

"We are all Government: Zapatista Political Community. Contexts, Challenges, and Prospects"

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Abbreviations:

ARIC	<i>Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo</i> (Rural Association of Collective Interest)
CAPISE	<i>Centro de Análisis Político e Investigaciones Sociales y Económicas</i> (Centre for Political Analysis and Social and Economic Research).
CIEPAC	<i>Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción en Chiapas</i> (Centre for Economic and Political Research and Community Action in Chiapas).
CIESAS	<i>Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social</i> (Centre for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology).
CIOAC	<i>Central Independiente de Obreros y Campesinos</i> (Independent Union of Workers and Campesinos).
CNC	<i>Confederación Nacional Campesina</i> (National Campesino Federation).
COCEI	<i>Coalición Obrera, Campesina y Estudiantil del Istmo</i> (Coalition of Workers, Campesino, and Students of the Isthmus).
CORCI	<i>Coordinadora Regional de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas</i> (Regional Coordination of Peasant and Indigenous Organizations).
DESCAI	<i>Derechos Económicos, Sociales y Culturales Indígenas</i> (Economic, Social, Cultural, and Indigenous Rights).
ECOSUR	<i>El Colegio de la Frontera Sur</i> (College of the Southern Frontier).
ENAH	<i>Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia</i> (National School of Anthropology and History).
EZLN	<i>Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional</i> (Zapatista Army of National Liberation).
FRAYBA	<i>Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas</i> (Human Rights Centre Fray Bartolomé de las Casas)
LO	International Labour Organization.
IMF	International Monetary Bank.

IPN	<i>Instituto Politécnico Nacional</i> (National Polytechnic Institute).
MAREZ	<i>Municipios Autónomos Rebeldes Zapatistas</i> (Autonomous Rebel Zapatista Municipalities).
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement.
OCOMPE	<i>Organización Campesina Obrero Magisterial Popular Estudiantil</i> (Popular Peasant, Worker, Teacher, and Student Organization)
OPDDIC	<i>Organización para la Defensa de los Derechos Indígenas y Campesinos</i> (Organization for Defence of Indigenous and Campesino Rights).
PAN	<i>Partido Acción Nacional</i> (National Action Party).
PFCRN	<i>Partido del Frente Cardenista de Reconstrucción Nacional</i> (Cardenist Front for National Reconstruction).
PRD	<i>Partido de la Revolución Democrática</i> (Party of the Democratic Revolution).
PRI	<i>Partido de la Revolución Institucional</i> (Institutional Revolutionary Party).
PST	<i>Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores</i> (Socialist Workers' Party).
PVEM	<i>Partido Verde Ecologista de México</i> (Mexican Green Ecologist Party).
RAP	<i>Regiones Autónomas Pluri-étnicas</i> (Pluri-ethnic Autonomous Region).
SEDESOL	<i>Secretaria de Desarrollo Social</i> (Secretary of Social Development).
UAM	<i>Universidad Autónoma de México</i> (Autonomous Metropolitan University).
UES	<i>Unión de Ejidos de la Selva</i> (Union of Jungle Ejidos).
UNACH	<i>Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas</i> (Autonomous University of Chiapas).
UNAM	<i>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México</i> (National Autonomous University of Mexico).

Glossary:

Barricadas: This term refers to the civil population's direct action while resisting armed attacks by State Police during the 2006 confrontation.

Campamentistas: In general, Zapatista sympathizers who visit the Caracoles or Zapatista communities are referred to as campamentistas. They may carry out a variety of tasks, from human rights observation, to offering workshops, to simply visiting the communities

Campamento: This is the site built for visitors to stay after having obtained the necessary permission. Each Caracol, as well as this community, has a campamento.

Compañero and compañera: This is the manner in which Zapatista members refer to each other. The term has been adopted from other Latin American revolutionary movements, such as the Cuban Revolution. Zapatistas also use it to refer to non-Zapatista visitors in order to include them in their movement in a friendly manner.

Contratistas: "Contractors" were Mestizos who went to the communities to try to convince the population to work on haciendas in other municipalities. However, working conditions were very poor, and in some cases, alcohol was offered in order to convince them or even to take them unwittingly in a drunken state, or to force them to work to pay off the debt of the alcohol.

Corporativismo: Corporativism is the doctrine that promulgates state directed organization of society into unions which unite bosses and common labourers across classes. Organizations created by the state as the sole channel for negotiating with the government were referred to as "corporativist". These included official teachers' unions, and state-affiliated campesino organizations, all of which negotiate with the state, of which they are part.

Ejido: The ejido referred to here is different from the type of ejido which existed in the 1830s. The ejido of the 20th Century is a type of collective land tenancy system created by Mexico's revolutionary land reform, by which rights to occupy and use land were either restored to former indigenous communities that had illegally lost them to haciendas (restitution), or, more commonly, were granted to a group of petitioners by the state. In the 1930s, it became possible for landless agricultural workers to petition for land grants that would be provided from expropriated haciendas even if the land had not originally

belonged to an indigenous community during Colonial times. Although land titles could be granted to individuals and passed on to their heirs, the land as such remained state property under the original legislation. Ejidos were registered under the National Agrarian Registry until 1991, when President Carlos Salinas de Gortari eliminated the ejido as a form of land tenancy from the Mexican constitution as a preparatory condition for entering into the 1994 NAFTA.

Guardias Blancas: According to Onesimo Hidalgo (1997), the name guardias blancas (white guards) is borrowed from the Soviet Union. After the triumph of the Soviet Revolution in October, 1917, the Soviet government opted to distribute land to anyone who needed it, but these new landowners were confronted with the resistance of the private police of large-scale landowners, called white guards. Therefore, the government tried to combat them with red guards. The white guards were simulated in Chiapas during the administration of Governor Samuel Leon Brindis (1958-1964), who authorised them in 1961 through a decree which allowed ranchers to bear arms and contract “private police”. Additionally, they have benefited from certification of agrarian “inaffectatibility,” which, as a whole, protected their ownership of some 224,619 acres of land from 1934 to 1988.

