

Researcher **Juliana Turqui**, University of Tromsø: *'Indigenous Workers in Guatemala City and the Mayan Movement. Exploring the Representation of Ethnic and Labor Demands'*

I want to thank the University of Tromsø and the Centre for Sámi Studies for inviting me to present my thesis and to share with you the results. The title of my thesis is 'Indigenous Workers in Guatemala City and the Mayan Movement. Exploring the Representation of Ethnic and Labor Demands'.

My thesis investigates the relationship between urban indigenous workers in Guatemala City and organizations of the Maya Movement in the post-conflict context. It identifies the key aspects of the indigenous workers' demands and their participation in Mayan organizations as well as in Market Labor organizations.

If social movements have no longer connection with the grassroots and therefore can no longer represent ordinary people, then such representation and channeling of demands should be done by the civil society organizations. Thus, the present work starts from the premise that it may be possible to find a gap between the Mayan Movement discourse and its bases. The specific demands of urban indigenous workers may not be included in the objectives of Mayan organizations.

The inquiry opens up by examining the indigenous workers' problems and demands in their place of work (urban markets). It identifies how power relationships operate when it comes to representing the demands of these workers. It also examines the perceptions of the indigenous workers about the Mayan Movement in general and about the Mayan organizations in particular.

These considerations are followed by a theoretical analysis of the Mayan Movement that reveals a variety of perceptions about the Movement's representative character.

Talking about the research question of my study, I can say that indigenous peoples may experience political and social marginalization when they do not see themselves and their demands represented by Ladinos (non-indigenous people). But what happens when those who represent them are Mayas? The purpose of my paper is to explore the relationship between urban indigenous workers and organizations of the Mayan Movement, and social and political participation of indigenous workers will be explored as well.

These are some of the research questions I have had during my thesis, and in my thesis they are operationalized and explained in more detail. One of these questions is what characterizes the everyday life of the indigenous as market workers in the city? In this question I wanted to know what problems and demands they have in their workplace, the municipal markets. Another question is: which are the possible channels of representation for indigenous workers in the markets? In the municipal markets of Guatemala, there are diverse channels of representation. One of these channels is the markets' committee that unites the peoples from different stands of the market, and there are also market labor organizations. So these may be the possible channels for representation of the indigenous workers demands in the markets. Another research question was: do you, as an indigenous worker, participate in the political life of the markets? And what I wanted to know was if they went to the committee, if they went to the assemblies, if they presented the demands, how they interacted politically inside their workplace. Then the other was: what characterizes the relationship between urban indigenous workers and Mayan organizations. Here what I wanted to know is if the indigenous workers knew some Mayan organizations, what was their idea about the Mayan movement, if they went to the Mayan organizations and presented demands, and if they had relationships with some of the leaders of these organizations. And finally do Mayan organizations represent urban indigenous workers?

The hypothesis I had before doing fieldwork was that it might be possible to find a gap between the Mayan movement discourse and its basis. Even though Mayan leaders include all indigenous peoples in their discourse, whether they are from the rural highlands or from the city, they may have little knowledge about what is the problematic of urban indigenous workers and therefore it may be difficult to defend their rights.

The methodology that I used for this research was qualitative and the methods of data collection were interviews, participant observation and analysis of secondary data.

Whom did I interview? I did interviews with urban indigenous peoples that worked in municipal markets and had lived in Guatemala City for at least 10 years, then with leaders that had worked or actually are working for the government, then administrators of the municipal markets that are mainly non-indigenous peoples, the presidents and members of ASIMEN (i.e. one of the syndicate organizations or market labor organizations, ASIMEN being the Association for Workers of Municipal Markets) and the president and members of FENVEMEGUA (i.e. the Guatemalan National Market Front for Workers and Informal Economy).

The fieldwork was done from May to August 2004, last year, in Guatemala City. These markets were 'Mercados Central', 'Mercados Urdos' and 'Mercado Laricia Guadalupe'. I did participant observation also in assemblies organized by labor market organizations. These organizations were ASIMEN and SAMBEMENGUA, as I mentioned before. I conducted interviews with Mayan leaders and Mayas working at the Mayan organizations. These organizations were the Indigenous People's Defense Office, the Indigenous Women's Defense Office, COMG, Rigoberta Menchu Fundacion, CECMA (the Mayan Centre of Cultural Studies), Indigenous Legal Defense, the Secretary of Indigenous Affairs in the Ministry of Labor, and IDEI (the Interethnic Centre of Studies of San Carlos University). Some of the theories and concepts that I used were: the concept of 'ethnicity' from Fredrik Barth, Abner Cohen, Edgar Esquit, Jorge Solares, Irma Nimatuj; the social movement theories, Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci, Nancy Fraser and Leslie Clark; then the theory of Foucault for discourse, power and resistance; some theory of Weber, Pitkin; and theory for civil society and NGOs as Mary Kaldor, Ernesto Laclau, and others. In addition, the works of experts like Kay Warren and professors of Tromsø University.

