressing the colonial origin of the category "Indian", he and his colleagues ignored the importance of social and economic differences among the indigenous populations. Beyond this they severely underrated objective economic and political contradictions between Indians and the non-Indian lower classes, e.g., the case of poor highland Indian colonists in the eastern slopes of the Andes who intrude into the hunting and gardening grounds of lowland groups, as well as the tenacity of racist attitudes widespread in all social classes in Latin America.

Compared to earlier ideas, however, conceiving the term "Indian" as an analytical category and linking it to colonialism was a major advance. The miserable living conditions of most Indians were neither attributed to genetic peculiarities, as the social Darwinist theories of the nineteenth century had done, nor were they seen as the result of the fundamental backwardness rooted in the culture of indigenous peasants, as twentieth-century modernization theory would have it. The approach of Bonfil and his colleagues, in contrast, focused attention on the relations of domination and exploitation under which most Indians had suffered since the Conquest.

Although the definitions of Caso and Bonfíl appear completely different at first glance, they share several commonalities. In both visions, the term Indian is defined *ex negativo*, i.e., not by what it is but by what it is not. Neither Caso nor Bonfil refer to the indigenous groups in their own right but regard as Indian what is different to the dominant national culture and society. In this view Indians are conceptualized as "the others" – as backward people standing in the way of modernization, or as exploited and oppressed groups. For Bonfíl, Zapotec peasants and the hunters and gatherers of the Amazonia had

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5   G. Bonfil Batalla, El concepto de indio en América: una categoría de la situación colonial, in: Anales de Antropología, 9 (1972), p. 122.
6   See St. Varese, Ethnische Strategie oder Klassenstrategie, in: Indianer in Lateinamerika. Neues Bewußtsein und Strategien der Befreiung. Dokumente der zweiten Tagung von Barbados, Wuppertal 1982, p. 41.

only one thing in common, namely, their shared position as colonized people.[7] Determining the essential characteristics of "the Indians", even in a positive evaluation, could be highly problematic, as evident in the sixteenth-century works of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, bishop of the diocese of Chiapas and renowned "defender of the Indians", where the natives of America are described as follows:

> *They were very docile and extremely faithful … humble, patient, peace-loving and tranquil; squabble, discord and quarrel were unknown to them; they were even unaware that resentment, hate, discord or revengefulness existed.*[8]

This idea of the "noble savage" has continued to appeal to many up to the present day. It is, however, merely the positive mirror image of opinions that depicted Indians as "barbarians" to justify the conquest of the Americas. Such was the case with López de Gómara, secretary of Mexico's conqueror Hernán Cortés, who characterized the American natives as polygamous homosexual idolaters with a predilection for regularly sacrificing humans and eating their flesh.[9] Both views are equally misleading and strongly reflect European projections than the lived reality in the Americas.

2. The diversity of Amerindian societies and cultures, and the attempts to destroy it

As is widely known, the American "Indians" owe their name to the error of the Genoese sailor Cristobal Colón (or Columbus), who was convinced of having discovered a new sea route to East India. He had in fact stumbled on a continent hitherto unknown to Europeans. In a papal bull in 1537, Pope Paul III recognized that the natives of the Americas were not just animals with the ability to speak but real humans. These "Indians", as they were called by the conquerors, were far from homogeneous. They differed greatly with respect to language, mode of living and social organization and showed several dissimilarities in terms of physical traits, such as skin colour or average height.[10] Although statements about the number of Amerindians on the eve of the Conquest cannot be more than "informed guesses"[11], the most probable estimates suggest that between 40 and 80 million people were living in the Americas at the time, most of them south of the Rio Grande.[12] The spectrum of languages spoken has been classified into approxi-

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7 See G. Bonfil Batalla, El concepto (note 5), pp. 108, 119.

8 B. de Las Casas, Kurzgefaßter Bericht von der Verwüstung der Westindischen Länder [original 1552], Frankfurt a. M. 1981, p. 9.

9 See F. López de Gómara, La conquista de México [original 1552], Madrid 1987, p. 34.

10 For a concise overview, see U. Schüren, Indigene Kulturen vor der europäischen Eroberung, in: F. Edelmayer / B. Hausberger / B. Potthast (eds.), Lateinamerika 1492–1870, Wien 2005, pp. 13-31.

11 N. Farriss, Maya Society Under Colonial Rule, Princeton 1984, p. 57.

12 See M. Coe (ed.), Weltatlas der Kulturen: Amerika vor Kolumbus, München 1986, p. 13; F. Edelmayer, Spanien und die Neue Welt, in: F. Edelmayer / B. Hausberger / M. Weinzierl (eds.), Die beiden Amerikas, Frankfurt a. M. 1996, p. 54.

mately one hundred language families. More than two hundred languages are known for Mesoamerica alone, and Nahuatl, which is spoken in the central highlands of Mexico, subdivides into nineteen languages that are mutually incomprehensible.[13]

