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PhD Programme in Earth Sciences

Experiments of Reconstruction of Indigenous Ethnic Territories in Latin America
(1990-2006)

PhD Dissertation

Summary

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1. Approach and matter

The dissertation deals with the indigenous segment of Latin America's ethnic geography and endeavours to answer the question of which position native cultures have in the societies of the region. At a subcontinental level Latin America represents a separate civilization (HUNTINGTON, S.P. 1998) or a culture-continent (KOLB, A. 1962). However, there are at least as many reasons proving its diversity as arguments demonstrating its linguistic, historical and socioeconomic unity. It is enough to recall the different names of the continent – Indo-America, Afro-America, Spanish America, Luzo-America, Ibero-America, as well as proposals for Eurindia, Amerindia or even Asian America. All of them refer to the origin of peoples who populated the continent, however Latin America became the most widely accepted denomination which is based on the common linguistic origins. It is not surprising that since Simon Bolívar several politicians, writers and philosophers have been dealing with the question „Who we are?”. Throughout the centuries following the conquest the ethnic melting pot was a spontaneous process, however national identity of the independent republics was shaped by the creole elite who adopted the ideology of liberalism and tried to integrate Indians into the nation by biological and cultural amalgamation (ANDERLE Á. 2002). The new corporativist states considered that the „Indian problem” could be solved by extending obligatory education to rural areas, teaching Indians to read and write in the dominant language of the state, and giving them land within the framework of agrarian reforms, that is, civilizing and turning them into peasants. That means indigenous people would be given space in the dominant socioeconomic structure only within the categories provided by the state.

However, the building of a *mestizo* nation was not completed and in the last decades of the 20th century Latin America witnessed the revival of indigenous identities and their demand of economic and political rights. The mobilization of indigenous groups of the region along ethnic lines increased in the 1980s, and by the 1990s it achieved continental dimensions. Indigenous demands included rights to land, reconstruction of ancient territories, control over natural resources in their territories, rights to native languages and culture, political representation, self-government and autonomy. There are groups whose struggle is well known internationally and in Hungary as well, for example the indigenous peoples of Chiapas or the struggle of the Amazonian indigenous groups. However, we have little knowledge of the demographic, social and economic background of identity building process and of the vitality of indigenous groups at the turn of the third millennium. The dissertation is aimed at

filling up these gaps considering that there is few literature available in Hungarian apart from the papers by LETENYEI LÁSZLÓ (1998) and some articles written by outstanding Latin American researchers on the issue (DEGREGORI, C.A., 1998; GUERRERO, A. 1998, ALBÓ, X. 1998) which were published in Hungarian by the collaboration of Letenyei. The risk with the theme is that it deals with new processes of the ancient ethnic groups of Latin American societies, which form parts of a long transformation process, and its success or failure can hardly be predicted.

In the context of globalization spaces and places increase in value and play an important role in shaping ethnic identities. In his work about Canadian cultural federalism BJORKLUND (1989) points out three premises for ethnic demands which we consider valid for Latin American indigenous groups as well: 1) any ethnic group of common origin and with common interests has the right to its own identity and not to have it imposed from outside; 2) each culture has the right to survive, and in our world with an increasing population it means the right to coexistence; 3) the vitality of a culture depends on its capacity of establishing a territorial basis for its activities, (...) the territorial basis is a premise of survival (cited by CAIRO CAROU 2000).

2. Objectives of the research

The main objectives of the research are defined as follows:

In the *Epilogue of Modern Latin America* (1992) when pondering about the future of indigenous cultures, Thomas Skidmore predicts that the region is not immune from the process of social homogenization which is so characteristic of the industrial world, and urbanization, mass media and the pressure for acquisition of the majority language and social models erode ethnic differences. Skidmore considers that Latin American indigenous cultures are likely to survive in those countries where indigenous populations live in concentrated areas such as southern Mexico, Guatemala and the Andes. Should the prediction that Latin American peoples will all emerge with primarily European cultures with scattered remnants of the indigenous cultures be shared? (African influence is not examined in the dissertation, however, the fact that Afrolatins, estimated at 150 million people, which amounts to 30% of the region's total population, cannot be ignored.)

In order to be able to give an answer to this question we trace the spatial patterns of indigenous population of Latin America, and provide an overview of their demographic

characteristics, language use and territorial distribution, as well as social and economic context of their lives.

During the conquest and the different periods of penetration of other cultures on their lands, indigenous peoples of Latin America were gradually pushed to the periphery of social and economic life. The purpose of the dissertation is to examine how indigenous populations are affected by different forms of inequalities – regional and geographic, rural and urban, as well as those between genders – which characterize the changing Latin American socio-economic space. The role of ethnicity in social, economic, cultural and political exclusion is also examined.

