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The Rise of the Purhepechan Nation: Democratization, Economic Restructuring and Ethnic Revival among the Purhepecha Indians of Michoacán, Mexico*

This paper seeks to identify the common conditions which have supported nation formation in Mexico, abstract the specifics of the Purhepechan case to account for the degree of its advancement in contrast with other ethno-political movements in Mexico, and contextualize the regional trends vis-a-vis the ideological transformations at the level of the individual and the community. In our paper we will pay special attention to two extraordinary phenomena: the rise and discourse of the organization Ireta P'orheecheri - Purhepechan Nation, and the celebration of the newly established ethnic-revivalist event P'orheecheri Jimbangi Uexurhini (Purhepechan New Year). Our thesis is that nation formation in Mexico is a result of economic and social modernization, democratization and the introduction of western liberal discourse, and changes in government indigenist policies that have been taken advantage of by indigenous political leaders.

Introduction: Nationalism, Politicians and Sleeping Nations

Mexico has always been a multicultural state. In the past decade, it has also gradually become a multinational state with new nations constantly appearing. Where had all these nations been? Why have they come to appear on the political scene precisely now? And why do we observe such significant regional differences in the speed, depth, form, and character of individual nation formations? The goal of this paper is to provide some answers to these very preoccupying questions.

We specifically focus on the very advanced nation formation process in the Purhepechan

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communities of central Michoacán, Mexico. Our presumption is that socioeconomic modernization and political democratization, together with changes in the indigenist development policies of the federal government led to a crisis of the traditional corporate character of the Purhepechan society. The subsequent ethnicization of local politics and the choices made by local political elites promoted the rise of a new ethnopolitical subject - the Purhepechan nation. This process has been accompanied by a number of power struggles and ideological controversies which have complicated national consolidation. However, the objective and subjective existence of the new nation is now an undeniable reality which the Mexican federation of the 21st century will have to learn to accommodate both politically and administratively.

First, we will briefly describe the theoretical framework which has served as the point of departure for our analysis. Then we will summarize basic information about the Purhepechan culture and outline major socioeconomic and political transformations of Purhepechan communities. Finally, we will analyze the principal regional political and ethnopolitical trends with a special focus on the organization Ireta P'orhéecheri (Purhepechan Nation) and the celebrations of the Purhepechan New Year, in the context of current developments elsewhere in Mexico.

Theoretical Framework

At the root of the contemporary nation formation processes in Mexico we find a political-philosophic crisis of the closed corporate community (Wolf 1957). The crisis is a product of three principal factors: modernization, democratization and indigenism. By modernization we mean the social and economic transformation of the traditional society, i.e. the monetarization of social relations, the privatization of communal land, the proletarianization of the labor force, the intensification of agriculture, the nuclearization of the extended family, the individualization of community members, the fragmentation of the social networks and the secularization of the society. By democratization we refer to the introduction of Western democratic political values, norms, processes and institutions into the traditional society. Finally, indigenism is the governmental development policy focused on the incorporation of indigenous communities into the Mexican national society. Indigenism opened indigenous communities to governmental control and modernization, and produced a new generation of educated indigenous leaders versed in the art of politics. From 1970s on, the confluence of these three processes has been producing the aforementioned crisis and promoting a complex transformation of the traditional society.

We believe that the differential level of modernization, democratization and penetration by indigenism produced varying responses in different parts of the country, both in the character of the crisis and in the reactions it provoked. In some places it led to the dissolution of the communities. In others it sparked violent political conflict and - where the conflict was overcome - it promoted the ethnicization and strengthening of the communities. The crisis politically supported and economically made possible the redefinition of roles and institutions; at the same time, however, it laid down the causes for an intense struggle for the future character of the reconstituted community. We argue that propitious preconditions for the birth of new ethnopolitical subjects arose in communities with a higher degree of modernization and democratization and with a longer experience with indigenism. By the same token, in communities with a lower degree of these factors in combination with a resilient and strong closed corporated community the process of ethnicization of linguistic groups proceeds more slowly and chaotically.

In the conceptualization of the causes and progress of the nation formation processes we draw our principal inspiration from the presumption of Ernest Gellner (1993) about the relationship between modernization and nationalism, extrapolating his conception from the state to the local level. However, we understand nation formation as a more instrumental process and emphasize the role of political elites, uprooted and alienated from their culture and language (Hobsbawm 2000). While modernization and democratization create the preconditions for nation formation, the final decision about the inception of the process is made by political elites, selecting between the inclusion in the majoritarian society or playing the "ethnic card."