Mesoamerica in the north and the Andean highlands in the south were the most densely settled parts of Latin America in the late fifteenth century. Complex societies, such as the Inca and Aztec empires, each with several million subjects, had evolved there and were based on the intensive cultivation of corn, potatoes and other crops. These societies were characterized by urbanism and monumental architecture, class stratification (nobility, priesthood, artisans and peasants), and state religions that provided legitimacy for the complex systems of domination. The intermediate area comprising the West Indian Islands, Central America and the northern parts of South America was also densely inhabited by people who were mostly organized in chiefdoms. In these mainly agricultural societies, centralized leadership and inequality in the form of ranking prevailed.[14] Political and social organization, however, proved to be less complex than in the core areas. Similar structures existed in the south and southeast of the Andes and on the fertile alluvial plains (*varzeas*) along the major streams of the Latin American lowlands, such as the Amazon and the Orinoco. The economy of the societies in these areas was based on hunting, fishing and the cultivation of manioc or other root crops apart from corn. Most of the Latin American lowlands (with the exception of the Yucatan Peninsula) were populated by often highly mobile people who combined hunting and fishing with gathering and gardening, and lived in relatively small groups with no central political authority.[15]

The differences among the native societies sketched above had significant consequences for the patterns of conquest and colonization in each region. Indigenous state societies were conquered in comparatively short periods. The Aztec empire of central Mexico, for example, fell after little more than two years (1519–21).[16] The Spaniards ousted only the top imperial leaders from office, installing themselves at the apex of an existent, highly centralized, political hierarchy. The common population, mostly composed of peasants and their families, was accustomed to relinquishing parts of their surplus product and labour to the aristocracy and the state. Thus, the Spaniards were able to refer to estab-

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13   M. Coe, Weltatlas (note 12), p. 13, 42-45, 86, 156-157; O. Smailus, Sprachen, in: U. Köhler (ed.), Altamerikanistik. Eine Einführung in die Hochkulturen Mittel- und Südamerikas, Berlin 1990, p. 263.

14   Chiefdoms were organized for the most part by (real or fictive) kinship ties. While people generally controlled their basic means of production, access to prestige goods was restricted. Hence, although ranking did exist, there was no genuine class stratification. See M. Fried, The Evolution of Political Society, New York 1967, pp. 109-154, 182-191; E. Service, Primitive Social Organization, Profiles in Ethnology, New York 1971, pp. 133-169.

15   For general overviews, see the contributions of León-Portilla, Helms, Murra, Hidalgo, and Hemming in: L. Bethell (ed.), The Cambridge History of Latin America, Cambridge 1984, Vol. I; see also A. Roosevelt, Chiefdoms in the Amazon and Orinoco, in: R. Drennan and C. Uribe (eds.), Chiefdoms in the Americas, Lanham, London and New York 1987, pp. 153-185; N. Whitehead, The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: The Caribbean (1492–1580), in: F. Salomon/St. Schwartz (eds.), The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas, Vol. III, South America, Part 1, Cambridge 1999, pp. 864-903; M. Rostorowski, History of the Inca Realm, Cambridge 1999.

16   In the Andes it took somewhat longer (1532–1539) for the Spanish to establish control.

lished institutions of government and exploitation. Although the enslavement of Indians played a major role during the Conquest and the initial years thereafter, it was soon replaced by other forms of tribute (e.g., *encomienda*) and forced labour (*repartimiento*, *cuatequil*, *mita*).[17]

The most vital sector of the colonial economy in Mexico and the Andes was the exploitation of the silver deposits discovered in the mid-sixteenth century. Large estates (*estancias*, *haciendas*) for breeding cattle, sheep and goats or growing European crops, such as wheat, for the colony's domestic market began to develop in the seventeenth century and were mostly Spanish-owned. However, the indigenous population was not completely deprived of their lands, and native peasant communities remained an important sector of colonial society. Although obliged to provide labour and pay tribute to the Crown, they were granted rights to village lands and resources, and to a limited form of self-administration by native officials. Hence the Indian communities functioned as producers of a surplus that could be appropriated by the Crown and the *encomenderos*, as a labour reservoir for the mines, haciendas, and other Spanish enterprises, and, at the same time, as a source of cheap foodstuffs and craft products.[18]

Conquest and the subsequent establishment of colonial rule was more difficult in the case of less centralized native societies, where each chiefdom or village had to be conquered individually. The Iberians were confronted with the difficult task of fundamentally changing, for example, existent patterns of authority, the division of labour and the distribution of surplus. Among many of the lowland tribes, stable leadership institutions had to be newly invented. The natives were frequently unwilling to work for others or hand over their products unless obliged to do so by force.[19] Since gold and silver deposits (exploitable at that time) were either limited or non-existent, native inhabitants constituted the sole "commodity" of interest to Europeans.[20] Slavery remained a key institution of colonial exploitation for a much longer period here than in the colonial core areas. This was especially true for the frontier regions and large areas that remained outside effective Spanish and Portuguese control, such as northern Mexico, parts of the

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17   The *encomienda* in its "classic" form meant the privilege granted by the king of receiving tribute from a group of Indians. In *repartimiento*, Indian communities had to release a fraction of their able-bodied population at periodic intervals to work for Spanish employers. See, for example, Ch. Gibson, Indian Societies under Spanish Rule, in: L. Bethell, Leslie (ed.), The Cambridge History of Latin America, Cambridge 1984, Vol. II, pp. 399-407; J. Garavaglia, The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: The La Plata Basin (1535–1650), in: F. Salomon/ St. Schwartz (eds.), The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas. Vol. III, South America, Part 2, Cambridge 1999, pp. 9-15.

