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Anath Ariel de Vidas

“The Teenek Indian and the public Indian. Indians and public spheres in Twentieth-century NorthEast Mexico”

- 1 The relationships between an indigenous group and the public sphere in Latin America are usually considered in terms of the Indians’ participation in ethno-political organizations, or their inclusion in national economic life. Sometimes a two-sided cultural impact is also envisaged, one side being the acculturation of the Indian groups to the dominant culture, and the other being the imprint of certain indigenous traits on the national ethos. Furthermore, the general discourse about Indians, produced by official circles or by indigenous organizations, frequently includes stereotyped and idealized figures, that are manipulated according to different interests, or are under Indianist or Indigenist influence¹. But what happens in regions where there is an institutional and organizational vacuum, and where Indians are not preoccupied by issues, such as “the Pan-American Indian conscience,” or the “five centuries of resistance”? How do such subtle and ambiguous relationships permeate indigenous vision and daily life ?
- 2 In many places throughout Latin America, the term “Indian,” rather than being an appreciation of the indigenous culture, refers to a socio-economic status, usually at the bottom of the social ladder. This is the case of the Teenek (widely known in the literature as Huastecs) of the Veracruz State in northeast Mexico (about 59,000 people in 1995), among whom, the Indian image is not used for their own ends, or for purposes of making claims. Until the present (1999), despite centuries of land spoliation, discrimination, and disrespect for basic civil and human rights, in the Huasteca region there have been no ethno-political movements. Militant action and indigenous demands for cultural rights and for the establishment of social justice, are not an issue on the local agenda.²
- 3 However, despite their social and cultural isolation from Indianist currents, the national image of the Indian, or rather the Indian image fashioned by the dominant culture, what I call here the “Public Indian”, prevails among the Teenek, fostered by elementary schools, textbooks, and civil and religious festivities organized by teachers and clerics. But, as we will see, the image of the Indian transmitted to indigenous society by the public sphere, is also subject to complex symbolic negotiation, and is not only the result of the open and public presentation of it. How then do the Teenek perceive this imported figure of the Indian ? How far do they identify with it ? To answer these questions, we should first briefly consider some of the group characteristics, then we will move to the symbolic level of explanation and finally, we will have some pragmatic considerations concerning the interaction between the Teenek and their national sphere.

The Teenek Indian

- 4 The Teenek are unique in combining the appearance of deculturation and a self-demeaning attitude, with a strong sense of collective identity. Among the Veracruzian Teenek (unlike the Teenek of San Luis Potosi’ State, who seem less acculturated), external ethnic traits, that generally make it possible to identify members of an ethnic group, are missing. They have no traditional costumes or traditional social organization, they do not practice agricultural rituals, specific ceremonies, system of religious *cargos*, and so on. The Veracruzian Teenek do not extol their ethnic membership, but on the contrary, belittle it in comparison with other social groups of the region; namely the Nahua Indians and the mestizos (those of mixed origins). Nevertheless, the Teenek have not sunk into anomie, but, on the contrary, they

have preserved their language and a particular world view that is part of the Mesoamerican tradition. Their cohesion is manifested by their strong tendency to endogamy, and by their localities, which are separated from the rest of society. Contrary to the general tendency of ethnic groups immersed in their national societies (i.e., modern-oriented with a dominant Western culture), in this case, the absence of emblematic ethnic traits is not accompanied by a weakened feeling of membership. The affirmation of Teenek identity, is not established through militant mobilization and socio-political demands, but, instead, through the distinct and persistent localization of the group on the political, economic and cultural margins of a multiethnic region. This situation raises questions about certain assumptions regarding interethnic contacts, and the resulting acculturation of Indian societies, as well as official statements claiming integration of indigenous groups into the national society. The foundations of Teenek ethnicity should therefore be sought through the subtle elements that constitute it, namely the ways in which the Teenek represent themselves as different from the others.³

5 One of the bewildering characteristics of the Teenek, is their self-demeaning perception in relation to other groups.⁴ I do not mean the usual negative appreciation of the fact of being an Indian, often found in the Latin American context among members of many ethnic groups, that disparage their autochthonous culture as against the mestizo culture. Teenek self-abasement goes much further than this generalized anti-Indianist current, and is at the center of their ethnic identity. This broad subject is beyond the scope of this essay. However, I would like to give one example, thereby illustrating the special Teenek attitude towards the image of "public Indians".