While Gellner and Hobsbawm explain well *why* nation formation happens, *how* it happens is best described by the analytical model of Miroslav Hroch (1996). According to Hroch, nations come to life with the desintegration of the feudal society and the development of capitalism. At first (Phase A), intellectuals who often are not members of the nation-to-be study its customs, language and history and promote national awareness. In the second phase (Phase B), a new generation of educated indigenous activists works to persuade and mobilize as many people as possible for a political struggle. Initially they are not very successful but gradually the effects of their activity begin to be felt. The third phase (Phase C) is marked by a mass nationalist movement. Nation formation can be interrupted in any phase and it can proceed with varying speed in different regions. Hroch based his model on the study of small Central and Eastern European nations for which he thought the

model most adequate. However, we find it extremely useful for the understanding of small nation formation in Mexico, as well.

Finally, for the full conceptualization of nation formation in Mexico we consider it necessary to mention Michel Foucault's idea on the bureaucratic production of object/subject. Bureaucratic categories such as insanity, sickness, deviance, crime and others which simplify and standardize the world and make it more easily controllable may become internalized and transformed by the target of the bureaucratic action. They take a life of their own and begin to contest the regime of truth which produced them (see e.g. Foucault 1995). Thus, "Purhepechas", that is, the bureaucratic category of the National Indigenist Institute (INI) and the academic category of anthropologists may turn into self-conscious, authentic and politically active Purhepechas. We do not claim that nations are produced by bureaucrats or anthropologists. We do argue, however, that the bureaucratic and anthropological categories have significantly shaped the forms which the nation formation process in Mexico has adopted.

The Purhepechas of Michoacán

The Purhepechas live in some 110 communities located in 21 *municipios* (1) of central Michoacán, covering an area of approximately 12% of the total surface of the state (Dietz 1999: 103). In 2000, this region had nearly 800000 inhabitants of which 110000 (13%) spoke Purhepecha. The population density in the region was double when compared to the state average - 109 inhab./km2 - and had grown very little since the previous census. 1/3 of the region's population lives in three major cities: Uruapan, Pátzcuaro and Zacapu (INEGI 2002). Map 1 shows the location of the Purhepechan area within the state while and Map 2 presents the location of principal centers and villages mentioned in this paper.

The Purhepechan region is traditionally subdivided into four sub-regions: *Juatarisi* (large and dry volcanic plateau in the north, west and south of the region), *Japundarhu* (fertile lake area around Pátzcuaro and Zirahuén), *Eraxamani* (a short, fertile but densely populated valley in the north) and *Jurhio* (lowland fertile and significantly acculturated area in the northeast). There are major geographic and historical differences between these areas which shape their specific developments. These areas also have an identificational significance for their Purhepechan inhabitants and influence their regional interaction.

In the Tarascan kingdom the word *p'orhéecha* signified a "commoner" (as opposed to *uakúsecha*, the "nobility"). It was a social cat-

egory much as the Aztec *macehual*. It has gained its ethnic connotation only in the last two decades. The Purhepechas differentiate themselves from the mestizos (*turishecha*), that is, from Mexicans of mixed descent who control the regional trade, politics and the administrative centers of *municipios*.

Most Purhepechas live in compact villages, centered around a church, a hospice and several public buildings. Houses are multi-generational and usually have an adjacent orchard and a garden. Land ownership is predominantly communal with individual usufruct but private and *ejido* plots are common, as well.(2) Traditional *milpa* agriculture was the prevailing source of subsistence until mid-20th century. Agriculture was complemented by local cattle herding, seasonal wage work, fishing, and wood, pottery, basket and musical instrument industries (Dietz 1999: 122-125).

In most communities the membership in village quarters (*barrios*) and sections is a significant stratificational factor shaping social interactions. Family ties and godfatherhood (*compadrazgo*) play a key role in public life and are *sine qua non* of a successful political career. Most families are extended, directed within and represented without by the eldest male. For women marriage still remains the main opportunity for social ascent and prestige. All communities require their members to take part in municipal works and religious events, punishing inconformity with marginalization or expulsion.

The Purhepechan religion is a mixture of catholicism and polytheistic folk believes, influenced by pre-Colombian mythologies. Communal religious celebrations are the focus of religious life and have a significant integrative function. Celebrations are sponsored by individuals who thereby gain social prestige. Alongside regular intra-sectional and intra-village events there also exist elsewhere unknown regional celebrations such as K'enchintskua in the *Eraxamani* region or the Purhepechan New Year (see later) which promote and strengthen regional solidarity and identity (Aída Castilleja, personal communication).