Kawilto: This is the indigenised version of the Spanish word “cabildo,” or town council.

Oportunidades: This program was created in March, 2002 by PAN President Vicente Fox. Although Oportunidades is really the continuation of PROGRESA, it shifted the focus from solely benefiting rural areas, and is considered to be a human development program to end poverty from one generation to the next. While it still applies to rural areas, it has greater coverage in Mexico’s urban and semi-urban areas (Orozco and Hubert 2005). Due to the fact that financing of both programs has depended on the Inter-American Development Bank, it may not be considered to be a national program, and much less is it an original political proposal.

Patron: This is a hacienda owner who acts as the boss of the indentured servants.

Piqueteros: According to Luis Oviedo (2002), “piquete” refers to collective protests of individuals who define themselves as exploited and opposed to the Argentinean state and its institutions. In 2002, hundreds of thousands of unemployed men and women joined the piqueteros. Their objective has been to organize those who are “disorganized,” while acting at the margin of unions and other institutions. The piqueteros practices hail from the Argentinean socialists of the first decade of the 20th Century

Plan Puebla Panama: Proposed in 2000 by Mexican president Vicente Fox, Plan Puebla Panama was eventually signed by Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. In 2006, Colombia joined. The primary objective of this project was to create a common economic area to facilitate management, business concessions, and investment by private capital and transnational companies to exploit the natural resources of these countries. With the incorporation of Colombia, the plan was renamed “Project Mesoamerica.” Mexican States affected are Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz, and Yucatan.

Pozol: A drink of cooked and ground corn mixed with water, pozol may be drunk plain, or with salt and chilli.

PRIista: This term refers to individuals or communities belonging to campesino organizations politically allied with the PRI party. Some PRI campesino organizations have been linked to armed attacks perpetrated against Zapatista groups or their sympathizers. These include “Peace and Justice”, “The Revolutionary Indigenous Anti-Zapatista Movement”, and “The Decapitators” (CIEPAC 1998).

PROGRESA: This program was instituted in August, 1997 by PRI President Ernesto Zedillo. The goal of PROGRESA was to combat poverty, especially in rural areas. Similar programs have existed in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Honduras (Behrman, Senguota, and Tood 2001).

Samuel Ruiz: “Don Samuel” was the Catholic Bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas from 1959 to 1999. For over three decades, he worked closely with the indigenous communities, fomenting Liberation Theology among Catholics. He also actively participated in the Zapatista conflict as mediator and conciliator, and is one of the few figures recognized by the Zapatistas as a valid interlocutor since 1994. He died in Mexico City on January 24, 2011.

Tojolabal: According to Shannon L Mattice (2001), Tojol = legitimate, ab'al = word, expressing the belief of being an authentic or legitimate people.

Ways and customs: This refers to the normative systems which, traditionally and to this day, govern the life of indigenous communities in Mexico. These systems may vary from community to community, and do not conform to the federal legal system.

The University of Manchester

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Abstract:

This thesis demonstrates how, through diverse daily life practices, a Zapatista community, referred to here as *La Humanidad*, creates a model of autonomy in the Mexican State of Chiapas. Based on ethnographic information, this study explores the meanings that this community attributes to practices and notions such as Autonomy, Resistance, Memory, good government and bad government. I contend that these practices represent an attempt to confront and resist the neoliberal model of Good Governance and consequently reconstruct the social fabric, revive communitarian practices, and develop models of self-sufficiency in regard to economics, health and education.

Although *La Humanidad* constitutes just one case study, it highlights little known aspects of what is meant by grassroots participation in regard to this particular Zapatista community, allowing us to gain deeper insight into how indigenous campesino autonomy has been constructed following the Zapatista Uprising. Furthermore, through multi-sited fieldwork, I demonstrate the variety of organisational experiences of The Good Government Council among the five different Zapatista *Caracoles*: Oventic, La Garrucha, Morelia, Roberto Barrios, and La Realidad. In order to contrast these *Caracoles* with official forms of government organization, this study also addresses aspects of the constitutional government in the Municipality of San Andres Larrainzar.

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Introduction

The final, and most important, protection of communal land ownership for Mexico's indigenous peoples was eliminated with the modification of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992, under the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Besides placing the indigenous *campesino* community in a vulnerable situation, this officially ended any possibility of agrarian repartition. "On January 6, 1992 the decree which reformed Constitutional Article 27 was published, ending the legal foundation which had regulated the relationship between the state and the *campesinos* of post-revolutionary Mexico" (Ventura Patiño 2008: 2). The Zapatista Uprising of 1994 provoked a political, social, and academic climate which favoured a process of analysis of these changes and, above all, of the history of Chiapas. Many authors, including Garcia de Leon (1997), Harvey (1998), De Vos (2002), Viqueira and Ruz (2004), and Higgins (2004), have developed new historical approaches and theoretical analyses of the construction of the state and the people which it governs. In the same vein, Rus, Mattiace, and Hernandez Castillo (2003) suggest that an exhaustive analysis of these political processes may offer the scholar valuable clues to an understanding of how the nation was constructed. Regarding this, Aubry (2005) states "that the processes of independence, reform, and Mexican revolution have not contributed to the formation of a nation, but only local states" (2005: 158).

This thesis, based on multi-site ethnographic research, with particular emphasis on the case study of the community *La Humanidad* in Chiapas, addresses the Zapatista autonomous model of government and governance which its followers argue better represents them and their history, values, cosmology, and ethnicity as Mayan indigenous Mexicans. The Zapatista model is constructed collectively, with voluntary association of its members, and is based on indigenous communitarian practices and social relations and the creation of the common good. Throughout this thesis, we will see how, in the Zapatista community, alternative social models are created with the objective of obtaining political and economic autonomy, and even food sovereignty. For the Zapatista movement, achieving autonomy from the state is also necessary since its members feel that the state no longer represents society's interests. In the global context, the Zapatista Good Government may be understood as an effort to renew the practice of "politics" in which

individuals may not only participate in party politics and voting, but also renovate social life and re-establish social relations, which in past decades have been entrusted to market laws.