6 The Teenek use the term *ejek* for the mestizos that surround them. Curiously, they use the same name for young turkeys, while chicks are called *teenek*, their own ethnonym. When I first learned about these names, I thought that I was mistaken, as it is well known that the turkeys are autochthonous birds, while the chickens were imported to America by the Spaniards. To call the imported bird by the name of the indigenous population, and the autochthonous bird by the conquistador's name, did not make sense to me. However, according to informants' explanations (in various Teenek villages), the birds have these names because the turkeys, which are fed corn dough, only eat out of the hand, and the Teenek have to serve them, just as they serve the *ejek*, namely the mestizos. By contrast, the chickens peck off the ground, and, according to the Teenek, they "eat any garbage like the Teenek." Examples of Teenek self-abasement, in this case reflected in their own language, are numerous. They always show that, although Teenek identity is well defined, it is not manifested through the exaltation of the indigenous culture, but, on the contrary, by its denigration.

7 Explanations for this self-abasement can be probably found in the Teenek cosmology in relation to the contemporary social world. The Teenek world view has indeed assimilated historical evolutions and sociocultural changes into a supernatural reality, linked to disease and territory, thus turning them into the loci of ancient time memory. The Teenek idea of misfortune is linked to the existence of the *Baatsik'* - chthonic beings and pre-human ancestors, who fled from light to the rotten and filthy underworld, from where they send disease to the Teenek. In order to avoid this kind of disorder, the Teenek elaborate a complex relation of mimetism with these pre-solar ancestors, thereby instituting the difference between the Teenek and other social groups. However, contemporary Teenek now somewhat distance themselves from those ancestors, because they have finally accepted the "light" and Christianity, which they consider as "civilization." The myth of origin of the *Baatsik'* appears to be the symbolic realm, that crystallizes in this group the set of internal and external social relations, particularly those that oppose the Teenek to the mestizos. By acknowledging descent from their pre-human ancestors -with whom communication can be only in Teenek-, by constantly practicing bilingualism, and by dissociating themselves from their ancestor's non-social characteristics,

the Teenek consider the *Baatsik*’ as operators of the identity-alterity equation. This outlook, playing on the fluidity of these concepts, allows the Teenek to explain their marginal and subordinated position as against the mestizo. The filiation to their pre-solar ancestors, who became underworld creatures, relegates Teenek to an intermediate position between the mestizo and tellurian beings. Finally, life in extreme poverty and on the margin of the national society, probably fosters this self-demeaning discourse, which justifies this situation, but which, because it is linked to the story of their ancestors, also supports their ethnic identity. Through this world view, the record of alterity (human and extra-human) is made, and the Teenek identity is constituted.⁵

The “Public Indian”