18   See, for example, S. Zavala and J. Miranda, Instituciones indígenas en la colonía, in: A. Caso et al. (eds.), La política indigenista en México. Métodos y resultados, Vol. I., Mexico City 1954, pp. 67-77, 80-98, 124-132; Ch. Gibson, Indian Societies (note 17), pp. 388-395, 399-411; K. Spalding, The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: The Andean Area (1500–1580), in: F. Salomon/St. Schwartz (eds.), The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas. Vol. III, South America, Part 1, Cambridge 1999, pp. 934-942.

19   See, for example, J. Lockhart, Social Organization and Social Change in Colonial Spanish America, in: L. Bethell (ed.), The Cambridge History of Latin America, Cambridge 1984, Vol. II, pp. 281-283; J. Garavaglia, The Crises (note 17), pp. 1-2.

20   See, for Brazil, J. Hemming, Indians and the Frontier in Colonial Brazil, in: L. Bethell (ed.), The Cambridge History of Latin America, Cambridge 1984, Vol. II, pp. 503.

Amazonian lowlands, the pampas of Argentina and southern Chile. The native people here were subject to violent incursions of Spanish troops and slave raiders for the entire colonial period.[21] Many of these regions were not conquered until the second half of the nineteenth century (e.g., southern Chile and Argentina as well as much of the Amazonian lowlands), decades after the Latin American states had acquired their independence from Spain or Portugal.

Another form of slavery emerged on the West Indian Islands and the Brazilian coast. The West Indies was the first region in Latin America to be conquered by Europeans. During the initial decades after the arrival of Columbus, it was to experience Spanish colonialism in its most anarchic and violent form, which led to the total disappearance of the Indian population on the larger islands within a few generations.[22] Tupi Guaraní-speaking groups scattered along the Brazilian coastline met a similar fate. They were rapidly decimated by incursions and slave raids once Portuguese colonization had begun in earnest in 1533. The lack in both regions of a local native labour force stimulated slave raids in the hitherto unconquered adjacent areas. As a result, the Spanish began hunting slaves on the Lesser Antilles and in mainland Central America during the first half of the sixteenth century.[23] In Nicaragua, for example, about 200,000 indigenous people were enslaved and sold to the Caribbean Islands, Panama or Peru in the first half of the sixteenth century alone.[24]

The enslavement of Indians was forbidden by the so-called New Laws (*Nuevas Leyes*) in the Spanish colonies in 1542 and in Brazil in 1570. However, this restriction did not apply to indigenous inhabitants in the frontier areas, should they refuse to acknowledge the supremacy of the Spanish or Portuguese Crowns.[25] Continuing well into the eighteenth century, Portuguese slave raids proceeded along the Amazon and southwards into Paraguay.[26] Even drastic measures such as these were unable to satisfy the labour needs

21 See J. Lockhart, Social Organization (note 19), pp. 283-285; Ch. Gibson, Indian Societies (17), p. 385; J. Hidalgo, The Indians of Southern South America in the Middle of the Sixteenth Century, in: L. Bethell (ed.), The Cambridge History of Latin America, Cambridge 1984, Vol. I; pp. 91-92; J. Hemming, Indians (note 20), pp. 536-545; R. Wright and M. Carneiro da Cunha, Destruction, Resistance, and Transformation - Southern, Coastal, and Northern Brazil (1580–1890), in: F. Salomon / St. Schwartz (eds.), The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas. Vol. III, South America, Part 2. Cambridge 1999, pp. 293, 295, 306, 318-321, 329-330, 347-350; J. Garavaglia, The Crises (note 17), pp. 6-7; H. Langfur, Uncertain Refuge: Frontier Formation and the Origins of the Botocudo War in Late Colonial Brazil, in: Hispanic American Historical Review, 82 (2002) 2, pp. 215-256.

22 See, for example, N. Whitehead, The Crises (note 15), pp. 868, 871-872, 889; M. Livi-Bacci, Return to Hispaniola: Reassessing a Demographic Catastrophe, in: Hispanic American Historical Review, 83 (2003) 1, pp. 3-51.

23 See Ch. Gibson, Indian Societies (note 17), pp. 401-402; Coe 1986:21; N. Whitehead, The Crises (15), p. 873; J. Monteiro, The Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies: Coastal Brazil in the Sixteenth Century, in: F. Salomon/St. Schwartz (eds.), The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas. Vol. III, South America, Part 1. Cambridge 1999, pp. 973-1023.

24 See M. MacLeod, Spanish Central America. A Socioeconomic History, 1520–1720, Berkeley 1973, p. 52.

25 See S. Zavala / J. Miranda, Instituciones indígenas (note 18), pp. 83-87; P. Bakewell, A History of Latin America. Empires and Sequels 1450–1930, Malden, MA 1997, pp. 305, 328; J. Monteiro, The Crises (note 23), pp. 1005-1006.

26 See J. Hemming, Red Gold. The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500–1760. Cambridge, 1978, pp. 38-44; P. Bakewell, A History (note 25), pp. 321-322, 328f; J. Hill, Indigenous Peoples and the Rise of Independent Nation-States in Lowland South America, in: F. Salomon / St. Schwartz (eds.), The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas. Vol. III, South America, Part 2. Cambridge 1999, pp. 709, 737, 739, 742-743.

of the developing plantation economies, so that African slaves had to be imported on a massive scale, especially to the Caribbean islands and Brazil.