In Mexico, the neoliberal model has accentuated differences among social classes on the one hand and between rural and urban areas on the other. Application of this model initially generated conflict among different dominant groups such as the financial sector, political parties, and political elites. These groups later united (Sonnleitner 2007), but, paradoxically, the union of the ruling classes did not lead to a strong Mexican government. On the contrary, the weakness of official governmental politics is evident in the current crisis in governance, which has led to uncontrolled violence and absence of state legitimacy and authority throughout the nation. As a response to this profound crisis, the Zapatista indigenous communities are developing projects which seek to re-establish the social fabric, community, the population's physical security, and justice. Throughout this study, we will see how the members of one community, *La Humanidad*, believes that in order to reach these objectives, it is necessary to first obtain their autonomy and self government.

In June, 2005, the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN) announced *La Sexta Declaracion de la Selva Lacandona* (The Sixth Declaration of Lacandon Jungle) in which they summoned Mexican civil society to come together to discuss the grave issues affecting the country, to exchange experiences of resistance, and to form a plan for a nationwide struggle. To advance toward these objectives, that August they began to forge an initiative called *La Otra Campaña* (The Other Campaign). This political strategy aimed to merge Zapatista proposals with the interests of other social groups in struggle against capitalism, an economic system identified as the source of the vast majority of socio-economic problems faced by all sectors of Mexican society, problems which are not unique to indigenous peoples. While *La Otra Campaña* took on its own political course outside the Zapatista communities in the following years, here I will focus exclusively on the daily lives of one community which belongs to the Zapatista movement. It should be noted that, to my knowledge, the inhabitants of this community are not members of the military ranks of the EZLN. Therefore, the importance of conducting an ethnographic study of the civilian members is that it allows us to grasp the importance of grassroots participation and gain deeper insight into the wider political initiative of Zapatismo. However, above all, the aim of this study is to contribute to broadening our knowledge of the daily construction of autonomy in

Zapatista communities and, through this ethnographic experience, explore the more general implications of the Zapatista experience in the context of Mexico.

I should point out that all citations in this study which were originally published in Spanish, as indicated in the bibliography, have been translated by this author, and that, with the exception of well known public figures and government officials, all persons mentioned in or interviewed for this text have had their names changed. I have also changed the names of some locations mentioned in the text.

0.1. Literature review:

On August 3, 1990, the Mexican Government approved Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) regarding the rights of indigenous people and tribal groups. In January 1991, this convention was ratified¹ (Gonzales Galvan 1999), opening up the possibility of amending article 4 of the Mexican Constitution. This meant that for the first time in its history, the Mexican state recognized the pluri-cultural composition of its population. (Hernandez Martinez 1992). According to Saldivar (2003), these changes provoked lively debate on indigenous rights in the mainstream media, and the public in general became aware of the issue. However, with the Zapatista uprising on January 1, 1994, the disparity between “de facto recognition” and “legal recognition” of indigenous rights became evident, as reports on the Zapatista uprising questioned the capacity of indigenous Mexicans to voluntarily join an armed movement. Hence, their legal status as indigenous people may have been acknowledged prior to this event, but news of the uprising demonstrated that they were generally seen as lacking free will.

On January 6, 1994, President Salinas de Gortari addressed the nation, categorically denying that this was an indigenous movement and attributing the uprising to foreigners who sought to destabilise the Mexican government (bibliotecatvChiapas 1994). Some prominent intellectuals and journalists (Krauze 1994; 1999; Viqueira 1999; Pitarch 2001, and Tello 1995) reiterated these arguments, asserting that this movement was heavily influenced, to varying degrees, by Liberation Theology, Maoism, Socialism, and Communism, and consequently it was undemocratic, violent, and posed a threat to the

¹This convention defined tribal groups as “those who are distinguished by social, cultural and economic conditions from the rest of the nation, and are governed totally or partially by their own traditions, customs or special laws”. Indigenous people are defined as “direct descendents of the native population of a country at the time of conquest or colonisation or those who lived in a region prior to the establishment of state borders” (Gonzales Galvan 1999: 857-858).

future modernisation of Mexico. These fears were further exacerbated by Guatemala's strained peace process after years of brutal civil war (1960-1996). Due to large numbers of refugees entering Chiapas and the known sympathies of the "radical" portion of the Catholic Church toward the movement, rumours abounded that the EZLN was influenced or partially made up of members of the *Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres* or EGP (The Guerrilla Army of the Poor). Such alarmist reports by Zapatismo's critics swayed public opinion toward believing in the possibility of a "Central Americanisation of Mexico". The ruling classes saw this as a threat to Mexico's business relations with the United States and Canada, since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had just gone into effect. Thus, allowing the Zapatismo to exist meant a step backward for Mexico, as there existed an "ideological" contradiction between establishing a neoliberal economic model and allowing strong political groups with socialist or communist tendencies, as the Zapatistas were characterised, to exist within the nation.

In the years following these tentative developments in Chiapas, commentaries on Zapatismo have diversified and become more nuanced. The Zapatistas have increasingly been recognized for their contribution to the democratisation of Mexico, as is evident in studies by Harvey (1998), Stephen (2002), and Collier (1994; 1995; 2004). Many such studies have contributed to the development of new political, historical, and economic perspectives which help to understand the causes and scope of Zapatismo. However, Arturo Warman's early studies such as *Y venimos a contradecir* (1976) and *El proyecto político del Zapatismo* (1986) provide an account of Mexican peasant politics which is not told from the perspective of the state – that of the free municipalities struggling against the state. Likewise, *Everyday Forms of State Formation* (1994) by Joseph and Nugent emphasizes the vision of politics from below, forcing readers to consider the importance of everyday political practices of *campesino* communities. Such an analysis is crucial for a deeper understanding of the processes of confrontation, negotiation, resistances, and resilient struggle among *campesino* groups and the state.