I am going to share with you the findings of my research. What I found in the interviews with indigenous workers at the municipal markets is that there is an absence of the term 'Maya' in the discourse of the urban indigenous workers. They do not identify themselves as Maya, but an ethnic identification is used instead because they recognize themselves as Quiche or Cacicque. Moreover the political participation in assemblies and committees is limited. Discrimination becomes stronger in the inter-ethnic contact due to stereotypes, pressures and misconceptions. Some of the stereotypes, pressures and misconceptions that my indigenous interviewees told about: that non-indigenous at the municipal markets think that they are backward, traders of traditional products, poor, illiterate, dirty, not able to express themselves, and resentful. So I found that there is a cultural clash inside the markets and there is also a lack of trust towards the representatives of the market labor organizations. Also I found that there is misinformation and ambiguity about the idea of the Mayan movement and about the Mayan organizations. They do not know any Mayan organizations. For me, according to my interviews, it seems that it implies an identification that is far away from them, who refuse representation even geographically. So indigenous workers at the markets are more organized as workers than they are as indigenous.

Regarding my findings, regarding the Mayan organizations, I can say that the possibility of context and alliance between labor and Mayan organization is unlikely. The worse political and economic interests, whether personal or collective, divide organizations rather than unite them. So the consequences are less effective and representative organizations are with less impact on a smaller area of action, for consulting with others on how the ethnic elements operate on a particular area of activity. I also found lack of involvement from the Mayan organizations in the urban indigenous workers programmes. The demands of the indigenous workers are considered not as ethnic demands but as labor demands. And also, as Russel Barsh, Demetrio Cojti and Kay Warren mentioned, there are international divisions between the popular versus the cultural approach. So the emphasis of the Maya organizations is either on class politics or identity politics. And also Montejo, a Mayan leader, is addressing the aspect that there is a new alternative: the regenerationists. He said that this regenerationist alternative will be neither the popular version, not the cultural, but a middle ground leadership.

The result is the atomization of the Mayan organizations. They operate with separate objectives when in practice they have a basis to interconnect. So the hypothesis of my thesis is confirmed. In addition to the problem that indigenous workers do not know Mayan organizations, there are other factors that may intervene to increase the gap between urban indigenous workers of municipal markets and Mayan organizations. Such

factors are: the non-inclusion of indigenous workers' demands in the objectives of those organizations (may be imposed, according to what my informant says, by the international cooperation), the lack of financial resources to include the indigenous workers demands, the fact that the demands of the indigenous workers are not considered by some Mayan organizations and leaders as ethnic demands, and, finally, the lack of Mayan organizations that addresses the demands of the urban Maya.

Some of my informants mentioned that the interests of the Mayan organizations are mostly in rural areas. So when it comes to answers to whether or not the Mayan movement represents the urban indigenous workers, then the definition of the movement appears necessary. But whether the Mayan movement can be analytically defined as a social movement or not is an academic challenge. One can say it is a stream of political thought or a social movement. The result according to the interview with my informant is that the Mayan movement is a stream of political thought. The Mayan movement for me can also be defined as an identity movement, which like many other movements of this kind, defends the interest and the promotion of rights of certain groups of individuals who feel discriminated against and search for symbolic and legal recognition by a significant other. In terms of Nancy Fraser, the movement can also be defined as a movement that demands identity recognition in terms of turn in, as a new social movement.

But the Mayan movement has also received a lot of critiques. Many scholars, as Kay Warren mentioned, like Zapeta and Morales, have stated that the Mayan movement does not represent the indigenous people. So the issue becomes one of authenticity. Who represents whom and who is allowed to talk on behalf of the others. These critiques say that rather than seeking to demonstrate its strength through mass mobilization, leaders of the Mayan movement have organized all sort of conferences, meetings and workshops. But one can say that certainly, who can best represent the indigenous peoples are their fellow indigenous, or Mayas, by including all the ethnic groups from the urban and rural areas, all the sectors of activity, and all the claims, the cultural and the economic ones. However it seems extremely difficult to reconcile the cultural and the economic struggles in Guatemala. But as an alternative some authors argue that the redistribution and recognition claims can be combined as key elements to be addressed by new social movements. Those two trends have appeared as dissociated and often polarized, but today justice requires both: recognition and redistribution. Neither alone is sufficient. For example, according to my thesis, there are ethnic demands to be addressed by market labor organizations and Maya organizations. And occasionally ethnic and labor demands overlap, this it can be difficult to classify them as one or the other because they are both ethnic and labor demands.