To understand the conquest of Latin America and the establishment of colonial rule, it should be noted that far from being politically unified, the native population was divided into numerous different and frequently hostile group dominions. As is well known, the conquest of the large indigenous empires began in the early sixteenth century with the arrival of small numbers of Spaniards. Hernán Cortés began his campaign against the Aztec ruler in 1519 with only 519 men. Francisco Pizarro was accompanied by no more than 180 Spaniards when he landed in the far north of Peru in 1532. The Aztec (Mexica) and Inca empires, however, were not highly integrated or unified wholes. They were polities that had emerged from a cycle of conquests carried out by certain indigenous groups in the early fifteenth century. The result was a complex structure of political subjection and economic exploitation dominated by the Incas and the Aztecs. Hence, the Spanish conquerors were able to take advantage of existing contradictions. In both cases, the Spaniards happened on a situation of political turmoil. A full-scale civil war over succession to the leadership of the Inca empire raged in Peru, while the empire's elite in Mexico was split as a result of power struggles between different factions. The indigenous groups and polities most recently conquered by the Aztec and Inca empires or threatened with submission at the time of the Conquest became the most important allies of the Spaniards.[27]

A similar pattern of Spanish or Portuguese and Indian alliances can be detected in many of the colonial frontier regions. In the coastal areas of Brazil, for example, several Tupi-Guarani groups allied themselves in the course of the sixteenth century to the Portuguese or the French in order to obtain firearms and gain advantages in the recurrent wars with their traditional indigenous enemies.[28] In Paraguay, the Guarani welcomed the first Europeans as allies in their defence against raids by the mounted Chaco Indians.[29] In northern New Spain, Christianized Indians as well as Spanish missionaries and settlers were forced to defend themselves against incursions by the Apache and other nomadic groups.[30]

Apart from that, indigenous groups were repeatedly involved in the Indian slave trade, selling their war captives to Europeans.[31] This practice continued after the independence

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27   A discussion of the reasons for the Spanish success in Mexico can be found in W. Gabbert, Kultureller Determinismus und die Eroberung Mexikos - Zur Kritik eines dichotomischen Geschichtsverständnisses, in: Saeculum, 46 (1995), pp. 276-294. For Peru, see K. Spalding, The Crises (note 18), pp. 922-926, 931.

28   See J. Monteiro, The Crises (note 23), pp. 991-997.

29   See P. Bakewell, A History (note 25), p. 243; D. Reff, The Jesuit Mission Frontier in Comparative Perspective, in: D. Guy / Th. Sheridan (eds.), Contested Ground. Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire, Tucson 1998, p. 20.

30   See D. Guy / Th. Sheridan, On Frontiers. The Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire in the Americas, in: D. Guy and Th. Sheridan (eds.), Contested Ground. Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire, Tucson 1998, pp. 3-15.

31   See, for example, J. Hemming, Indians (note 20), pp. 512, 519-530, 535; N. Whitehead, The Crises (note 15), p. 893.

of the Latin American colonies from Spain in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The massive spread of firearms in the lowlands led to an intensification and radicalization of violent conflicts within and among different indigenous groups. The desire to obtain guns or other manufactured goods, such as iron cooking pots or steel knives, fuelled the hunt for members of neighbouring indigenous settlements, who were than sold to European slave traders. The demand for exotic goods in Europe led to a hitherto unknown expansion of headhunting among the Jívaro in Peru and Ecuador between the 1860s and 1920s. Traders paid Jívaro warriors in the form of a gun for each shrunken head.[32]

The indigenous groups in Latin America differed socially and culturally, as did their specific role in the drama of conquest and colonization. However, all of them suffered – albeit to varying degrees – from a veritable demographic catastrophe that led to a reduction in their numbers of up to 90 per cent in many regions and to complete depopulation in others. Thus, the indigenous inhabitants on Hispaniola had already been exterminated in the middle of the sixteenth century. In Mexico and Central America, for example, the native population declined from 11-25 million on the eve of the Conquest to around 1.25 million in 1625. Population losses were apparently somewhat less severe in Peru.[33] Although most deaths were caused by epidemics such as influenza or small pox, the warfare, forced labour and famines that resulted from the breakdown of precolonial systems of production and distribution also played their part.[34]

3. Indians as colonial subjects

Spanish law defined "Indians" (*indios*) as a special social category (estate) to which one belonged by birth. Indians were subject to specific laws and decrees. They had to pay tribute to the Iberians and provide them with forced labour. Regarded as minors and wards of the Crown, they were forbidden to bear arms, ride horses, or dress like Spaniards.[35] However, the colonial order that developed in the sixteenth century did not rest purely on the domination of the indigenous population by a few Spanish soldiers and officials – as a dichotomic view such as that of Bonfil suggests. In reality, colonial rule depended to a crucial degree on precolonial traditions of social differentiation. Up to the late eighteenth century, the Spaniards did not have the resources to uphold their authority with immediate military means or to secure the supply of native labour or tribute, even in the colonial core areas. Hence, for most of the colonial period, it was the native intermediaries who were to play a significant role in maintaining the colonial system.