Holloway (2003), Zibechi (2004a), and Almeyra (2003; 2004a; 2004b) have made important contributions with their non-state centred analytical approaches which address levels of political action and political spaces which exist outside of, or are independent of, political parties and established political entities such as trade unions. Abeles (2006) refers to these spaces as "predominant and omnipotent political places". Likewise, Scott (1985; 2009) and Linebaugh and Rediker (2002), while they do not deal with Zapatismo, provide important insights for developing the concept of political action outside the realm of the

state. These authors show how daily life practices of certain non-Western societies and subaltern groups are the primary front for resisting the state's monopoly of political power. Interestingly, the most important confrontation between the EZLN and the Mexican state has been in the political arena. The federal government's lack of compliance with the San Andres Accords, signed in 1996, has not only meant a deadlock in the signing of peace accords between the two groups, but also that such non compliance has not allowed for establishment of a more just relationship between the government and the indigenous peoples (Higgins 2001). This deadlock led to the birth of the Zapatista *Caracoles* in 2003, marking the beginning of a new way of administering the territories occupied by the EZLN. The Zapatistas created 5 "*Caracoles*" in different regions of Chiapas: Oventic, Morelia, La Garrucha, Roberto Barrios, and La Realidad. Each of these *Caracoles* is comprised of several ethnic Mayan groups united under the Zapatista movement. The *Caracoles* may be viewed as the geographic, administrative, cultural, and political centres of the Zapatista autonomous territories. Since their founding, many studies, including those by Burguete (1996; 2007; 2007^a; 2007b), Eber (2001), Mattiace (2002), and Van Der Haar (1998), have shown that the Zapatista initiative was not the first attempt to achieve autonomy in the State of Chiapas, nor the only such attempt by Mexican indigenous people. These studies help to understand the complexity of the political scenario in Chiapas. Nevertheless, these authors still take the state, elections, and political parties to be points of reference for the construction of autonomy, and do not address in a detailed manner how autonomy is constructed from within. For this reason, in my thesis, I attempt to provide a more close-up view of what autonomy means for a given social group, and describe a concept of autonomy which transcends land ownership, receiving material goods, and participation in electoral processes.

0.2. Why study the Zapatista movement?

In *Rewriting the Self and the Social*, Atkinson (1997) observes that anthropological texts are increasingly a product of a dialectic relationship between the anthropologist and his or her environment. According to Atkinson, the anthropologist in this new relationship may not reclaim sole ethnographic authorship, but rather only produce texts which bring together multiple voices. According to Atkinson's interpretation, the anthropologist is one of the subjects of the text, and his or her objective should not be to justify his or her presence in the field or act as a specialist, but rather demonstrate to the readers that anthropologists are part of the social processes which they study.

Although I lack space to fully discuss the debates around anthropology at home, proposed by Strathern in the early 1980s (Baker 1987), I would like to emphasise that my thesis raises issues that have been widely debated in Mexican and Latin American anthropology, such as the reproduction of colonial relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Mexicans, a topic which cannot be easily ignored (Mendez 2009). As Krotz (2005) points out, the relationships between indigenous intellectuals and non indigenous native anthropologists leads to very complicated political relations. In other words, a post-colonial model developed in a different socio-political context, for instance British anthropologists conducting ethnography in India, may not be ready adaptable to ethnographic research in Mexico where notions of the “other” are more internalised and bring with them a completely different set of power relations (Klor de Alva 1995).

In this regard, my interest in the topic of Zapatismo began with personal experiences in 1993. In 1993, I began to study sociology at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM) in Mexico City. In early January, 1994 television and newspapers flooded us with reports of the conflict in the south-eastern region of the country. According to the media, the Zapatistas were guerrillas like those of Colombia or Guatemala. This media portrait greatly contrasted with the supposed entry of Mexico into the so-called First World through NAFTA, generally considered to be the greatest achievement of President Salinas de Gortari.

In retrospective, I realize that our Sociology classes were in general highly politicised. For example, some professors told us in class that our university, the UAM, had been created in the 1970s by the Mexican government to counteract the political activity of militant students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) who participated in the 1968 Mexican student movement which culminated in October of that year with the Massacre of Tlatelolco. Some professors even jokingly said, “Yes, but that will never stop us.” With this type of commentary, they introduced us to Latin American social movements, and they tried to create what they considered to be a critical environment. At the very least, students of the Social Sciences department had a general idea of the history of leftist political activity in our country. Many of our professors and the parents of some of our fellow students had been involved in independent union activity. Teachers and students spoke of Marxism, trade unions, and political problems in Mexico. Furthermore, some classmates sought to participate in activities which they believed could contribute to social justice in the country.

In the summer of 1993, a classmate whose family had visited communities in Chiapas for years invited me to teach literacy in an indigenous community called La Realidad. I spoke with my father about the possibility of going to Chiapas. My father was very passionate about social justice, but he denied me permission, arguing that, "The army just found drug trafficking bases there and there have been armed conflicts". In fact, a confrontation had occurred, but it was between the Mexican army and one group of Zapatistas, and the version my father told me was false. However, this story was widely disseminated by the Salinas administration in an attempt have NAFTA signed without alerting the public to the existence of dissenting voices, namely, the Zapatistas (Tello 1995). Five months later, the topic of Chiapas dramatically returned to our lives. In initial protests against Federal Army incursions in Chiapas in January, 1994, I spoke with some fellow students who had gone to La Realidad that summer. At least two of these students were looking for an opportunity to leave the country, saying, "There will be a witch hunt." Everything that happened around us seemed so new, but it was part of a very old context. Until that time, the most radical thing we knew about politics was the attempt to create independent factions within the large trade unions. We had heard news of repression of strikes in some States in Mexico, but that was all.