- 8 Among the Teenek, the national image of the “Public Indian,” fits into this symbolic context. I use the term “national image,” because the term “Indian” is applied by the national society to the Teenek communities, and it is particularly embedded in the scholarly and clerical systems. However, in the Teenek language, the generic word “Indian” does not exist at all.
- 9 In the district (*municipio*) of Tantoyuca, in the north of the State of Veracruz, half of the population is Teenek (52%), a small part is Nahuatl (6%) and the rest is mestizo⁶. In this multiethnic and hierarchical society, ethnic limits are clear to all social actors, and each one of them expresses its identification with his own group, as well as the differences that separate him from all other groups. The Teenek are at the bottom of this hierarchy, not only economically, but also on the scale of their evaluation as an ethnic group. The mestizos often call them “Inferior Indians” and when the mestizos compare the Teenek with the Nahuatl, they describe the former as “survivors, subjugated, submissive, timorous, quiet and pacific; they do not use pressure, they do not try to outdo, they do not want to align themselves, they do not have idea of what they want, they are reckless, lazy, filthy, drunk, without any sense of reasoning”. The Nahuatl, by contrast, are, according to the mestizos, “more open minded, more hard-working people, best prepared, with more conscience”.
- 10 Not surprisingly, the mestizos who dress up as “Indians” for the local carnival (in All Saint’s Day) and in the opening parade of the stock breeders’ fair, wear traditional Nahuatl garments (white cotton shirt and wide pants), rather than Teenek ones (modern clothes usually torn to shreds). The “bilingual” schoolteachers, who work in Teenek villages, adopt the same position, thus elevating the mestizo and Nahuatl cultures to the detriment of the Teenek. At school festivities, after having danced to the Blue Danube, the children usually continue with “indigenous dances,” and Teenek pupils perform the “huapango” (regional mestizo music and dance) and the *Xochipitzauat*, a typical Nahuatl dance, despite the fact that, in this part of the Huasteca region, three prehispanic Teenek dances still persist⁷. I don’t suggest here, that being Indian means that one may not waltz to the Blue Danube, or perform dances of other indigenous groups. Instead, I only want to refer to the fact, that the Teenek dances are seldom seen at school events, and conclude that this probably reflects a certain disdain by teachers for the Teenek culture. This disdain and this lack of interest, are transmitted to the pupils. Similarly, the graduating classes at the *telesecundarias* schools⁸ of the region, are often named after prehispanic Nahuatl cultural heroes, such as Quetzalc—atl (deity of fertility) or Huehuetotl (fire deity), but they are never given Teenek names.⁹

Indians without knowing it

- 11 The omnipresence of the Nahuatl in the Mexican ethos is not surprising. The Nahuatl or Mexica group, predominant among the ethnic groups under the Aztec empire, were chosen by the Spaniards as representatives of “the Indian.” Their language became the lingua franca during the colonial period, and many chronicles about the local cultures, used the Nahuatl prism, in order to describe other groups. These facts certainly influenced the different historical and

anthropological studies on the indigenous populations of Mexico, as well as the different Indigenist policies. As for the Teenek's own vision of the "Public Indian," it is undoubtedly influenced by these approaches, that laud the Nahua culture to the detriment of their own. Nevertheless, the Teenek self-demeaning perception of their own culture, as will be shown later, also helps to construct this relationship to the "Public Indian."

12 An example of Teenek perception of the "Public Indian," is evident in the Teenek interpretation of the manifestation of the Virgin of Guadeloupe to the Indian Juan Diego. The traditional story tells that in 1531, Juan Diego met the Virgin on the Tepeyac mountain. She told him that she wished to have a sanctuary at that place. The Indian reported it to the Archbishop, who did not believe him. The Virgin reappeared to Juan Diego, but this time her image was left painted on his cape. With this miraculous and incontrovertible image, the Virgin of Guadeloupe was soon made into the patroness saint of Mexico.

13 In the Teenek version of this account, Juan Diego was obviously Teenek because "he was like us: poor, ugly, stinky, he didn't wear nice clothes, and for that reason nobody believed him." The Virgin's appearance to Juan Diego is commemorated in Mexico on December 12. On that day, the Teenek, like the rest of the Mexican population, revive the historic event in their "dance of the Indians girls" (*danza de las inditas*), performing it outside the church in the district town of Tantoyuca, or at the village chapels. A dozen young girls dance in two rows, singing in Spanish, and in a nasal voice relates the historic episode. Between them is a young boy, representing Juan Diego. The curious aspect of this Teenek dance is the fact that the girls and the boy are dressed up as Nahua Indians. The boy wears a white cotton shirt and wide pants, and the girls wear embroidered cotton blouses and colored skirts and their hair is braided. The Teenek, as I mentioned earlier, do not have a typical costume, and their clothes are modern. Teenek women wear dresses, not skirts, and their hair is gathered in a pony-tail. Not only this dance of "the Indians girls" is an Occidental contribution (the theme is sung in Spanish, and the instruments used -violin and guitar-, are both of European origin), but it also adopts the Nahua as the image of the "public Indian." The Nahua are certainly the largest indigenous group in Mexico, but in Tantoyuca, they are a very small minority. The biggest indigenous group is undoubtedly the Teenek, but even here, the Nahua image is representative of the Indians, including the Teenek. Furthermore, in the story about the appearance of the Virgin, the Indian is perceived as Teenek, but this attribute is actually a negative one, that is related to the fact that Juan Diego was poor and ugly, which is why nobody believed him. In the dance, by contrast, the Indian of the same story is not a Teenek, but a Nahua, because in this case, the Indian image -rather than denigrated, is elevated by the clerical machinery that introduced the dance.