Does the increase of migration and urbanization process, the elimination of territorial drawbacks and the exploitation of natural resources in indigenous territories result in the levelling of inequalities between the region's indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and in the weakening of ethnic confrontations?

Nowadays, in many countries recognition of the cultural diversity of states and regions, implementation of democracy, guarantee of cultural, territorial autonomy and self-government, as well as the development of international law have contributed to the conservation of ethnic diversity. We do not aim at completeness in the analysis of Latin American laws which guarantee indigenous peoples' rights and their social and political participation, however, we try to answer the question if legal and administrative instruments really do serve the conservation of indigenous ethnic diversity, or do they suppose inevitable occidentalization? Can indigenous demands for space adopt European ethnic categories, terminology and democratic solutions used in developed countries for the problems of minorities?

Self-government of indigenous groups is not a recent phenomenon in Latin America. Throughout centuries socioeconomic organizations of indigenous peoples based on customary law were maintained parallel with the power structure set by the dominant society. In the two case studies included in the dissertation we examine how the reorganization of public administration initiated in the 1990s affects ethnic territories. Does decentralization give rise to indigenous government in those administrative units where indigenous people form a majority? Do indigenous people participate in local power in accordance with their demographic weight and territorial concentration? Do decentralization and self-government lead to the improvement of indigenous people's life quality? Are there local energies capable of encouraging development?

Investigations were also aimed at explaining Latin American indigenous issues in a global context. Some of the global megatrends, such as democratization and administrative decentralization, open up possibilities to indigenous demands. At the same time regional integrations and economic competition work to the further detriment of indigenous groups in the heterogeneous Latin American socioeconomic space. Since traditional use of the territories by indigenous communities did not have the goal of maximizing profits, it ensured the sustainment of natural environment throughout centuries. In the dissertation we refer to the conflicts between indigenous peoples and local and foreign capital. We also provide an overview of those Latin American and international social movements that represent an important support of indigenous communities. With the help of these movements local indigenous struggles may join in global macro-processes.

3. The structure of the dissertation

The period investigated in the dissertation embraces chiefly the two decades of 1990-2000, however, occasionally we go back to the events of the 1960s and 1970s. The analysis covers the Latin American subcontinental region where, apart from the Caribbean islands, French overseas departments and Netherlands' overseas islands, there are indigenous groups in 16 countries.

The dissertation consists of two parts. In the first part after providing a review of the relevant literature on the subject, we give an interpretation of the changes in terminology applied to indigenous peoples and the legal definitions which describe them. Relying on statistical databases of the countries in question, demographic, territorial and socioeconomic characteristics of indigenous groups and languages are examined in separate subchapters. The regional and international context of ethnic mobilization and the main questions of Latin American multicultural constitutionalism are studied in separate chapters as well.

Subcontinental range of the research is explained by several circumstances: a) irrespective of demographic differences, indigenous peoples are found on the lowest layer of the socioeconomic pyramid in all the countries of the region; b) the ethnic-based mobilization spread within the region simultaneously over the same period of the 1990s and 2000s; c) the reasons of indigenous appearance on the scene are very similar in different countries; d) in the period examined indigenous territories gained in value due to the reorientation of regional economic policy; d) by now, indigenous issues took on a transnational character and have institutionalized Pan American organizations.

In the case studies included in the second part of the dissertation we analyse the experiments of reconstructing indigenous territories and the possibilities of self-government guaranteed by the legal framework in two countries: Bolivia and Mexico. The inclusion of Bolivia is justified at least by two circumstances: its indigenous population constitutes numerical majority and in the 2005 general election they came into power. In the case of Bolivia the emphasis is made on bottom-up strategies, while in the analysis of the Mexican situation a top-down approach is used. At the beginning of the 21st century there was a change in the Mexican political practice concerning indigenous issues, thus for the moment only its initial stage and recent results can be examined. In both case studies the regional inequalities, the role of indigenous peoples in labour division, their life conditions, reivindications of historic territories and the legal framework are analysed in separate subchapters.

In the present dissertation our main purpose was to provide a broad analysis of different forces which determine Latin American ethnic spaces and we assume that it is achieved to the detriment of a deeper analysis of research questions.

4. Methods

As a theoretical foundation of the dissertation we provide a review of international and Hungarian literature in cultural and ethnic geography related to social and spacial organization of ethnicity. We also rely on the population and political geography of the region. However, we go into details about the literature only when it furthers our purpose of interpreting concepts.