Many of my classmates were children of the 1968 generation, and of those involved in movements for public housing in the greater Mexico City area. In general, our political experience was that of our parents. When the Zapatista uprising occurred and the media were replete with news of the rebels, we understood that this was our opportunity to create our own political life. Many of us, above all those in the Social Sciences department, had supported the UAM's university workers' union. In January, 1994, we held a student meeting. Arguing that we were students who could only meet according to our own schedules and resources, someone suggested we form "collectives." These collectives were not unions or formal organizations, but rather a group of students united not by a contract but rather by their voluntary desire to support the Zapatista cause. We would work in commissions with concrete objectives. In order to decide on our common objectives, we asked ourselves what we wanted and how we wanted to accomplish it. We made all decisions in assembly; for example, whether we would support the Zapatistas, and if so, how. From the beginning, we had decided we were basically meeting with respect to the Zapatista movement. Other collectives were also formed in other Mexican universities, such as the UNAM and the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH). We began to meet with them, thus creating a network of collectives which then

began to coordinate with collectives of other universities throughout Mexico. These networks of collectives allowed us to participate in the Zapatista caravans to visit Zapatista occupied territories, which began in 1994. For example, during one such caravan, we transported food and medicine, and organised workshops with women and children in the refugee camp at San Pedro Polho.

As a collective, we chose to organise in a very flexible manner; each student could participate according to his or her time and willingness. It became clear to us that our form of organising was different from other forms of political organisation with which we were familiar. Over the following two years, new groups of students met with us, always with new ideas. At one point, another group of students from our university joined us and proposed that we join the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), arguing that “the people of the party will help us; we will have more funds to more easily do our work.” At that point, we divided into two different groups – those who followed the PRD, and those who decided to follow the path of the independent organisation. In the following years, those who became members of the PRD achieved positions in public administration or within the party. Meanwhile, those who followed the independent path continued to support the EZLN, even after graduating. Since then, members of my student collective and I have joined various initiatives initiated by the Zapatistas. Collectively and individually, we participated in favour of what we considered to be one of the most viable political alternatives for democratising the Mexican political system.

0.3 Research Ethics:

The above discussion only minimally addresses the troubled context of Mexico in the early 1990s. During the 1990s and the first decade of 2000, I continued to participate in different projects in other rural, semi-urbanized, and indigenous areas of Mexico. These experiences put me face to face with the severe poverty in which many other Mexican communities were submerged. Over the years, all of this greatly influenced my personal and professional motivations. At the end of 1998, after having obtained my undergraduate degree in sociology, I decided to study a master in anthropology, thinking that this would be a good way to return to working with the communities. As Scheper –Hughes (1992) comments in her introduction, “Anthropology may constitute the adequate vehicle to return to the communities”. In my mind, in returning, I would have to contribute to and learn from the communities. My intentions and preconceptions had to be greatly modified after I presented my petition to the Good Government Council of Oventic to carry out

voluntary work as a teacher in the autonomous school of the *Caracol*. My wish to provide useful knowledge was confronted with a new concept of community and with the Zapatistas' ideas regarding what type of community they wished to build; above all, I was confronted with the fact that they sought their autonomy and to no longer depend on external support. Nevertheless, at all times, my wish to contribute was inspired by a research ethic based on the practice of collaborative, not exploitative, anthropology (Wood 2006). As is evident throughout this study, the answer I obtained from the Good Government Council changed the course of my stay in Chiapas. This was my first opportunity to understand what the Zapatistas refer to when they speak of and practice that which they call autonomy.

Historically, these communities that have been object of systematic state violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2003) unveiled to me the construction of their alternative model of autonomy. I was able to witness this type of autonomy when I attended, upon invitation, the ceremony of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the EZLN in Oventic, the Dignified Rage Festival in Mexico City and San Cristobal de las Casas, and the anniversary of the Zapatista uprising in January, 2009. At all times during my stay in Chiapas, I presented myself as a student researcher. Because of this, during my process of asking for permission to visit to the five *Caracoles* and the community *La Humanidad*, the organization submitted me to a rigorous process which left no doubt about my identity as a researcher.

From the moment I arrived in the *Caracol* Oventic, I realized that individuals and groups from a variety of universities, as well as from international organizations, frequently arrived to solicit permission to carry out research. At that moment, three research groups were investigating the autonomous models of education and health. In the face of this panorama, I had to be very clear about my intentions with the Councils. From the beginning, I commented to the Good Government Councils with whom I spoke that I could not offer anything material in exchange for my stay. However, I was available to speak with and accompany them in the labours that they might ask of me. My relationship with them never involved any type of monetary transaction.

From then until now, the second semester of 2012, the political situation of Mexico has been characterized by an increase in violence (Mendoza 2011; Gonzalez 2012), which has taken on very particular characteristics in the south of the country where I carried out my study. Over time, I came to agree with Wood, who has stated that “field research in conflict zones is challenging for both methodological and ethical reasons” (Wood 2006:

373). Despite the fact that I had discussed the ethical implications of this project with my tutor, the situation of violence in Zapatista territory led me to modify the manner in which I addressed the theme. Nevertheless, at all times during my stay in, and outside of the Zapatista territories, the prevailing spirit of this study has been the research imperative to “do no harm” (Wood 2006). Due to the context of low intensity warfare (Collier 1994) in which I carried out this study, the ethical dilemmas which I confronted led me to procure to the best of my ability to protect the identity of the people with whom I met and spoke in the field; for example, I wrote my field notes only after returning to San Cristobal or Mexico City. Once returning to Manchester, I kept my material in a safe place.

Due to continuing violence in Mexico in general and attacks on Zapatista communities, I decided to not make public any material which could put the people with whom I spoke at risk. However, I did not change the names of government officials and other public figures, or events which were highly publicized in conventional and alternative media in Mexico or abroad. My fieldwork experiences were very stressful, especially those in the community *La Humanidad*. However, it was precisely in that environment that I understood the relevance of the events I was observing, and this strengthened my determination to continue with this study, since in this way I could contribute to communicating how the Zapatista model represents a real alternative for democratization and reconstruction of the social fabric of Mexico and that it is important for this information to be recorded.