14 A similar example of such ambivalence, that conceives the Indian image through the Nahua, appears in the Teenek interpretation of the Spanish conquest. According to this interpretation, the Aztec emperor Moctezuma was in fact the king of the Teenek, because he was timorous and submissive, while the other Aztec emperor, Cuauhtemoc, was the king of the Nahua, because he was more courageous. It must be mentioned here, that contemporary Nahuas are considered descendants of the Aztec-Mexica civilization. Note also that, according to the official history, Moctezuma II (1480-1520) was, on the Spaniards' arrival, the Aztec emperor, and that he allowed the Spaniards entry into the center of his empire, believing that their arrival was the return of the Quetzalc—atl god, that was announced to him earlier in his dreams. Subsequently, he was stoned to death by his own people, who rose against the conquistadors. In contrast, Cuauhtemoc (1495-1525), who succeeded Moctezuma, led a bloody struggle against the Spaniards, but, in the end, he was captured and executed. He nevertheless remained the symbol of the implacable resistance of the last Aztecs against the invaders.

15 Cuauhtemoc, the national symbol of the Indian, and carrying so much positive charge, ultimately found its place in the Teenek representation-system, only as a representative of the

Nahua Indians. This highly estimated image, was not adopted by the Teenek as their own. Instead, the Teenek identify themselves with the anti-hero of the conquest, the Aztec emperor Moctezuma, who was victim of his own dreams. What we have here, is a vague perception of what is an Indian. The other ethnic groups known to the Teenek have their own names (Otomi, Totonac, Pame) and, "the Indian" as such, is an import into the Teenek culture, and import that has an ambivalent charge in the national society, and is also perceived ambivalently among the Teenek, who interpret it according to their own way of thinking.

16 Thus, of the two images of the Indian, the Teenek identify themselves with the degraded one, the one that is poor and miserable; and whenever the Indian image is somehow exalted and made an object of pride by the mestizos and the national society, the Teenek assimilate this positive figure to their closest indigenous group, the Nahua. Even though it is an imported term, the "Indian" is thus integrated by the Teenek into their own differentiation scale, hence into their representation system of the self and of the Other.

The Teenek and the public sphere

17 Above, we saw that the Teenek maintain a certain posture towards the extra-communal world, in which the Nahua, the closest and strongest indigenous group, serves as the "Indianness" criterion, according to the official vision. The distinction made by the Teenek between themselves and the "public Indian," represented by the Nahua, probably originates implicitly in their cosmology. However, the distinction is not only reflected in explicit Teenek definitions, which are also influenced by external and national agents; it is also apparent in the actual relations between the Teenek and the few government institutions with which they are in contact.