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32   See J. Hill, Indigenous Peoples (note 26), pp. 747-749.
33   See M. Livi-Bacci, Return (note 22), for Hispaniola; M. Coe, Weltatlas (note 12), pp. 20-21 on Mexico and Central America and F. Edelmayer, Spanien (note 12), p. 54; K. Spalding, The Crises (note 18), p. 932 for Peru. For other regions cf. also J. Hemming, Red Gold (note 26), pp. 444-445, 487-501.
34   See, for example, J. Garavaglia, The Crises (note 17), pp. 24-26; M. Livi-Bacci, Return (note 22).
35   See, for example, Zavala / J. Miranda, Instituciones indígenas (note 18), pp. 100-101, 151-153; L. McAlister, Social Structure and Social Change in New Spain, in: Hispanic American Historical Review, 43 (1963), 3, pp. 358-359.

The prerogatives of indigenous nobles were therefore respected and a share of their town's tribute distributed accordingly. Native town councils had the task of collecting taxes and selecting men and women for labour drafts.[36]

Consequently, the different indigenous groups (e.g., in the core areas or marginal regions) and social strata (nobility, artisans and peasantry) were affected quite differently by conquest and colonial rule. The major burden of the colonial system was placed on the Indian peasants, who made up the bulk of the indigenous population. They were legally obliged to pay tribute and provide forced labour.[37] The privileges of the indigenous nobility, in contrast, were generally recognized by the Spanish Crown in Peru and Mexico up to the eighteenth century, and identified with the lower Spanish nobility (*hidalgos*). Many of the Indian noblemen were exempt from tribute, forced labour, and the legal prohibitions imposed on Indian commoners. They were permitted to carry a sword and dagger, and wear European dress. A number of noblemen were granted the title of *don*, and many were allowed to ride horses. A certain section of the Indian nobility owned large estates, while others amassed considerable wealth in commerce. On the whole, therefore, they were better off economically than many of the Spaniards. John Murra described the situation in colonial Peru as follows:

> *Many a highland lord found himself temporarily richer and more powerful than he had ever been; they took readily to horses, firearms, and silk hose. They also started plantations of European crops – vineyards or barley. Most of the internal, long-distance trade to the new mining centers was in their hands; they lent and borrowed money, employed Europeans as clerks and artisans, mastered reading and writing and even court behavior.*[38]

In the course of the eighteenth century, however, the political and economic magnitude of the indigenous elite declined considerably due to significant administrative changes (Bourbon reforms) aimed at establishing effective government structures. Among other things, the Indian caciques and village community governors lost control of public revenue to Spanish officials. Since their judiciary functions were curtailed, they were reduced to mere tax collectors and largely robbed of political influence. In addition, village latitude for self-government became more and more limited.[39]

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36   See, for example, K. Spalding, Social Climbers: Changing Patterns of Mobility among the Indians of Colonial Peru, in: Hispanic American Historical Review, 50 (1970), pp. 647-648, 655-659, 661-662; K. Spalding, The Crises (note 18), pp. 936-937, 939, 953, 956; J. Murra, Andean Societies, in: Annual Review of Anthropology, 13 (1984), pp. 124-125; W. Gabbert, Becoming Maya. Ethnicity and Inequality in Yucatán Since 1500, Tucson 2004, pp. 23-25. Cf. also N. Whitehead, The Crises (note 15), p. 869 for the Caribbean.

37   See, e.g., K. Spalding, Social Climbers (note 36), pp. 645-664; Ch. Gibson, Indian Societies (note 17), pp. 388-394 f, 399-406, 413; J. Lockart, Social Organization (note 19), p. 294.

38   J. Murra, Andean Societies (note 36), p. 125.

39   See, for example, N. Farriss, Maya Society (note 11), pp. 356-366; J. Coatsworth, Patterns of Rural Rebellion in Latin America: Mexico in Comparative Perspective, in: F. Katz, Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution. Rural Social Conflict in Mexico, Princeton 1988, pp. 54, 58; L. Glave, The "Republic of Indians" in Revolt (c. 1680–1780), in: F. Salomon/St. Schwartz (eds.), The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas. Vol. III, South America, Part 2. Cambridge 1999, pp. 541, 552-554; K. Spalding, Social Climbers (note 36), pp. 648, 663 f; Ch. Gibson, Indian Societies (note 17), pp. 412-413; J. Chance, Race and Class in Colonial Oaxaca, Stanford 1978, pp. 124-126.

4. Ethnic Mobility

As mentioned above, "Indians" were considered a legally defined social category (*indios*) among others (e.g., Spaniards and mestizos). However, the indigenous people themselves frequently rejected this ascription and employed their own categories in referring to themselves. In Central Mexico, for example, people used the Nahuatl word *macehualli*, which meant commoner or vassal.[40]

Affiliation to the social categories of Spaniard, Indian, mestizo or mulato was held to be determined by descent or biological criteria. In reality, however, wealth and cultural adaptation occasionally permitted mobility into categories of higher status, so that a number of mestizos and Indians with sufficient property and language skills in Spanish, for example, were legally accepted as Spaniards.[41] Some Indian artisans and tradesmen in the cities became quite prosperous. Many donned European dress and became culturally Hispanicized to such a degree that by the end of the colonial period they were indistinguishable from Spaniards or mestizos. Phenotypic clues to differentiate between the various groups in colonial society had always been quite unreliable and even lost in significance when miscegenation between Iberians and Amerindians became widespread in the course of the colonial period. A Mexican decree indicates that the category of Spaniard frequently encompassed a broad range of individuals. It orders that all non-Indians in the villages, as well as people with no sign of African descent, be defined as Spaniards and treated as such.[42]