Gerber (2004) discusses how, during the period called the “silence” of the Zapatistas, when the communities closed in on themselves and communicated very little with the outside world, it was possible to carry out research, but that such work involves great difficulty and requires extreme patience. It is important to recognize that the dilemmas and conflicts of working in conflict zones are accentuated when violence is a central part of the way in which the society functions (Bourgois 2009). Furthermore, these dilemmas follow the researcher and are present not only in the field, but also in the process of writing the final text. With respect to this, Kovast points out that, “little mention is made of how the reality of lived violence affects or is edited out of anthropological theory, method, ethics, and text” (Kovast 2002: 208). In this sense, the experiences I confronted in the field and the histories of violence which those with whom I spoke entrusted to me led me to decide to continue this process under the following convictions: first, following an ethic of “do no harm”; second, with a commitment to not cause distress to the people with whom I spoke; and third, to not romanticize a history which proves to be very

controversial in contemporary Mexican history. Once I returned to Manchester, and after having analyzed the data collected, I decided to create a document which focuses on the daily struggle of the Zapatistas, and which dignifies those involved in this project of autonomy; this would not have been possible without ethnographic work.

As previously explained, my ethnic origin played a very important role in my fieldwork. My experiences as a result of this aspect led me to discoveries which I consider to be relevant to this study. As a consequence, I believe that my field experiences may be interpreted as an “insider-point of view.” (Povrzanović 2000). However, this study represented a challenge in that at all times I had to be conscious of not exercising any type of exploitative anthropology (Wood 2006). Nonetheless, it was important for me to not reproduce romanticized cultural images or anthropological preconceptions regarding indigenous communities (Trench 2005). Aside from this, the inevitable disparity between the field site and the privileged position of the anthropologist generates internal conflict regarding the function and purpose of anthropology what Smith describes as “the tension between distance and proximity” (1999: 21). Identifying this tension, Smith wrote of the need to move toward an engaged political anthropology that acknowledges the politics underlying our own lives as well as the lives of those with whom we are conducting fieldwork. In my view, the intense emotional experiences the ethnographer undergoes during fieldwork, such as those I experienced in 2008 and 2009 (Wood 2000; Kovast 2002), demand a shift in paradigm and perspective toward the symmetric relations between anthropologist and the “object of study”.

With the aim of transcending the hierarchical relations between the anthropologist and the so-called “objects of study” (Bourgois 1990), Juris advocates the practice of militant ethnography. He holds that in order “to grasp the concrete logic generating specific practices, one has to become an active participant” (2008: 20). Going beyond our understanding of our own personal experiences as anthropologists, Speed (2007) in *Rights in Rebellion* suggests that activist research can enrich ethnographic practices by allowing the anthropologist to gain a more profound insight into the internal logic of our designated fields of study. While Latin America has a longstanding tradition of committed anthropology (Hale 2001; Bourgois 1990; Scheper-Huges 1995; Stephen 2002; June 2005; Escobar 2008; Coldstein 2007), the limitations, contradictions, and dilemmas of anthropological practices developed with groups which are considered to be vulnerable are still a great source of debate in the broader academic context (Brisbin 2009).

This debate continues and as I have mentioned before my fieldwork was not free of ethical and personal dilemmas, however at all stages of my research I utilised as a professional point of reference The Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practices of the Association of Social Anthropologist ASA (ASA 2011 <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml>). These guidelines establish the crucial importance of protecting your sources. Therefore, with these guidelines in mind, the names of the sources have been changed, along with certain situations and locations with the intention that this would protect my sources, both psychically and psychologically. On the other hand, the historical information included in this work is based on information that was widely distributed by the EZLN at the time of its occurrence to the mass media, the alternative media and to the world, and hence can be considered public knowledge.

Nevertheless, I am furthermore aware that the official political tendency in Mexico is to criminalise public dissent and political protest, so it was my aim to conduct my research in a manner that would prevent the potentially harmful effects of research in this sensitive area, and consequently I have established with the University a minimum of 5 years restricted access to my thesis. My concern here is to protect the participants in this research from harm by withholding data from publication that could potentially adversely affect any of my informants.

According to the ASA's Ethical Guidelines "consent in research is a process, not a one-off event, and may require renegotiation over time" (ASA 2011). In this introduction I have referred to this process, however here I would like to touch on a few points I consider particularly salient. Consent in this research was achieved through an extensive period of negotiation; these negotiations began in 2008 during the time I was writing the proposal for this thesis and attempting to formulate the means of investigation. Upon arrival in Mexico, I immediately approached the Good Government Council in Oventic to present my ideas and so initiated an exhaustive period of negotiation for consent. This process involved frequent presentation of my intentions to study the Good Government Council, however they suggested that I should visit other Caracoles to see, in their words, 'how we work', rather limiting my vision solely to Oventic. My visits to each Caracol required permission from each council of each Caracol, but whilst extending my sphere of research I found that I was increasingly being invited to or included in events, celebrations and activities hosted by the different Caracoles.

In the case of *La Humanidad*, because my participation there was more extensive, I would constantly have to approach the Good Government Council of La Realidad for renewed

permits to reside, as 10 days was the longest a visitor could stay in one community at a time, and in periods of high tension the Council would request that visitors to the community leave for their own safety. This meant that I would have go through the whole process of approaching the Council and asking for a renewed permit- this happened on 8 occasions in all. On occasions when risk was perceived as high, they would ask me to remain for a period at the camp at La Realidad, during which time I would participate in the activities of the camp, such as health workshops. Upon arrival at the community, the commission of the camp would check and verify my permit to establish that I would stay there and conduct interviews with members of the community. The only restriction on my research was that I not be seen to talk for too long with Bety, the only resident member of the Good Government Council. At the very least if I was to be seen to talk to Bety, it must be in a very public place; here the concern was to avoid potential for corruption or perceptions of favouritism. It was desired that I give equal attention to every member of the community. As will become evident, this thesis was based on oral consent, and was constantly renegotiated throughout the duration of my fieldwork.