Traditional Purhepechan politics followed patterns common to most Mesoamerican closed corporate communities. Political-religious hierarchies (3) were the center of public life with a heavy emphasis being placed on public service, humility and wealth redistribution. In Purhepecha this orientation is expressed by words such as *jats'ipeni* ("to serve others") or *marhuatspeni* ("to serve the society") (Lucas 2002). With a few exceptions we no longer find in the Purhepechan region the standard, closely integrated political-religious hierarchies we know, for example, from Chiapas or Oaxaca (Sepúlveda 1974: 84). Hierarchies have been preserved only in the religious sphere. By 1950s

the traditional political offices had disappeared and the office holders had been almost universally replaced by standard municipal functionaries such as the municipal president, the secretary or the hamlet-based municipal agents. This does not mean, however, that local political offices have the same powers and responsibilities as the Mexican municipal law requires. In fact, only few villages respect the electoral dates and periods. Often the political functionaries receive no pay for their work and they are assigned additional religious duties and roles which go far beyond regular administrative work (Aída Castilleja, personal communication).

Modernization and indigenism in Purhepechan communities

Today's Purhepechan area lies in the center of the pre-Colombian Tarascan kingdom, conquered by Spaniards in 1523. As in other parts of Mexico, resettlement projects (*congregaciones*), forced labor (*encomienda, repartimiento*), and tribute and taxation significantly changed the original settlement and organizational patterns. As other Indian groups also the Purhepechan communities maintained the status of indian republics (*repúblicas de indios*) for most of the colonial period. What might have differentiated the Purhepechan area from other conquered regions was the privileged position of the Tarascan nobility during the colonial period and the deep Catholic religiosity attributed to the work of the bishop Vasco de Quiroga. Unlike catholicism the Tarascan nobility vanished with the colonial regime.

The communal character of indian republics based on corporate land ownership was attacked by the 19th century's liberal reforms. The reforms were resisted less successfully than in other parts of Mexico and by the turn of the 20th century most village lands had been divided and privatized. Usually the richer members of the community and their mestizo neighbors took possession of them (Dietz 1999: 146-148).

During the Mexican revolution in Michocán, General Lázaro Cárdenas built the foundations of his later career. Thanks to a close relationship with Cárdenas many agrarian leaders were able to establish themselves as local strongmen and rule village politics for several decades. The agrarian movement, however, never gained a large following in the region, mostly due to the predominant private small-holding pattern of land ownership and the conservative nature of the deeply Catholic villages. Most villages split into two factions: the anti-Catholic landless *agraristas* and the tradionalist small landowners. The conflict turned into a civil war during the 1920s and 30s and in many villages the *agraristas* were drowned in blood. This conflict

prevented the reconstitution of strong closed corporate communities in the region.

Thanks to Cárdenas's influence as the state governor and later the country's president the Purhepechan area became a laboratory for the first indigenist experiments which preceeded similar programs in other regions by decades. In 1928 the first Cultural Missions (*Misiones Culturales*) were opened in Paracho and Charapan. In 1932 the influential Mexican anthropologist and one of the founding fathers of Mexican indigenism Moisés Sáenz established in Carapan in a parish building closed during the agrarian movement the Experimental Station for the Incorporation of the Indian. The experiment was a fiasco, ending a year later, setting, however, the future integrationist course of governmental policies. In 1935 the first Indian Boarding School was opened in Paracho. By the end of the 1930s the infamous Summer Institute of Linguistics, invited by Cárdenas, had established itself firmly in the region. These experiences led to the creation of the Institute for the Literacy of Monolingual Indians in Cherán in 1940s (Dietz 1999: 180-183).

It is not a coincidence that the first Interamerican Indigenist Congress, organized by Cárdenas in 1940, took place in Pátzcuaro in the very heart of the Purhepechan region. The conference prepared ground for the creation of the National Indigenist Institute (INI) in 1948. The INI was directed by principal sociologists and anthropologists of the time who prepared acculturation and development projects with the final goal of incorporating indigenous communities into the Mexican society. The INI created coordination centers around the country which trained indigenous workers as teachers, medical personnel and development agents (*promotores*) who promoted indigenist policies in the communities themselves. Many of these workers became politically influential due to their government contacts and as *caciques*, autocratic strongmen, ruled their communities for the subsequent decades. To increase its political legitimacy, the INI created supreme councils (*consejos supremos*) for each linguistic group which were to coordinate development efforts. As at that time linguistic groups still lacked ethnic consciousness, the councils represented noone and for the most part were captured by INI workers and teachers. With the councils, however, new bureaucratic-political forms appeared which the subsequent nation formation filled with substance (Favre 1985).