Status symbols such as descent, phenotype, occupation and wealth were distributed inconsistently, making ascription of legal and social status difficult. Solutions to the problem varied with the locality and the time period. On the other hand, status category assignment was never solely determined by ascriptive criteria such as descent.[43] Moreover, assignment to a specific status category in censuses and in baptism and marriage records was often highly inconsistent and could change several times in the course of someone's lifetime. McCaa, for example, discovered that in the late eighteenth century in a community in northern Mexico, the assignment of the groom or, in most cases, of the bride was altered in half the marriages between individuals of different status categories in order to reduce social distance in marriage records. Patricia Seed establishes a relationship between assignation to a status category ("racial term") and occupation and wealth in eighteenth-century Mexico City. She argues that racial terms were cognitive labels attached to different groups in the economic organization of production. Where the divi-

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40 See J. Lockart, Social Organization (note 19), p. 286.
41 For Mexico in general, see I. Diggs, Color in Colonial Spanish America, in: Journal of Negro History, 38 (1953) 4, p. 424; L. McAlister, Social Structure (note 35), pp. 355, 366-369; J. Chance, Race (note 39), pp. 97, 100-101, 128-142, 175 f., 189-190, 194-196; N. Farriss, Maya Society (note 11), pp. 98, 108-109; J. Lockart, Social Organization (note 19), pp. 288, 316-318; Ch. Gibson, Indian Societies (note 17), pp. 416-418; .
42 See N. León, Las castas del México colonial o Nueva España. Noticias etno-antropológicas, Mexico City 1924, p. 27.
43 See, for example, I. Diggs, Color (note 41), p. 425; L. McAlister, Social Structure (note 35), p. 355; N. Farriss, Maya Society (note 11), p. 108; W. Gabbert, Becoming Maya (note 36), pp. 18-23.

sion of labour and the cognitive system of racial labels coincided, the level of agreement on social race was high; where they diverged, i.e., when specific economic tasks were not associated with racial labels, there was little agreement.[44] McAlister aptly summarizes the situation as follows:

> *Thus, in fact and in law, 'white' or 'Spaniard' was practically coextensive with* gente de casta limpia *[people of pure blood], a category which included not only persons of pure Spanish origin but mestizos and castizos [descendants of a Spaniard and a mestiza] who were of legitimate descent, free from the taint of Negro blood, and who 'lived like Spaniards'. The distinguishing feature of the castes [e.g., mestizos or mulattoes] was illegitimate descent or the suspicion of it and the possession of Negro blood or the suspicion of such a taint because of illegitimacy. … In regard to the Indian group, it was composed of ethnic Indians and mestizos who were culturally Indian.*[45]

In the course of the colonial period, the mestizo group expanded enormously as a result of the miscegenation of people of different ancestry as well as the cultural Hispanicization of large parts of the indigenous population. After independence, in particular, the indigenous nobility and urban artisans and tradesmen dissolved into the mestizo population. Wealth differences among the Indian village population decreased. The category "Indian" became a term used more and more by urbanites and elites to refer to the poor, uneducated and supposedly backward population in the countryside. In the nineteenth century, racism became the leading ideology and postcolonial progress-oriented elites came to view "the Indians" as the quintessence of "barbarism". Such views have survived up to the present day.

Independence from Spain was not accompanied by the self-rule of a hitherto colonized people but domination by a new elite of American-born Spaniards (Creoles) in the emerging Latin American states. The wars of independence were essentially conservative movements intended to prevent major social change. While Indians in the core areas were freed from colonial legal restrictions, they had to face new and intensified assaults on their communal lands, propelled by expanding capitalist agriculture. Those laws of the Spanish Crown that had provided at least some protection of indigenous land rights in the colonial period were confined or abrogated. Thus, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were characterized not by less but more collective violence than during most other periods in the colonial era. The expansion of haciendas and plantations, and the expropriation of village lands as part of the so-called Liberal Reforms[46] provoked

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44   See R. McCaa, Calidad, Clase, and Marriage in Colonial Mexico: The Case of Parral, 1788–1790, in: Hispanic American Historical Review, 64 (1984) 3, pp. 493, 497-499; P. Seed, Social Dimensions of Race: Mexico City, 1753, in: Hispanic American Historical Review, 62 (1982) 4, pp. 601-602.

45   L. McAlister, Social Structure (note 35), p. 355, italics there.

46   These modernization projects propagated the construction of infrastructure such as railways and schools, the economic opening to foreign capital and integration into the world economy with the introduction of new agrarian products such as coffee or bananas for export. The intention was to separate church and state, and to attempt to generalize capitalist forms of production and possession. Land owned by corporations such as the church or indigenous and non-indigenous communities was to be privatized.

large-scale Indian peasant rebellions all over Latin America.[47] Beyond this, the independent Latin American states conquered the remaining Indian refuge areas, annihilating the last vestiges of native autonomy and decimating, sometimes even exterminating, entire indigenous groups.[48] Hence, the nineteenth century can be considered the "second conquest" period.