In terms of confidentiality, I was able to guarantee to each and every participant in the research complete confidentiality, that all the information gathered during my fieldwork would be shared only with my tutor on the project, and from this information we would jointly select the data that is fit to publish with regards to safeguarding sensitive details that could compromise the safety of my informants. To the best of my knowledge this guarantee has been honourably followed through. Any electronic or hard copies of ethnographic material I gathered in furtherance of realising this research are stored safely in the United Kingdom and can not be accessed by any third party. Following the protocols of the 'Relations With, and Responsibilities Towards, Colleagues and the Discipline' in the ASA Ethical Guidelines, whilst I was in the field I remained in contact with the anthropological community of Mexico, particularly those with specialist knowledge of Chiapas, and gained from them comments and suggestions on how to better approach and develop this subject.

04. Research questions:

My original research proposal, written in the spring of 2008, focused on the Good Government Councils. My research questions included the following: How do the representatives of the Councils perceive their work, their political practice, and the effectiveness of these practices? Do the Councils have an impact on how the local,

regional, and federal governments operate in Chiapas? How, if at all, has the federal government responded to the Councils in terms of policy shifts or alternative practices? Might it be said that the Councils have made a difference? Are the Councils perceived as a real alternative government and by what sectors of society? How does popular participation in self-government develop with regard to decisions about community development and direct political participation? What types of strategies have been developed to deal with cultural and ethnic diversity in this government? Within the Councils, what structures or political practices have been adopted from the state, and how have these been combined with local indigenous forms of government? While I also discovered many other facets of Zapatismo, these initial research questions remained pertinent to the development of this thesis.

Nonetheless, once I returned to Manchester and embarked upon a process of further reflection, I identified the following general questions to which my study as a whole could contribute: What historic events have generated a sentiment of discontent toward the Mexican political system and its institutions among the impoverished sectors of the nation? What local, regional, and national historic events have contributed to the radicalisation of social protest? What are society's responses to the crisis of the Mexican political system? What is the importance of Zapatismo to national and global social movements? As I wrote this thesis, I realised that these questions were becoming increasingly important to my research. During the past few years we as Mexicans have come to realise that what in 1994 seemed to be a problem exclusive to Chiapas is rather just one symptom of a general national crisis. These post-fieldwork reflections later greatly influenced the content and lay-out of this thesis.

0.5. Research methods:

In 2007, when I decided to carry out this research project, I contacted old friends by email and told them of my ideas. They told me it would not be easy, but neither would it be impossible to carry out such a study. Upon returning to Mexico City in August, 2008, I met with my friends and we spoke about this project. I received many different opinions - that it would be possible to carry out the study, that perhaps not, that the situation was very difficult, etc. I was asked an endless number of questions about why I wanted to carry out the study and what I wanted to know. In informal conversations, my friends told me that in recent years the Zapatista communities had become disheartened by a series of

publications that, in their opinion, completely distorted the dynamics of the Zapatista territories, and consequently they increasingly rejected outsiders.

I arrived in the city of San Cristobal de las Casas on November 4, 2008 and began to visit NGOs and meet with professors of several local universities. I also contacted university students who had carried out studies on Zapatismo. In this environment, several situations surprised me. First, professors of local universities such as the Centre for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), the College of the Southern Frontier (ECOSUR), and the Autonomous University of Chiapas did not have much of a relationship with the Zapatistas. Some even advised me that I not be seen publicly with them as it could interfere with my work. Also, I noticed that many Mexican university students who strongly supported Zapatismo had never even visited the Zapatista communities which were relatively close to San Cristobal. The situation of local NGOs was not much more helpful. The manner in which some members of these organisations reacted to me when I told them of my interest in visiting the Zapatista territories alerted me to the fact that my research would not be easy. Thus, I realized that I would have to deal with the fact that access to the communities had become increasingly difficult, in a context in which researchers were less welcome than they had been in the 1990s, a period in which many important studies of the EZLN had been carried out. The EZLN's level of mistrust of academics were matched only by academics' fears of becoming too involved with the EZLN.

Finally, during the second week of November, I met with a friend, Igor, who volunteered in some Zapatista communities. He told me he would take me to Oventic, a community near San Cristobal, where - in 2003 - the EZLN created an office for administering the Zapatista rebel territories of the Highland region of Chiapas. This office, together with other offices, schools, a small hospital, collective stores, and a basketball court are referred to as the *Caracol*. After many setbacks, I was finally going to the *Caracol* with Igor, but before going, he warned me that he would not be responsible for me - that I had to establish contact with the Zapatistas myself. I would soon learn that the EZLN's suspicion of academics and journalists is reflected in their increasing emphasis on autonomy and reduced dependence on outsiders, which renders conducting fieldwork among them a rather arduous process.

During my visit, I explained to the vigilance commission of Oventic that I am Mexican but had recently been studying in England and wanted to learn about the work of the *Caracoles* and the Good Government Councils. I explained that I was also interested in

doing some voluntary work. After five days, I finally met with the Council, and over the course of the next several weeks listened to their talks and presented my written petition to them at least 7 times. Each time, I was attended to by different people. They asked me to explain why I was interested in the Zapatistas, what I know, what would be the benefits to them of assisting me, etc. From then on, each day for three months, I travelled back and forth to Oventic to speak with someone, and waited outside the little wooden house which was the office of the Good Government Council, a rotating commission in charge of administering the *Caracol*. I spoke frequently only with Pedrito Fernandez, an older man who was on guard every day at the store. Finally, the Council invited me to attend the celebration of the founding of the EZLN. On that occasion, while we danced through the night, I was able to speak with Zapatista members more in depth about many topics. From that moment, I began to be recognised, and each day I sat to wait for my response. Finally, they told me they could not help me, and I could not work as a volunteer teacher in the autonomous school because they wanted to train their own teachers from the Zapatista communities. After all, "That is autonomy, don't you think?" they said, "because if each time they come and although in good faith they want to help us, when are we going to learn for ourselves?"