So I suggest that the urban indigenous workers at the markets are in a situation of mis-representation or mis-recognition. Since the organizational patterns of both labor market and Maya organizations deny indigenous workers the chance to interact with others as peers. They lack what Frazer calls 'status equality'. According to this author the conditions required for parity of participation are that the distribution of material resources must ensure participants' independence and voice, and the institutionalized patterns of cultural values express equal opportunity for achieving social self-esteem. These conditions are not accomplished in the case of urban indigenous workers in the markets. So as a result of my thesis work, I have some recommendations. I propose that the Mayan organizations, while focusing on the process of intercultural dialogue and indigenous rights, should promote on an upper state and a medium organizational and institutional level. They should also stress on the micro-level, in this case urban indigenous workers as an example, otherwise the gap between the Mayan movement and the indigenous workers will become wider, leading the organizations to work with objectives that can only partly reflect the Guatemalan reality. In my opinion, it is worthless to have international treaties ratified and peace accords signed if those rules and recommendations are unknown and disregarded on the micro-level.

So I will share with you the conclusion of my thesis. Through the development of the previous chapters I have looked at the relationship between the Mayan Movement and urban indigenous workers to assert to what extent it is possible to find a linkage or a gap between them. I found that urban indigenous workers at municipal markets have little and ambiguous knowledge/information regarding the claims, demands and activities of Mayan organizations.

At the markets, the indigenous workers' position is characterized by employment relations and working conditions that place them at the bottom of the social and economical hierarchies. Conversations with indigenous informants suggest that questions of identity are central to define their participation in politics at the Market Committees and Organizations. Participation is then limited due to stereotypes and misconceptions such as those that the indigenous workers are resentful, unclean, not able to express themselves and difficult to deal with (NUEVO). As a result, indigenous workers may face obstacles when it comes to defend their rights as workers.

In addition, Mayan organizations have little and ambiguous knowledge about the problems that indigenous workers face in the markets. Several reasons for why Mayan organizations do not focus on objectives that include urban indigenous workers demands were discussed. Nevertheless, I would argue that the most significant, in analytical terms, is that the Mayan organizations do not consider the worker's demands as ethnic demands.

Mayan organizations as well as market labour organizations perceive indigenous workers demands narrowly, either only as labour demands or only as ethnic demands. Since common goals and shared values seem unlikely to be fused, the organizations cannot consider each other as partners in the civil society, therefore contacts and alliances among them are not emerging.

My position is that the demands of urban indigenous workers can be classified both as ethnic and labour demands. No matter how apparent it may be, the ethnic element is present in the daily life of these workers, underlying causes of conflicts which are complex and related with a structure that legitimizes ethnic polarity - ladinos versus indigenous. This association is even stronger when considering the example of the market rules written only in Spanish. In that context, to have the rules written in indigenous languages constitutes a labour right since indigenous people have the right to be properly informed about the working conditions and regulations. But it is also an ethnic demand. Since the Peace Accords, Guatemala is declared a multilingual and multicultural country. To have the rules of the market written only in Spanish in a place where a great numbers of workers are indigenous, constitutes a violation of the Accords and promotes discrimination.

Regarding market labour organizations, I would suggest them to transcend the boundaries of the workplace (market) in which they defend civil and economical rights and enter the terrain of ethnicity defending social and indigenous rights as well. I believe this will promote a better understanding of what indigenous workers want. For that purpose, it will be necessary for market labour organizations to establish alliances with Mayan organizations that can support the implementation of ethnic rights inside the markets.

There is a credibility issue to be addressed by the market labour organizations as well as by authorities in the markets such as members of market committees. To overcome that difficulty, market organizations need to guarantee decent working conditions, social security and health care for all the workers at the markets. Only with the achievement of those benefits will market labour organizations emerge as credible representatives for the indigenous workers.

There is no doubt that the Mayan Movement has contributed enormously to a shift in the Guatemalan national politics. The movement has achieved the recognition of indigenous peoples in international law and has been influencing, since the '90s, the way national governments understand ethnicity. However, the Mayan organizations have an unfinished business with their own people. Despite the fact that Maya leaders have achieved powerful positions at the State level, they have not been successful when trying to implement the constitutional reforms suggested by the ILO 169. And although there is a chapter on employment and economical issues for indigenous people as part of the Peace Accords and in the ILO 169 Convention, those issues are neither accomplished by the State nor addressed by Mayan organizations, except for the land issue.

I have argued in this paper that Mayan organizations encounter difficulties in designing their own objectives because those are not always proposed by Mayas but rather by the international cooperation. This may be one of the reasons for the difficulty of including indigenous workers demands. For Mayan Organizations, to avoid

being dependant on the financial aid from international funds and find ways of becoming self sustaining and independent, is not a simple task in third world countries. However, I believe Maya leaders are capable of finding ways to participate in the settings where those objectives are negotiated, and exert pressure in order to include what is needed.

As a way to make peace sustainable, Mayan Organizations should start considering the demands of all indigenous people from Guatemala in a broader perspective. As Kaldor argues, inclusive identities are a key to promoting peace (Kaldor, in Orjuela 2004). In this sense, Mayan organizations are not contributing to peace because they do not promote inclusive identities, they do not seem to overcome a polarised understanding of ethnic identities. Different interests must be accommodated within Mayan organizations. It is necessary to connect Market Labour and Mayan organizations since, each of them, individually seem insufficient to give answers and represent the urban indigenous workers demands and needs.