5. The Redefintion of "Indian" in the twentieth century

In the mid-twentieth century Alfonso Caso expected Indians to be completely assimilated and thus dissolve into the national (mestizo) population in the course of "modernization". However, this did not occur. An empirical study carried out in 1979 found that the indigenous population of Latin America had more than doubled from 1961 (13.1 million) to 1978 (28.5 million) and would probably increase to around 42 million by the mid-1990s.[49] A survey of recent demographic trends among lowland indigenous groups in Latin America suggests that after severe population declines in the first half of the twentieth century, these groups have experienced a remarkably rapid growth since the 1980s. The authors conclude: "After a painful historic decline, Latin America's self-identified indigenous lowland peoples are now witnessing an overall profound population expansion driven by high fertility and falling mortality rates."[50] Quite interestingly, these populations are very young and fertility rates considerably higher than among contemporaneous non-indigenous rural women.[51] Hence, indigenous populations may increase, not merely in absolute numbers but also, at least in some countries, in relative numerical weight.

Parallel to this demographic recovery, numerous indigenous movements and organizations have emerged in most Latin American countries, especially since the 1970s.[52] This organizational growth on the local, regional, national and international planes can be primarily attributed to two processes: 1. Capitalist expansion in many Latin American countries to the rural peripheries, particularly the critical development of land tenure in these regions, and the resulting social conflicts. 2. The accelerated process of social

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47 See, for example, the overview in J. Coatsworth, Patterns (note 39) and for a Mexican example W. Gabbert, Of Friends and Foes – The Caste War and Ethnicity in Yucatán, in: Journal of Latin American Anthropology, 9 (2004) 1, pp. 90-118.

48 See, for example, J. Hill, Indigenous Peoples (note 26), pp. 709-711, 714-716, 742-753, 758-759.

49 See E. Mayer / E. Masferrer, La población de América en 1978, in: América Indígena, 39 (1979), 2, p. 243; Indigenous Peoples and Power in Latin America, Latin American Special Report SR-03-04, September 2003, p. 2.

50 K. McSweeney / Sh. Arps, A 'Demographic Turnaround': The Rapid Growth of Indigenous Populations in Lowland Latin America, in: Latin American Research Review, 40 (2005), p. 20.

51 See ibid., pp. 18-19.

52 For a fuller discussion of this process, see W. Gabbert, Cultura, autonomia y estado: Movimientos sociales indígenas en America Latina, in: A. Koechert / B. Pfeiler (eds.), Interculturalidad e identidad indígena. Preguntas abiertas a la globalización, Hannover 1999, pp. 13-25; W. Gabbert, Ethnisierung von „oben" und von „unten" – Staatliche Indianerpolitik und indigene Bewegungen im postrevolutionären Mexiko, in: Ch. Büschges / J. Pfaff-Czarnecka (eds.), Ethnisierung und De-Ethnisierung des Politischen, Frankfurt a. M. / New York, pp. 142-165; N. Postero / L. Zamosc (eds.), The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America, Brighton 2004.

change in Indian sub-societies, which has, at least in part, been produced by public development policies since the 1950s.

The decline in living conditions in many of the rural regions of Latin America, both Indian and non-Indian, have been widely documented. The same holds true for the attack on Indian land rights by capitalist enterprises seeking to exploit oil, wood, minerals or other resources in these territories, and by both cattle ranchers and poor, landless mestizo peasants, who are pushing the agrarian frontier into Indian areas.[53] Therefore, the issues of land tenure and the right to natural resources are central demands of almost all Indian organizations. I will not dwell further on this topic at this point but instead turn to the second of the above-mentioned processes, i.e., social change.

Since the 1950s many Latin American governments and international institutions have introduced development policies aimed at integrating marginal, frequently Indian, regions and their inhabitants into the capitalist economy, and additionally assimilating them into the national culture. The language and culture of the various Indian groups were seen as "barriers to integration" that had to be overcome. National and international organizations launched numerous projects, using a strategy that was quite modern at the time, i.e., "community development". Members of the alleged "backward" communities were themselves expected to become the carriers of "modernization". Education played a key role in this concept, the intention of which was to change the value system of the local population. Thus, a multitude of "cultural promoters", health workers and rural teachers were trained as "agents of change" within their communities.[54] Several figures illustrate the dimensions of this new social group within the Indian population. The number of bilingual teachers and cultural promoters in Mexico increased from approximately 3,400 in 1970 to more than 30,000 in the early 1990s and almost 49,000 in the year 2000. This represents an increase of more than 1,400 per cent in merely thirty years.[55]

It is an irony of history that precisely this group, created to promote assimilation, has become one of the most vital forces in the emerging Indian movements all over Latin America. Development policies in Latin America after the 1950s initially provided new

53   See, for example, R. Cardoso de Oliveira, La politización de la identidad y el movimiento indígena, in: J. Alcina Frauch (ed.), Indianismo e indigenismo en América, 1990, pp. 145-161; N. Figueiredo, La última frontera de los grupos indígenas de la Amazonía brasileña, in: J. Alcina Frauch (ed.), Indianismo e indigenismo en América, 1990, pp. 210-234; F. Serrano, Modernization in the Ecuadorian Amazon: Indigenous People's Political Responses to State Modernization Policies, in: The Latinamericanist, 26 (1990) 1, pp. 6-11; R. Dilger, Die Kolonisation der karibischen Tiefländer Zentralamerikas, in: P. Stüben (ed.), Ökozid 1, Gießen 1985, pp. 82-101; W. Gabbert, *Creoles*. Afroamerikaner im karibischen Tiefland von Nicaragua, Münster 1992, pp. 256-265, 299-301.