The first coordination center in the Purhepechan region was founded only in 1967 in Cherán. It was to serve the western half of the area. However, in the eastern half the Cárdenas-promoted Regional Center for Basic Education in Latin America (CREFAL) had been already doing the same kind of work since the 1940s. Only

in 1975, when CREFAL's activities waned to a simple bureaucratic vegetation was the second coordination center opened in Pátzcuaro. The political and economic competition between the centers and also between their indigenous clients led to the creation of two supreme councils, representing the western and eastern halfs of the region. In 1979 the program for ethnolinguists was opened in Pátzcuaro, creating an inflation of bilingual teachers with political ambitions. They soon took control of the councils, having remained in the forefront of local and regional politics ever since. In 1980s numerous technical, vocational, agricultural and pedagogical schools were opened in the area but none could stop the high migration outside of the region.

The new intellectual elites found themselves in a politically highly propitious situation when at the end of 1970s the government began to change its indigenist policies from assimilationism to the promotion of cultural diversity and consciousness. Until 1970s both the rhetoric as well as the practice of indigenist institutions openly strived to eliminate indigenous cultural practices. These were seen as backward and injurious to the mental and physical health and progress of indigenous groups. The use of native languages and the traditional clothing was prohibited in many areas and traditional healing and agricultural practices were suppressed as outdated and inefficient. (4)

In 1970s indigenist projects were reevaluated and a new leadership was appointed to head the INI. During this and the following decade a new approach, ethnicism (or ethnopopulism) as it was called, began to stimulate the revitalization of traditional cultural practices which the INI had previously tried to uproot. (5) At the ideological level this turn was supported by many intellectuals with Bonfil Batalla in the forefront. His famous book *México Profundo* (1987) idealized indigenous cultures and called for a total reconstruction of Mexican society on the basis of the Mesoamerican civilization. As a consequence, the new indigenous elites had the funding, the political backing and the intellectual ammunition to attempt to gain a greater legitimacy by ethnic mobilization. From agents of modernization the elites turned into ideologues of ethnicity. Indigenism never intended that but it provided all the necessary means.

By mid-1980s the supreme council for the western area had taken control of the INI-created Purhepechan radio station and ethnicized its broadcasting. In 1985 the council even occupied the INI center in Cherán and forced a change of its directorship. In the eastern area the supreme council followed the suit and in 1989 its members occupied an old colonial mansion in Pátzcuaro which had belonged to the last descendant of the Tarascan king and at the time served as the INI center's headquarters. Since

then the mansion has served as a Purhepechan-controlled tourist market (Dietz 1999: 289-294).

The wave of purhepechization of the area received a substantial impetus by the amendment of the Agrarian Code which newly allowed the creation of agrarian communities besides *ejidos*, as well. The former communal lands of the indian republics became legally recollectivized again, falling under the control of a new legal subject, the agrarian community. The community, defined on linguistic grounds, had an independent source of authority, the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (SRA), which gave the members a leverage against the mestizo-controlled municipal governments. By 1982 there were 230 communities controlling over 84% of all land in the Purhepechan area (Vázquez León 1986: 90).

As a result of these and other modernization programs the quality of life and the lifestyle of contemporary Purhepechas differ little from mestizo communities. Living standards and the access to public services, education, and medical care are comparable to state levels and in some indicators the Purhepechan communities even show more favorable results. The relative and absolute exceptionality of this case is highlighted by a comparison with indigenous communities of central Chiapas (Los Altos region). In 2000 in the Purhepechan area the illiteracy rate in the age group 6-14 was 14.5% (Los Altos 34%) and in the age group 15+ it was 14.1% (Los Altos 46.5%). The differences between men and women were minimal: 4.5% (Los Altos 26.9%). Only 16% of women over 15 were illiterate (Los Altos 60%). The access to public services is also fairly high. Only 18% of households lacks water plumbing (Los Altos 38%) and 4% lacks electricity (Los Altos 17%). Only 26% of inhabitants, however, have full access to health services. Generally speaking, the percentage of people employed in the primary sector in the Purhepechan villages is slightly higher than the regional average (20%, Los Altos 76%) but nowhere does it exceed 50% while in Los Altos it is more than 85%. All of these figures demonstrate an earlier and more profound modernization of the Purhepechan area in comparison with others. Finally, 95% of inhabitants are Catholic (Los Altos 53%). As a result, Michoacán has not, for the most part, seen the violent religious conflict we know from Chiapas or Oaxaca (INEGI 2002).

The modernization process has led, as elsewhere, to profound changes of the Purhepechan society. In the area of production we see a tendency towards the commercialization, mechanization and intensification of agriculture and the growing use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. As a result, poorer farmers are forced to seek temporary and permanent wage work outside of the region. It is estimated that at any given time up to 20% of all Purhepechas work outside of Michoacán, mostly in the U.S.A. (Gobierno del

Estado de Michoacán 1999: 18). Many families move out of the villages to municipal centers and cities. Traditional social institutions are desintegrating and the closed corporate community is weakening. It is the dissolution of the traditional society, a growing wealth inequality, and an increasing tension between individual and collective rights that are the major driving force of local politics and the Purhepechan nationalism.