18 From the statements made about the difference between Nahua and Teenek, we learned that, among the mestizos, this difference is measured against certain normative criteria in respect to their distinct "capacities" to integrate into modern society. The Nahua are considered much more dynamic than the Teenek, less circumspect about the outside world, more jovial, enterprising, and the like, while the Teenek are said to have a much more reserved attitude. This kind of observations are made by various people who work daily in this region with both Teenek and Nahua (operatives of Indigenist institutions or other government bodies, peasant organization activists, field researchers, agronomists, teachers, etc.). This difference in behavior has also been noted in the two other regions populated by these two ethnic groups: in Sierra Tantima southeast of Tantoyuca, and around Tancanhuitz in the state of San Luis Potosí to the northeast. An example of this attitude was evident at a meeting of the Indigenous authorities, organized in July 1992 by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI)¹⁰ of Tancanhuitz. Teenek and Nahua authorities were invited to discuss the interaction between special indigenous characteristics, and the constitutional framework. The discussions in which the Teenek participated, soon came to an end, before the time planned was over, and they could develop only through the efforts of the INI moderators. Those in which the Nahua participated, on the contrary, extended well past the time accorded. After this meeting, the INI direction of Tancanhuitz decided not to hold joint gathering of this kind any more, as a different institutional approach to each group was needed. Generally, when a government initiative is taken towards indigenous groups in the region (essentially agricultural improvement or innovation projects), the Nahua profit better from these programs, while Teenek interest in them is usually minimal¹¹.

19 It is evidently difficult to offer conclusive explanation for this ethnic differentiation, lived and experienced daily in the region. Elsewhere, I outlined some tentative interpretations for the more active Nahua participation in regional commercial networks, as well as in the government initiatives in rural development¹². Briefly, the region's agrarian history seems to offer some indications about the distinct options for corporate land holding available to each group (*ejidos*

for the Nahua and *bienes comunales* for the Teenek¹³). These choices had later repercussions on the degree of integration of each group into the national society. The *ejidos* are indeed more involved in the commercial networks and have access to rural credits and other institutional support. To these distinct forms of land holding, in addition to cultural differences between the two groups (language, customs, costumes, etc.), one must augment the different development of roads in the Nahua and Teenek areas, as well as the presence of official institutions and organizations in the former, and their absence in the latter.

20 Finally, the differential terms used by the various social actors in the region, reflect discriminatory and hierarchical prejudices existing in all sides and, in certain cases, a negative internalization of these by the Teenek. This may be a situation and an attitude which were inherited, as ethnic differentiation was already noted in the colonial period¹⁴. Thus, the Teenek representations of their difference and inferiority, would be autochthonous interpretations, explaining the historical differentiation. I don't want to err here by taking an essentialist approach. I wish to underline the fact, that an objective difference does exist in the integration of each one of the two ethnic groups in the national society, and that this difference is commented on by the various social actors on the regional scene, who use some qualitative and essentialist descriptions. These descriptions, in turn, are pervaded with a certain idea of the "Public Indian". Anyway, it is difficult to demonstrate a clear relation of cause and effect between the less dynamic and less autonomous participation of the Teenek in the development programs, and the representation system of self, that they manifest towards their Nahua and mestizo neighbors. Yet one may conjecture, that what we have here is a cultural manner "to think with"¹⁵, "that influences Teenek and Nahua behavior and attitudes to the outside community, including their participation in programs ultimately intended to integrate them to the mestizo world"¹⁶.

21 The Teenek, however have their own explanation of this difference. They say that the Nahua are

much more tough than us, it's a race that has no sense, they always do what they want.

22 The last phrase reflects, as much as it sums up, the Nahua and Teenek differences observed by outsiders. But the "sense" referred to by the Teenek, differs from the logic that praises the activity and the integration of indigenous groups into the modern society. The next comment undoubtedly illustrates the rationality of these differences as perceived by the Teenek:

... The Nahua is more nimble, he has more faculties than the Teenek, he adapts himself easily but he also loses his culture easily. The Teenek are more shy, they progress slowly; they are more traditional, but they keep themselves more united. The Protestants sects can't penetrate the Teenek world, while they are more successful in the Nahua communities.

23 In a more objective manner, it seems then that the behavioral distinction between members of the two ethnic groups in respect to the national society, could be characterized as a notable difference in the way by which each group lives its Indianity. The Teenek seem to preserve their ethnic identity in a passive way and with a relative hermetism, while the Nahua participate more actively in regional economic and political life, at the same time preserving some of their indigenous characteristics.