To answer the research questions proposed in the dissertation we used multiple sources for gathering data, which can be classified in several groups:

a) Demographic and social indicators of indigenous peoples were taken from censuses of the 2000s, available at the home page of the national bureau of statistics of each country. Data of eight or ten countries with numerous indigenous population were compared. In some cases the study included those five countries which concentrate 90% of the indigenous population of the region. Censuses were also used as one of the main sources for statistics on indigenous languages and ethnic groups. Apart from official statistics we relied on the estimations made by different authors and indigenous institutions. Statistics and publications of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and those of the Economic Commission

for Latin America and the Caribbean were also used. To study the differences in human development we relied on the country papers of the UNDP published between 2004-2006.

b) We consider the ILO *Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples* (1989) as the basic international policy document on the rights of indigenous peoples. For the analysis of national legislations on indigenous issues the IDB's *Database on Indigenous Legislation in the Americas* was used, which compiles national legislations – constitutional, primary and secondary laws, classified according to 22 variables, including decrees and constitution modifications until 2006.

c) Data on natural resources of indigenous territories were taken from development plans of regional integrations on the one hand, and from the home pages of the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE), on the other.

d) The research was completed by using the home pages of indigenous groups and organizations which sympathize with them, as well as by the documents edited by indigenous institutions.

Besides the analysis of statistical data and rates we aimed at the graphical representation of the data.

The employment of the case study as a research method was motivated by the circumstance that the dissertation covers several countries of a vast geographic region, which impedes a deeper analysis of the research questions in each country. The purpose of the two case studies was to study in depth the ethnic issues in the two countries selected and to emphasize their differentiating characteristics, besides the existing similarities.

5. Results

In the dissertation we studied the questions of ethnic reindications, which have become a global phenomenon by the last decade of the 20th century, focusing on indigenous groups of the Latin American geographic region. The main findings of the investigations are as follow:

1. As a result of the review of relevant literature in the subject area we found that in spite of the abundancy of Hungarian and foreign literature on specific ethnic questions and national minorities, there have been written only few comprehensive works on the subject. This fact indicates that it is a recent, or rather a reviving phenomenon and a research question. On the other hand it suggests that complex study of the question is not easy, because ethnic processes are embedded in broader social structures, thus their study requieres a transdisciplinary approach. That is why we committed ourselves to regional geography which made possible for us to study the interrelations of territorial, cultural, economic and political aspects of the Latin American indigenous question.

2. As a result of the research peculiarities determining Latin American regions were outlined: a) ethnic groups that exerted influence on natural and cultural landscapes in the region were constant over the centuries; b) economic regions bear the mark of an ethnic-based labour division which remained permanent throughout Latin American history; c) however, internal colonization and migration broke up the sharply seperated linguistic and ethnic areas. Cycles of demographic changes, those of national economy, world economy, as well as regional integrations may considerably modify the characteristics of regions. In 20th century Latin America the following can be considered as such modifying factors: the population growth in the second half of the century, different periods of agrarian reforms that did not change land property structure, import substituting industrialization, neoliberal economic policies which encouraged the inflow of foreign capital since the 1990s, as well as new or revived regional integrations which deepened regional differences and led to internal migrations to developing areas. All these factors together with increasing urbanization changed the ethnic composition of regions and towns. The first censuses of the 21st century evidence demographic and territorial expansion of indigenous population in all the countires of the region. Demographic data of indigenous groups and languages based on the criteria of self-identification and knowledge of indigenous languages demonstrate the strengthening identity of indigenous groups of the region. This does not contradict to the fact that indigenous migration is

increasing, as a result of which 30-50% of indigenous people live in medium large towns, and national capitals also concentrate hundreds of thousands of indigenous persons. Indigenous people living in towns represent a separate subculture which is maintained by the frequent relations of urban indigenous groups with rural communities. These relations lay on cultural kinship on the one hand, and on the dependence of rural communities on urban income, on the other.

3. Changes in the last decades of the 20th century have modified the approach according to which indigenous peoples were identified exclusively with rural areas, economy of subsistence and land problem, that is they were considered an agrarian problem. Land question, the importance of which has not diminished despite of migrations, has undergone a qualitative change, it has become more complex, and by now it means territorial question which includes material territory with its resources, as well as the historical territories of the indigenous groups as their homeland. Its conservation under the forces of global and regional processes is considered by indigenous peoples to be guaranteed by legal defense used by national minorities in developed countries.