The Purhepechas and Electoral Democracy

An early modernization and a strong impact of indigenism in the Purhepechan communities allowed for a relatively rapid and successful democratization of the area. It is difficult to evaluate the ordinary people's attitude towards democracy before 1989. As everywhere in Mexico elections were marked by fraud and low real voter turn-out. The speed with which electoral democracy in Michoacán developed, however, indicates the existence of certain propitious normative, socio-economic and political preconditions.

Already in mid-20th century there were opposing factions within the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in most communities. The so-called *party of the people* represented and defended conservative, anti-agrarian interests and closely cooperated with the Catholic circles in Zamora. The other wing, the *revolutionary party*, allied with landless peasants and agrarian activists fighting for further agrarian reform and internal democratization of communities (Aguirre Beltrán 1991: 152-153). Unlike in most other indigenous regions of Mexico where the monopoly of the PRI remained uncontested oppositional parties were able to harness significant support among the Purhepechas. The most successful of them was the clerofascist National Sinarchist Union (UNS).

The democratization movement's impact on Michoacán was deeper and proceeded faster than in other parts of the country. This was mainly due to the popularity of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the state's ex-governor and son of Mexico's most popular president, who led the movement at the national level. In 1989, his Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) successfully contested the PRI in numerous municipalities, winning in 12 of the state's 13 districts with a significant Indian population (Sánchez 1999: 123).

Conflicts which accompanied democratization everywhere in Mexico occurred in the Purhepechan communities, as well. In 1989 the PRD occupied municipal offices in Tzintzuntzan and forced the creation of a plural municipal government, in Cherán the police injured two

PRD members and the PRD subsequently erected a parallel municipal government, and in Chilchota over 20 PRD members were attacked and injured by local PRI followers (Calderón Mólgora 1994: 154-156). In many other municipalities the PRD occupied townhalls and formed parallel governments. This happened, for example, in Paracho, Charapan, and Nahuatzen (Ávila García 1992: 243).

The municipal elections in 1992 did not proceed regularly either; by 1995, however, the entire Purhepechan region had seen a consolidation of local democracy and the establishment of a free competition of political parties. Electoral participation between 1992 and 2001 remained well over 50% and significantly exceeded the state average. This was not because of continuing electoral fraud but because of a real opening and pluralization of indigenous communities and the inclusion of women in the electoral process.

The situation in Michoacán again sharply contrasts with the democratization process in Chiapas. There, the presence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), the Mexican army, and numerous paramilitary groups together with violent religious conflicts and the strong resistence of the ultraconservative political-religious hierarchies continue to thwart the development and consolidation of democracy. This is reflected in low voter turn-out as well as in everyday political violence, persecution, repression and expulsion of the opposition. Strong political identies also draw attention away from ethnic mobilization which is nearly nonexistent in Chiapas.

The situation in Michoacán, however, is still far from ideal. Party identification remains a question of pragmatic material gains rather than of ideological preferences and the participation of women continues to be low. The democratization process is not yet completed and the citizen control of public organs remains weak. Civic action tends to be chaotic and explosive rather than systematic and on-going. Finally, family ties and factionalism continue to shape local politics and make it little transparent and open. These problems reveal the fragility of Michoacán's democracy, yet at the same time frequent open discussions about them attest to the growing legitimacy of democratic culture and values in the region. In comparison with the tension and violence in Oaxaca or Chiapas these problems seem rather trifle, anyway.

Last but not least, the establishment of democratic institutions and processes was accompanied by the introduction of democratic ideas and values, such as political equality, tolerance, pluralism, individual human rights, women's rights and others. The adoption of these values brought about a crisis of the traditional corporate society. Today's Purhepechas live an omni-

present duality of tradition and modernity, *entre la ley y la costumbre* (Franco Mendoza 1997). The tension is highly visible in politics when women and young men challenge the authority of elder men, in public life when the corporate community is undermined by individuals who refuse to participate in mandatory municipal works or who wish to sell their usufruct parcels of communal lands, and also in private life when women leave the household to work for wages and become financially independent on men. Modernization and democratization brought about a crisis of political authority, legitimized by tradition, ancestors, gods, saints, public service and inter-generational submission. The legitimization vacuum was for some time filled with struggles for land, natural resources, public services or environmental protection. At the end, however, most village leaders played the "ethnic card" and rested their political authority on ethnic identity (6). In 1990s the individual municipal transformations converged into a region-wide ethnic mobilization. The following paragraphs attempt to capture the principal moments of this process.