Indianity without Indianism

24 With these characteristics in mind, one might envisage a certain coherent attitude regarding actual Indianist militancy in the region. It is indeed reasonable to think that the Nahua would be more active in any such Indian expressions, protesting about the lack of respect for their cultural rights and the social injustice, claiming the reoccupation of ancestral lands, and so on. But in this region, there are no such activities, not by Nahua and not by the Teenek. Despite

the difference in attitude between the two groups, neither of them is looking expressly for the "means of singularity"¹⁷." This local shared attitude, is totally in contrast to that of the Paez Indians of Colombia, for example, who in fact have completely reconstituted their history and their rites for the purpose of making political demands¹⁸. Another exemplary contrasting attitude is found among Guatemalan indigenous groups, whose ethno-political activities are already part of the national agenda.¹⁹

- 25 Analyzing indigenous participation in the Latin American public sphere, we may speak of Indianity that develops at different rates. Some groups, do not even perceive themselves as "Indians," while others manipulate this concept for the purpose of making political or social demands, and placing themselves in a specific niche within the national society. Between these two poles, there is a wide array of different conditions and different levels of "Indian" consciousness, connected to the degree of social and economic involvement (which in turn makes knowledge accessible). I have no explanation as to why no Indianist organizations exist in Tantoyuca, in order to claim cultural and social rights. Nor do I want to have readers believe that all is well in the Veracruzian Huasteca inter ethnic relationships. However, I think that some points must be set forth, for a better understanding of this lack of political participation.
- 26 First, an important point should be mentioned regarding the municipal set-up in which the indigenous group is immersed. In Tantoyuca, this set-up is an urban district, mostly settled by a mestizo population, while the Indians live in tiny villages around the town, ones which are often a three to five hours walk away, in the bush. The villages are mostly inhabited by people of only one ethnic group. They are organized in small groups of localities (*congregaciones*), which have representatives who meet with the mestizo municipal authorities once a month. These representatives have no political power at the municipal level, but they do have some local duties, essentially maintaining order, as it is understood by the community. This circumstance allows a certain social and cultural autonomy, a matter to which we shall return later.
- 27 Contrary to this situation, in other Mexican states, especially in Oaxaca and Chiapas, where the most numerous indigenous population lives, the Indian communities constitute municipalities. Municipal politics is conducted within the ethnic group and its multiple factions. Thus, political apprenticeship, including dealing with the municipality's relationships with government bodies, begins with municipal self-administration.²⁰ In Tantoyuca, on the contrary, the Indians do not administer towns, and have no access to extra-communal power, and here, the Indian village is but a small part of a much wider unit, namely the *municipio*, which is managed by mestizos.
- 28 Indians' political apprenticeship, that occurs in others Mexican states, generates essential knowledge (even if partial) of the modern, national society. By contrast, most of the Teenek population is almost isolated from matters that pertain to the everyday life of the more integrated citizen, and the absence of this kind of knowledge is a social handicap for whoever wants to integrate to the national society. Basic examples for that, are details that seem obvious to city people, but are unknown or are novelties for those who live in the bush, without electric current, running water, cash incomes or roads. These include the absence of even abstract knowledge of how to manage a bank account and use a checkbook, of how to use a telephone or a gas stove, how to cross a street, etc. I do not mean that the Teenek and other indigenous groups that live relatively isolated from the modern society cannot learn and socialize these details. On the contrary, the moment an opportunity arises to integrate an innovation into the daily life, this is generally done without major problems. What I suggest here, is that all these kinds of elements are part of a much wider socio-technical complex, that is related to institutional structures and to the functioning of modern society, and from which the Teenek are relatively excluded. This exclusion is a social handicap that must be overcome, first in order to create of a relationship with the national society, and eventually in order to

establish any kind of militant organization. I will illustrate this with a simple example, dealing with a locality that is newly connected to the electrical current. Leaving aside the changes stemming from the existence of artificial light (extension of the workday, additional handicraft activities, introduction of television with its cultural impact, possible technical innovations, etc.), the very fact of undertaking a monthly commitment to pay the bill implies economic reorganization of the family unit, cash management, and a contractual relationship with a national institution. Thus, the introduction of a basic service to an Indian community until then isolated, implies profound changes in respect of its entry into the public sphere, and the apprenticeship of modern life practices. These cultural changes do not inevitably entail loss of sense of ethnic membership, but they do enlarge the circles of entry into and knowledge of the national social structures.