4. Another important conclusion of the present investigation is that the indigenous question in Latin America got out of rural areas and ceased to be a local problem: it acquired national, Pan American and global dimensions. It is demonstrated by the Latin American range of indigenous organizations and forums and by the support they receive from environmentalist, human rights and alternative civil movements which sympathize with indigenous struggle and have financial means to back them. As a result of the global spread of ethnic mobilizations, international legal documents and normatives of international institutions which codify indigenous rights and have a pluralistic approach since the 1990s, have exerted a lot of pressure on national legislations in the region.

5. The investigations provided evidence of that indigenous demands fit in the global and Latin American socioeconomic transformations which took place at the end of the 20th century and which are determined by two processes:

a) Modernization, having two main effects both of which can be traced in Latin America: the accommodation of indigenous peoples to dominant societies – as observed in language shift and in forced changes of economic activities. At the same time the strengthening of ethnic loyalties and the mobilization for the defense of indigenous cultures is observed.

b) Democratization and decentralization, as a result of which Latin American indigenous peoples have similar claims to those of civil society movements, that is: to play a role in local and national decision-making process and constitute territorial and political formations according to their cultural identity within state boundaries.

Latin American indigenous peoples protest not only against existing spacial boundaries but also against social boundaries between dominant and indigenous cultures set along the lines of exclusion.

6. As a result of the country analysis in the case studies the following were demonstrated:

a) On the basis of exclusion factors and the human development index, ethnic regions are the poorest areas of both Bolivia and Mexico. This manifests itself in considerably lower indicators of indigenous life conditions, schooling, children mortality, provision by social infrastructure as compared with non-indigenous population. Social exclusion is due to language-based drawbacks on the one hand, being the highest among indigenous monolinguals. On the other hand it is due to territorial disadvantage caused by profit-oriented development of economy and infrastructure determined by the dominant society in the last decades. These conditions demonstrate that both in Bolivia and Mexico regional differences in development, apart from differences in natural endowment, lay on ethnic basis, too.

b) Due to discriminative redistribution policies of the state, the exploitation of natural resources of the ethnic regions did not contribute to the improvement of indigenous life conditions. The situation is worsened by the privilege of state over natural resources in indigenous territories and that development investments until recently were realized without considering the interests of indigenous peoples and often resulted in the resettlement of local population and in the deterioration of natural environment. The codification of the right of indigenous peoples to be consulted about development projects in their territories only in few cases resulted in previous estimations of environmental and social effects of investments, and as a consequence, local indigenous population was given an adequate compensation. In Bolivia the lack of guarantees of this right led to conflicts between indigenous peoples and foreign oil and gas companies operating in the country which ended in the use of hydrocarbons for political purposes and the nationalization of the sector. In the southern

indigenous regions of Mexico interests of indigenous groups clash with state interests because of the Puebla-Panama Plan.

c) In the countries we examined indigenous peoples' claims are similar: they passed from the material claims of the 1970-80s – land, education, health service – to the demand of symbolic rights in the 1990s (right to their own language, self-rule) and to the demand of the right to self-government and autonomy. Ethnopolitical movements that strengthened in the 1980-1990s achieved the modification of constitutions, which codified the rights of indigenous peoples to their own identity, language, ancient indigenous territories, and the right to self-rule in indigenous municipalities. In Bolivia and Mexico their political rights were also codified, thus besides informal means used for the enforcement of their claims (marches, protests) they have the right to organize ethnic parties and guarantee their political representation via elections. However, part of indigenous rights is not guaranteed according to the expectations of indigenous peoples, since during state modernization indigenous territories were not integrated into the administrative and territorial structure of the state neither in Bolivia nor in Mexico.

d) Indigenous peoples' claims for self-government or autonomy do not threaten the integrity of Latin American states because independent indigenous states, if existed, would face several difficulties. Some of them are of geographical nature: in spite of that part of the indigenous groups live on their ancient, geographically continuous territories, as it was said earlier, migration processes of the last two decades resulted in the mixing of different ethnic groups in urban and rural areas as well. In the majority of ethnic groups the constitution of independent states is hindered by demographic factors, too: there are only few ethnic groups that have more than a million members, most of them amount to a few thousands or hundreds members, whose independence is not viable neither politically nor economically.

In conclusion, the role of ethnic dimension in Latin America's socioeconomic, political and cultural life is increasing. Indigenous peoples of the region – due to their demographic weight, to the rebirth of their identity and the support provided by favourable international context – became active players in political life at the end of the 20th century. However, substantial changes in the social situation of indigenous peoples are hindered by the fact that the enforcement of their rights interferes with the prejudices of dominant society and the short

term interests of foreign capital. Therefore in many cases they only have the right to claim their rights.