Regional Ethnopolitical Processes

The regional political scene in the Purhepechan area is highly fragmented at present. Dozens of organizations compete for political support. Let us mention at least the supreme councils, the National Association of Indigenous Bilingual Professionals (ANPIBAC), the Indenpedent Front of Indigenous Communities of Michoacán (FICIM), the Independent Front of Indigenous Nations (FIPI - Michoacán), the Purhepechan Nation, the Communal Peasant Union Emiliano Zapata (UCEZ), the Zapatista Purhepechan Nation, the Democratic Teachers' Movement (MDM), the organizers of the celebrations of the Purhepechan New Year, individual political parties, and various national and state peasant organizations (Zárate Hernández 1999: 254). While this political jungle weakens the Purhepechan nationalist movement organizationally, the competition paradoxically helps to fortify the idea of a Purhepechan nation as individual organizations strive for support by appeals to national or ethnic solidarity and identity.

The specific development of regional politics in the Purhepechan area is heavily influenced by the struggle over the control of natural resources (water, forests, land) and by the serious environmental devastation of the area (erosion, pollution, waste) which antagonizes intra- and inter-village conflicts. The last important issue is the question of equalizing the political and economic discrepancies between the mestizo-controlled municipal centers and the dependent

Purhepechan villages and hamlets. The ethnicization of these discrepancies radicalizes Purhepechan organizations and promotes the construction of new exclusive identities based on communal membership and blood.

The principal causes for political mobilization in the western part of the region (*Juatarisi*) were water shortage and forest exploitation. When the first water pipeline in the area was opened in 1979, it connected only two mestizo-controlled municipal centers, Paracho and Charapan, leaving the Purhepechan villages out. Local protests moved to a regional level when the Committee of Communities was created by eight communities excluded from the pipeline. Women played an important role in the process. With time the Committee gained wider support and extended its activities to include agricultural, industrial, forest and social development issues. In 1987 it transformed itself into an ethnically defined Committee of Purhepechan Producers. A growing distance between its leadership and the member base weakened the organization and today it does not play an important role any more. There are several other organizations such as the Union of Indigenous Communities Adolfo López Mateos or the Cooperative Marku Anchukoren but personal animosities, competing economic interests and severe inter-village conflicts over land prevent their unification (Dietz 1999: 263).

In the area of the Lake Pátzcuaro (*Japundarhu*) the regional mobilization began when the federal government announced the establishment of a nuclear power research center on lake's shore. In 1981 the Committee for the Environmental Defense of Michoacán (CODEMICH) formed, achieving the cancellation of the project. Another impetus to the regional movement was given by the struggle to close a factory polluting the lake's water, the observable desiccation of the lake, and the increasing decimation of the fish population caused by reckless exploitation. In this climate, two organizations were created - the Lakeshore Organization against the Pollution of the Lake Pátzcuaro (ORCA) and the Center of Social and Ecological Studies (CESE) which continue to carry out various environmentalist projects in close coordination with Purhepechan communities (Esteva 1997). Finally, in early 1980s, the mobilization of the Purhepechan village Santa Fé de la Laguna against land invasions by neighboring mestizo ranchers had a major impact on local ethnopolitics. This tension strenghthened linguistic solidarity in the area and promoted the ethnicization of local politics, resulting in the autonomist efforts of some communities (Zárate Hernández 1999: 258-260).

Ethnopolitical organizations operating in the entire Purhepechan area began to appear approximately at the same as the aforementioned

local organizations and were marked by similar factionalism and competition. Suffice it to mention the intellectual lobby group the Revolutionary Indigenous Movement (MIR), created in 1975, or the Communal Peasant Union Emiliano Zapata (UCEZ) which has been helping peasants to create, protect and extend communal land holdings since its formation in 1979. Differences between regional organizations were overcome only at the beginning of 1990s when president Salinas de Gortari initiated constitutional reforms marking the end of the agrarian reform and allowing for the privatization of communal property. In protest against the reforms the Independent Front of Indigenous Communities of Michoacán (FICIM) was formed in 1991, issuing the Declaration of the Purhepechan Nation in which the idea of Purhepechan nationhood was clearly formulated for the first time (see FICIM 1991). The ethnic-corporativist course set by this declaration has never been abandoned.

Two years later the FICIM divided into a radical, ethnically oriented and a moderate, marxist wing. The ethnic wing transformed itself into the organization Purhepechan Nation (*Ireta P'orhéecheri*) and issued the Declaration of the Principles of the Purhepechan Nationality (Nación Purhépecha 1993). After the EZLN uprising they expressed support for the zapatistas and even took part in their negotiations with the federal government in San Andrés. In Michoacán they organized a number of protests and raised funds for developmental projects (Máximo Cortés 2002).