29 In Mexico, there are indigenous communities that have been linked to the electricity grid for more than thirty years, and others that still have no access to this utility. There are municipalities administrated by Indians, with everything that this implies regarding interaction with government bodies and acculturation process, and there are Indian localities absorbed in wider municipal complexes managed by mestizo people; this fact implies (at least in Tantoyuca) total isolation of the people living in the Indians villages from government bodies, since contact is always mediated by local and mestizo political forces. Moreover, as we have seen in the first part of this essay, the process from institutional lack of attention towards Teenek groups, to indigenous-State interaction, is still imbued with all kind of "ethno-logic" realities. This illustration, I believe, clearly explains the "Indianities" developing at different rates throughout Latin America. It is the result of distinct degrees of articulation between the Indian community and national life, that is, the opportunities to manage diverse rationales (of the political party, the community, the budget administration, etc.). The national power structure is always the same. What differs, from one region to another, is the active or passive integration of the Indians into it.

30 The Indians of Tantoyuca thus maintain their Indianity without manifesting it in political organization. There is a kind of conservatism in that region, a sort of status quo and consensus regarding the social configuration. The two ethnic groups, as mentioned, live isolated from the mestizos' town district, and as a result, they enjoy relative autonomy that enables them to develop their culture within their own communities (agricultural, medical, social organization indigenous practices, etc.), and each according to its world view. The right to difference exists de facto. The linguistic and cultural affirmations are exercised in this manner, without passing through wider extra-communal organizations. Although settling land problems might be a necessity in order to preserve this ethnic territory, considering all the symbolic relationships of the Indians with their land²¹, these problems are always managed as peasant-stock breeder conflicts, and not as an Indian struggle. The peasant organizations, official and independent, that are active among the Nahua and the Teenek, are always promoted by mestizo leaders. They produce general peasant-agrarian ideologies; sometimes they foster some rural producers' cooperatives, but they never carry an Indianist orientation. The relative regional isolation, and the few anthropological investigations done in the region, may be another factor that influences the absence of a pan-Indian consciousness (perhaps I exaggerate here the actual influence of the anthropological literature on the local societies). Finally, one must also think about the migratory flows moving out of each indigenous region, and evaluate the degree of contact between the migrants and their community of origin. In the Tantoyuca region, those who leave their communities tend to disengage from their indigenous culture, and if they ever come back home, it is not in order to promote it.

Conclusion

31 The following words of a Teenek informant may sum up the entire position of this ethnic group in face of the public mestizo national scene :

... When the Spaniards came, they arrived here. They brought here priests, they brought people, they brought the civil register, everything. They christianized us, they baptized us, this is what the priests did, they brought the evangelization. Before, we were living like raccoons, just living, we were not baptized. When the Spaniards came, they brought teachers, so we could learn to speak, so we could learn everything. Before, when we were only Teenek here, we were living without knowing. The Teenek believed that everything was God, the stars, the land, the sun... This is the way we believed, but when the Spaniards came, they taught us, they baptized us so we could have the knowledge. The Spaniards are the ones who carry the best instruction, the best knowledge... that is the reason we are now like we are...

... Well, the Spaniards are those who are in command because they are in the cities, because they are in the government. A Teenek can't be in the Spanish [mestizo] government because he is not an *ejek* [mestizo]. The government only exists in the center, far away from here, because we are here on poor lands, and a person from the government has never come here, they are only in Mexico City. They stay only in the center, in the capital, there are the people who govern. There are no Teenek in this government, they do not allow it to the Teenek. Maybe because the Spaniards make efforts, with money, to get into the government. Even if we have the knowledge we can't get into government. A Teenek will never get into the government because he doesn't have the money for it. A Teenek just doesn't have it.