54   See G. Aguirre Beltrán, Community Development, in: América Indígena, 26 (1966) 3, pp. 219-228; M. Münzel, Neue Formen der Opposition bei Indianern, in: T. Ginsberg/M. Ostheider (eds.), Lateinamerika vor der Entscheidung, Francfort 1984, pp. 71-73; J. Albó, ¿Khitipxtansa? ¿Quienes somos? Identidad localista, étnica y clasista en los aymaras de hoy, in: América Indígena, 39 (1979) 3, pp. 477-528.

55   Data from M. Münzel, Neue Formen (note 54), p. 79; M. Ríos Morales, La formación de profesionistas indígenas, in: A. Warman / A. Argueta (eds.), Movimientos indígenas contemporáneos en México, Mexico City 1993, p. 219; Gobierno Federal, Programa Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos indígenas, 2001–2006, Mexico City 2002, p. 55.

opportunities for upward social mobility, such as education, professional training and jobs for a growing number of Indians. However, it did not take long for Indian teachers, cultural promoters, university students and nurses, for example, to recognize that the confines of social mobility were extremely narrow. They were rarely able to compete successfully with whites or mestizos for the desired middle or high-level positions. Not only was their training frequently of a lesser quality, but more significantly here, they met with the open contempt and discrimination of the national majority. Now mindful that assimilation was not always possible, the Indians became aware that belonging to a minority was important.

When individual social mobility becomes difficult or even impossible, attempts to reach collective social change will inevitably occur.[56] Thus, the rise of Indian movements can be seen, in part, as an expression of Indian elite ambitions for social advancement. The demand of Indian movements for bilingual education, for instance, cannot be comprehended simply as an attempt to preserve Indian languages. It should also be seen as a means of securing jobs for Indian bilingual teachers who can (in contrast to their non-Indian colleagues) teach in the native idiom.

To enable the mobilization of large parts of the Indian population, the interests of the elite in social advancement must be linked to key problems of the rural masses (usually the protection of land rights). The demand for political autonomy and Indian territories is a case in point. Its fulfilment would offer suitable positions for educated Indians and at the same time solve the land problems of the rural Indian population.

The indigenous elite needs the Indian masses as a potential power base if it is to succeed in regulating its (quite particular) interests, just as the rural natives require the elite to effectively articulate their demands. The latter depend on the elite to translate their political activities into forms that are acceptable to the dominant "western" culture, such as peasant unions, co-operatives or Indian organizations with associational structures. Beyond that, an organizational connection between the different local communities is necessary to focus, structure and channel the discontent felt in isolation.[57] Hence the elite can contribute to solving the structural problems of organization in rural populations, such as the lack of communication and co-ordination due to scattered settlement patterns. The rhetoric of Indian organizations emphasizes issues such as language, culture and tradition, since it needs to unify people of different social standing and, at least partially, divergent interests. However, what unites the different sectors of Indian groupings apart from the above-mentioned functional necessities is the attitude of the dominant sectors of Latin American societies, which even today is more often than not one of contempt and discrimination.

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56   See, for example, H Tajfel, Human Groups and Social Categories, Cambridge 1981, pp. 238-253, 312-315.
57   See the theoretic considerations in J. Raschke, Soziale Bewegungen: Ein historisch-systematischer Grundriß, Frankfurt a. M./New York 1988, pp. 124-128, 146-147, 159-160 and J. Rothschild, Ethnopolitics. A Conceptual Framework, New York 1981, pp. 27-30.

Indigenous movements have also begun to counter discrimination on the ideological plane by revaluating the term "Indian" (*indio*), hitherto defined almost exclusively in negative terms. Following the example of the US civil rights movement in the 1960s, they strive to make the category a positive symbol with which all indigenous people can identify, remaining differences and conflicts notwithstanding. In this sense, the term "Indian" is no longer seen as a foreign category imposed by the Iberian colonialists but is filled with a new content independent of colonial domination. Indigenous movements invoke tradition, language and culture in their discourse, celebrating a world view with a high degree of spirituality, a peaceful relationship to nature and a strong ideal of communalism supposedly shared by all Indian groups. In contrast to "the West", with its destruction of nature, exploitation, egoism and alienation, they invoke the myth of a pan-American Indian personality characterized by solidarity, respect, honesty and love.[58]

There can be no doubt that the social and economic situation of the majority of Latin America's indigenous population is critical and discrimination still widespread. Thus, independent organizations in a position to articulate their legitimate demands are of crucial importance. These organizations have to face immense challenges. They have the arduous task of establishing communication and relationships with the indigenous populations, most of whom still live dispersed throughout the remote areas of the Latin American states. Furthermore, they frequently have to bridge existing conflicts and contradictions between indigenous populations (e.g., highland and lowland Indians in South America). However, acknowledging the need for indigenous organizations should not induce us to romanticize them. Neither the indigenous people in their entirety nor single language groups or communities are always of the same opinion or share the same interests. Social and political relations among the indigenous groups are neither more nor less harmonious than among other groups, and the notion that Indian organizations always represent to perfection the interests of "their people", a mere projection. If therefore we support indigenous organizations, we invariably decide to foster a specific political project and not the "general will" of an Indian people. The "noble savage" remains what it has always been – a product of our imagination.

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58   Cf., for example, G. Bonfil Batalla, Utopía y Revolución. El Pensamiento Político contemporáneo de los Indios en
      América Latina, México 1981, pp. 35-44 and passim.