The Purhepechan Nation strived from the start to become the official spokesman for all Purhepechas but it never achieved this goal. Internal conflict resulted in the division of the organization into the Purhepechan Nation (NP) and the Zapatista Purhepechan Nation (NPZ). The NP supports electoral politics, cooperates with the moderate National Plural Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) and promotes the creation of indigenous municipalities and electoral districts. By contrast, the NPZ supports the radical program of the EZLN, boycotts electoral politics and calls for an extensive local and regional political autonomy (Máximo Cortés 2002). Both organizations are the most active ethnopolitical subjects in the region and organize a number of political meetings, protests, marches and conferences. They took an active part in the organization of the Third National Indigenous Congress in the Purhepechan village of Nurío in 2001 and mobilized support for constitutional changes in the same year. Thus far, their competition has not threatened the gradual consolidation of the Purhepechan national identity as is clearly demonstrated by the growing popularity of the Purhepechan New Year celebrations, sponsored by their conservative competitors.

P'orhéecheri Jimbangi Uexurhini (Purhepechan New Year)

The celebrations of the Purhepechan New Year (*P'orhéecheri Jimbangi Uexurhini*) were conceived as a project for the revitalization of the Purhepechan identity and culture. Starting in 1983 they have taken place every year since then in almost as many villages. The project was initiated by a group of conservative Purhepechan intellectuals living in the state capital Morélia. Most have university degrees and some of them work at the state university. Others work for the government, in schools or as priests. The composition of the original organizers influenced heavily the form and content of the project, presented as conservatively apolitical (Rojas 2002).

The celebrations are characterized by conscious syncretism and the reinvention of tradition. The traditional and the modern combine to produce new forms with the ultimate goal of creating common identity and ethnic solidarity and pride. They take place on February 1st when according to the Tarascan calendar the old year ended. The new day (and year) is welcomed at midnight with a sacred bonfire, symbolizing the Tarascan sun god Curicaueri. In theory, the place of celebrations should rotate every year between the four traditional Purhepechan areas, in practice the organizers improvize according to demand. This reminds us of the traditional rotation of offices and ritual celebrations between quarters and sections of villages. The organization of the celebrations is conceived of as a *cargo* (traditional office), binding the office holder with responsibility to cover all expenses associated with the celebrations. The organizing committee - *petámuticha* (*petámuti* was the chief Tarascan priest) - acts as a sort of a regional council of elders and all *cargo* holders automatically become its members (Rojas 2002).

The organizing village prepares the program and provides food and refreshment for all participants and visitors who amount to several thousand. Hospitality thus becomes a constitutive element of the Purhepechan identity. The entire program from dances, songs and poetry to the Catholic mass and discourses of activitists and politicians takes place in the Purhepechan language. The use of the native language is meant to renew ethnic pride and serves as a political manifestation of ethnic difference before the visiting outsiders (mestizos and foreigners).

The principal symbols of the celebrations are an obsidian spear point and a stone cube with engraved signs of all past *cargo* holders' villages. Ever more often the Purhepechan flag can be seen, as well. The flag has four colored fields, symbolizing the four traditional areas. In the center there is an obsidian spear point, surrounded by flames, with arrows pointing to four directions. From the flames a clenched fist is ris-

ing. The flag often bears the words *Ireta P'orheecheri - Juchari Uinapikua* (Purhepechan Nation - Our Strength) and conveys the radical spirit which gave it birth in Santa Fé de la Laguna in 1980s (Roth Seneff 1993).

The celebrations are not yet universally accepted but every year they gain a greater authenticity in the eyes of the common people. Although the organizers present the celebrations as a purely cultural event, they are in fact deeply political, and not only because they draw a clear line between the Purhepechas and the rest. *Petámuticha*, the intellectual fathers and organizers of the event, compete for the political representation of the Purhepechas. As a result, every year the celebration is marked by inter-organizational strife. Inter-village conflict is visible as well, be it in the ostentatious absence of inhabitants of the enemy village or in the lobbying during the selection process for the place of the next event. Furthermore, intra-village political conflict is also reflected in the event. Finally, many ordinary people resist the celebrations for their folklorization and politicization of traditional culture which to them is still alive. In their eyes the politicians are expropriating their culture and turning it into a political manifest (fieldwork in 2002). Very few, however, challenge the Purhepechan identity as such.

Conclusions: Multiculturalism or Multinationalism?