32 From these comments and the previous analyses, it becomes clear how the Teenek political consciousness, together with their relationship with the national sphere, are strikingly connected to their ethnic identity and representation system. Within the group, the Teenek identity finds its origin among the ancestors, the local topography, the nourishing earth, the Indian language or, in other words, the autochthonous. However, from the outside, this identity is seen as negative, as some kind of problem involving integration (considered imperative). The solitude of the Teenek Indians, is by no means the same postulated a long time ago by Eric Wolf, when he described the "closed corporate community"²². The Teenek live in a permanent contact with the national mestizo society, and with Western urban culture. Their myth of origin is indeed influenced by it. The very fact that for historical and demographical reasons they lack land, and therefore are obliged all year round to find seasonal work outside their communities, causes them to become involved in wider social structures. The Teenek thus manage distinct cultural registers: one in which they are becoming increasingly involved, but not integrated, because there is another one, in which they take refuge, so they can retain, in face of the globalizing process, their own identity.²³

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Notas

1[´] In the Latin American context, "Indianism" (*indianismo*) is distinguished from the official "Indigenism" (*indigenismo*) by the fact that it is an ideology elaborated by Indians and that it accentuates the struggle for their liberation from internal colonialism.

2[´] The first part of this essay is a development of an earlier paper concerning the image of the Indian in Mexico (See Ariel de Vidas 1998).

3[´] This essay is the result of an anthropological study on the Veracruzán Teenek modalities of ethnicity based on fieldwork among Teenek villages around the municipality of Tantoyuca (State of Veracruz, Mexico). The investigation was conducted from March 1991 to March 1995.

4. See Ariel de Vidas 1997b.

5[´] For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between Teenek cosmology and their social marginality, see Ariel de Vidas 1997a .

6´ Sources: *Conteo de Población y Vivienda*, INEGI, 1995.

7´ The Hawk dance (*bixom t´iiv*), the Jaguar dance (*bixom padhum*) and the Reed dance (*bixom pakaab*).

8´ Secondary schools in Mexican rural regions where, for lack of competent teachers, the lessons are transmitted by the national television. In the Tantoyuca region there are three "telesecundarias" (1995) established in Teenek localities, but failure of the battery electricity system (in the absence of electricity grid in the villages) often does not allow sustained application of the scholar program.

9´ On the different perceptions of Indian cultural patrimony in this region, see Ariel de Vidas 1994.

10´ The Mexican government institution administers Indians affairs in economic, educational, justice, health, and culture matters.

11´ This attitude has prevailed since the establishment in the early 1970s of two INI centers in the Huasteca region (Chicontepec and Tancanhuitz) and lately, in 1990, of one at Otontepec (see Ariel de Vidas and Barthas 1996).

12´ A first approach to this problem is presented in my forthcoming article.

13´ The *Bienes comunales* are a unit of lands legally attributed, according to the 1917 Mexican Constitution, to Indian communities able to present colonial property titles. These lands, which form the basis of the agrarian Indian communities and where land ownership is collective, are inalienable and can be transferred only and exclusively among the community members.

14´ See Sahagún 1977, t. 3: 202-203; Díaz del Castillo 1977: 85 and 359; León-Portilla 1965; Tapia Zenteno 1985: 23.

15´ See Cohen 1985: 19.

16´ On the other hand, it is problematic to analyze questions of continuity of identity throughout various centuries, and it is impossible to demonstrate it in this paper. These problems and a tentative explication to the Teenek posture are largely developed in my Ph.D. thesis (see Ariel de Vidas 1997).

17´ "La vía de la singularidad", see Villoro 1998: 71 and *passim*.

18´ See Rappaport 1990.

19´ See Warren 1998.

20´ See for example M. Bartolomé 1979.

21´ See Bonfil Batalla 1990: 203.

22´ See Wolf 1957.

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