Yet changes point to the conservation of indigenous languages and culture in the region, which means that they maintain, even increase their role in shaping Latin American space.

The dissertation concludes with a paraphrase of Hobsbawm (1994): Latin America's 20th century was long and it has not ended. Changes that took place on the continent always indicated the beginning of something and meant a new possibility of a long desired modernization. Nevertheless, it could be realized unequally because of the region's social, economic and ethnic heterogeneity. This has resulted in the permanent coexistence of different ages and spaces, that is different stages of socioeconomic developmental processes can be traced parallel in the same space. The problems of Latin America which remained unsolved in the 20th century – uncompleted demographic, economic and democratic transition, the need for stabilization and integrated modernization of economy, deep social differences and the conflicts between ethnic identities – have entered the 21st century.

6. List of Publications

Articles on the subject of the dissertation

1. BERKICS ERIKA - LILÓN DOMINGO (1999): (Re)visión de siglos: La emigración Europa-América Latina (siglos XIX-XX). In: *Acta Scientiarum Socialium (Historia, Philosophia, Sociologia)* Universitas Pannonica Scientiarum Agriculturae, Facultas Kaposváriensis, Tomus V/1999. pp. 9-14.
2. BERKICS ERIKA. (2002): Las lenguas y el comercio internacional. In: *Acta Scientiarum Socialium (Historia, Philosophia, Sociologia)* Universitas Pannonica Scientiarum Agriculturae, Facultas Kaposváriensis, Tomus XIII/2002. pp. 125-132.
3. BERKICS ERIKA (2003): A nemzetközi kereskedelem és tőke áramlásának nyelvi-kommunikációs aspektusai. In: *Földrajzi tanulmányok a Pécsi Doktoriskolából IV.* pp. 265-273.
4. BERKICS ERIKA (2006): Spanyol működőtőke-befektetések Latin-Amerikában. In: *Földrajzi Értesítő* LV.évf. 1-2. pp. 239-249.
5. BERKICS ERIKA - LILÓN DOMINGO (2007): Raza, nación e identidad nacional en La Hispaniola. In: Slobodan S. Pajovič (ed.): *Interculturalidad en los Procesos de la Formación Identitaria de América Latina. Percepciones e interpretaciones.* Megatrend University, Belgrade, pp. 101-116.
6. BERKICS E. - HORVÁTH GY. - LILÓN D. (2007): Populismo y Nacionalismo en América Latina. In: Ana Matia da Costa Toscano (org.) *Cadernos de Estudos Latino-Americanos.* Centro de Estudos Latino-Americanos. Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Porto, pp. 91-129.
7. BERKICS ERIKA - LILÓN DOMINGO (2007): The Poverty in Treasure of Energy Resources in Countries of Latin America: the Case of Bolivia. In: *Megatrend Review. The International review of applied economics.* Vol. 4. (1) Megatrend University, Belgrade, pp. 93-113.
8. BERKICS ERIKA (2008): Latin-Amerika nyelvi-etnikai képe. In: Pap Norbert (szerk.): *Amerika politikai földrajza.* Pécs (megjelenés alatt)

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1. BERKICS ERIKA.- LILÓN DOMINGO. (2001): América-Latina y el Caribe: un balance del siglo XX. In: E. Rónaky - B. Tombi (eds.): „*Como interpretare il Novecento. Una memoria per il futuro*” Atti del 1. Seminario internazionale interdisciplinare. Imago Mundi, Pécs, 2001. pp.110-116.
2. BERKICS ERIKA (2002): A mexikói demográfiai változások az 1970-es évektől napjainkig. In: Szabó L.-Ölbei T.-Wilhelm Z.(szerk.): *Anyországok és (volt) gyarmataik I.* PTE Afrika-Amerika- Ázsia Universitas Munkacsoport, Pécs, pp. 345-352.

3. BERKICS ERIKA (2006): Latin-Amerika visszahódítása: spanyol befektetések a térségben. In: Szommer G. - Szabó L. - Ölbei T. - Wilhelm Z. (szerk.): *Anyországok és (volt) gyarmataik 2*. PTE Afrika-Amerika-Ázsia Universitas Munkacsoport, Pécs, pp. 49-60.
4. BERKICS ERIKA (2008): Az őshonosok térköveteléseinek kérdései Latin-Amerikában. In: Reményi P.- Szebényi A. (szerk.): *A nagy terek politikai földrajza*. V. Magyar Politikai Földrajzi Konferencia. PTE TTK Földrajzi Intézet Kelet-Mediterrán és Balkán Tanulmányok Központja, Pécs, pp. 48-58.