Inspite of the aforementioned political differences and complexities we may consider the organizations Purhepechan Nation and Zapatista Purhepechan Nation and the Purhepechan New Year celebrations as unique manifestations of the rising indigenous nationalism which with a few exceptions lacks adequate parallels in other parts of Mexico, as yet. In Hroch's terminology we may place Purhepechan nationalism somewhere between Phase B and C, that is, we may charactarize it as an incipient mass movement. To what extent we have to presume that other linguistic groups will follow the Purhepechan suit is yet to be determined. In the little modernized and strongly conservative central Chiapas we find no clear nationalist movements.(7) Among the city Zapotecs of Juchitán, Oaxaca, the Zapotec identity is very strong, yet lacks the panregional impact the Purhepechas have been able to establish. We also find a very advanced stage of nationalism among the Yaquis of Sonora who are, according to our expectations, some of the most modernized and acculturated indigenous groups of Mexico (Molina 1999).

Modernization and democratization, however, are not the causes of Indian nationalism as Gellner (1993) theorized. They only produce the necessary conditions such as the individualiza-

tion, secularization, homogenization and proletarization of community members. Such an individual, however, can easily become absorbed by the Mexican society. And many, in fact, do and have done. A large portion of the Mexican "mestizo" peasants are in reality but acculturated Indians, who had lost their indigenous identity in the past. The key role in the nation formation process has been played by the new political elites, educated at Mexican or Western universities, wielding the ethnicist and collective rights' discourse and receiving political and material support from Western intellectuals. They appeared for the first time in 1960s and 1970s and pragmatically responded to changes in the government policies. It is them who will make the final decision between a standard electoral democracy within the Mexican society and an "ethnic democracy" of reinvented "traditional" institutions. Thus far, we fear that most have chosen the second option. We may only hope that the Mexican government will accommodate the new demands with sufficient speed and flexibility before the ethnic movements turn into armed national liberation struggles.

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Notes:

1. *Municipios* are the lowest self-administrative entities. They are represented by a president and several functionaries, all of whom are regularly elected. The municipalites have an administrative center (*cabecera municipal*) and several dependet villages, hamlets and ranches. We include in the Purhepechan region the following municipalities: Charapan, Cherán, Chilchota, Coeneo, Erongarícuaro, Nahuatzen, Nvo. Parangaricutiro, Pracho, Pátzcuaro, Peribán, Quiroga, S. Escalante, Tancítaro, Tangamandapio, Tangacícuaro, Tinguindín, Tingambato, Tzintzuntzan, Uruapan, Zacapu.

2. *Ejido* is an agricultural collective formed by a group of peasant who applied for a land grant under Mexico's Agrarian Code. It is a self-governing entity, based on the collective ownership of land and direct-democratic decision-making procedures. Its members usually farm specific plots individually and only cooperate in the purchase of expensive technologies, fertilizers and pesticides, the dealings with governmental and private bodies, and the merchandising of their products. Together with the agrarian communities (reinstated indigenous communities with communal land ownership) *ejidos* control over half of the national territory (Toledo 1992: 37). *Ejidos* are the product of Mexican Revolution (1910-1970). In 1992, reforms of the Agrarian Code brought the agrarian reform to a definite end.

3. For a closer look on the origins, principles, and functions of political-religious hierarchies see for example Chance and Taylor 1985 or Sepúlveda 1974.

4. For a superb illustration of the indigenist thought of that era see de la Fuente (1953).

5. An excellent record of the paradoxical and unintended consequences of this process among the Mames of Chiapas can be found in Hernández Castillo (2001).

6. This legitimation crisis is well documented, for example, by Zárate Hernández 1993 and Rivera Farfán 1998.

7. This sentence might seem shocking in view of all that has been seen and heard from the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. However, a closer examination of the zapatista movement reveals a very different picture. The zapatistas are based in the cosmopolitan and peasant part of eastern Chiapas, not in the linguistically and culturally homogeneous and conservative Los Altos of which we speak in this article. Their rhetoric is pan-Indian, not Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Ch'ol or Tojolabal. The intellectual father of the EZLN documents most probably is the mestizo Subcommandant Marcos, not indigenous leaders. The EZLN tried to transcend the problems of Chiapas with a universalist program, speaking of democracy, neoliberalism and environmental protection, and using the new technologies with mastery. It thus should be understood rather as a post-modern, umbrella movement which does not, by any means, exclude the possibility of a Tzotzil or Tojolabal nationalist group ever appearing on the Chiapanecan political scene. A by-product conclusion of this article could be, then, that unlike Michoacán, Chiapas could not, as a result of its present cultural, social and political composition, produce anything else but a pan-Indian movement. The local scene is still (in Los Altos) and already (in La Selva Lacandona) too fragmented (in different ways) to allow for a regional ethnic solidarity.

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