Over time, I realized that Pedrito Fernandez was sometimes at the entrance to the *Caracol*, sometimes in the Political Information Commission, and sometimes on the Good Government Council. I asked myself what this was about, wondering if this was due to poor organisation or was it that there were so few people available? With time, my doubts were cleared up. The second week of December, they told me they could no longer attend to me, that now they were dedicating themselves to organising a large event, "The Dignified Rage Festival" which would be held December 26th in Mexico City, and then they would return to Oventic and San Cristobal to continue the festival until January 3rd. They recommended that I attend - that there I was going to learn more. I again contacted my friends from Mexico City and they signed me up to attend the event there. During the event, I told these friends I was not progressing in my work with the Zapatistas and they just laughed. Finally, they explained to me that for a long time, the Zapatistas had been deciding in a completely autonomous manner who could visit them in their territories, suggesting that I had passed the test.

Upon returning to Chiapas on December 31, I attended the commemoration of the Zapatista uprising. This was a massive event, full of reporters and visitors. At the end of the event, people commented that they were a bit disillusioned, that they would have liked

to see Subcommander Marcos, who never appeared. However, Pedrito Fernandez commented to me while we drank coffee that they, the Zapatistas, were becoming more independent, that they wanted to speak for themselves. That night, my friends commented to me that things were no easier for the Zapatista communities than when we had visited them years ago as students, but the Zapatistas were good teachers and we were just there to learn.

After the Festival ended, I thought that things would improve for me, but they remained the same. I continued to visit Oventic for a couple of weeks, until the Zapatistas told me that they could not help me for the moment, and that it would be best for me to visit the other *Caracoles* to learn more about their projects and what they did. Thus, I began a long journey through the Zapatista *Caracoles*. Each time I wanted to enter a *Caracol*, I had to present myself and explain the motive of my visit, and I had to wait several days for a response to my request. On some occasions, I was able to help with minor tasks, but almost always, my presence was useless - it appeared as if nothing I knew or could do was useful to them. I could only observe and write down what I saw. From these visits, as I explain in the ethnography in Chapter 2, I understood that what I was witnessing was not a government institution, but rather a political practice replicated in different territories. I found that this practice - while it incorporates certain traits of Western political practices - is so flexible and innovative that it responds to the needs of the communities, and has as its ultimate objective self-governance. These regional Zapatista governments appropriate knowledge from many sources, but the principle of communitarian organisation predominates throughout.

As a Mexican and as an anthropologist, I was confronted by a series of difficulties and incidents that led me to question my own position within the practice of research. Similar to the experiences of De la Cadena (2005), in the field I was constantly asked whether I was *Mestiza* or indigenous. This led me to questions such as when we are at home, and who determines what is our home, history, or politics. In San Cristobal, the former capital of the State of Chiapas, I detected a strong sentiment of racial differentiation which distinguishes inhabitants and visitors according to their physical appearance. For example, the term "*Coletos*" is used to refer to those who consider themselves to be descendents of the first Spanish colonists in Chiapas. Meanwhile, "indigenous" refers to all descendents of the original inhabitants of Chiapas. "*Kaxlan*" is the term used by the indigenous people to refer to *Mestizos* and lighter skinned people of the region. I also heard that they use this term in a derogatory manner to refer to indigenous people who have adopted *Mestizo*

cultural practices although they had not racially mixed with any other ethnic group. In my case, for the indigenous of Chiapas, I was *Mestiza*. Meanwhile, for the *Coletos* I appeared to be indigenous, though in terms of my habits, customs, and education it was difficult for them to adequately classify me. Nevertheless, I consider that my different “aspects” facilitated my entrance to different worlds within contemporary Chiapas. Finally, a pair of encounters that I could only classify as extraordinary allowed me to overcome the difficulties of fieldwork. One of these was meeting *la China*, a doctor who had been living in Chiapas for four years and had taught health courses in different communities. She taught me how to conduct myself in the *Caracoles*. Her help proved to be invaluable. The other was coincidentally meeting Julia, who had worked voluntarily in different Zapatista communities over the course of several years, and who later introduced me to the Zapatista world. The result of those encounters is in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

A conversation with a former student of CIESAS, Lilia Miranda, finally gave me the courage to throw myself independently into this study. She told me, “No, my friend, nobody has to sponsor you. Just grab your backpack and go to the jungle. That’s the only way of finding what you’re looking for.” My experience 18 years ago with Zapatista solidarity collectives in Mexico City, the people I befriended in Chiapas, and talks with my former university classmates had all been critical in sustaining my motivation to persevere with this study. But above all, it was the tremendous kindness and fraternity of the Zapatistas of the different *Caracoles* and of the community *La Humanidad* - despite their innumerable, unimaginable tasks – that allowed me to get close and observe the daily life of the Zapatista communities, an aspect which is little known to researchers. By daily life, I refer to that of those who have nothing to do with the high military ranks of the EZLN - those who day to day do not wear ski masks and do not appear in magazines and newspapers, but who carry out their daily work with tremendous will in order to construct what they call autonomy. They have learned to govern themselves, and their actions exemplify the term “grassroots participation”. In order to capture these moments and more thoroughly contribute to this debate, I decided to visit both Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities.

As I mentioned, I continuously visited the Oventic *Caracol*, typically waiting many hours and leaving frustrated, and after this I visited the *Caracoles* La Garrucha, Morelia, and Roberto Barrios. I later realised that this frustration and constant movement provided me with the knowledge that would eventually become Chapter 2 of this thesis. This time consuming process reflects something of the way Zapatista *do* politics. During the final

month of my research, I visited the constitutional municipality San Andres Larrainzar. I also visited other non-Zapatista communities in the company of a non-Zapatista friend. Finally, I visited La Realidad, which led me to continuously visit the community *La Humanidad* over the course of six months. It was during these initial travels that I began to observe the politics of everyday life in Chiapas - when possible without intervening; just watching and listening to conversations of others. This allowed me to identify those topics and situations which the population itself wished to highlight. The introductory history regarding how and why I carried out this study narrates the practical difficulties I confronted from the beginning which led me to carry out multi-sited fieldwork. These sojourns to the five Zapatista *Caracoles* allowed me to identify the connections and networks which have made it possible for the objectives of the Zapatista movement to be mutually decided upon.

Until visiting *La Humanidad*, I was able to carry out a fairly “classic” field study. My experiences with the people from *La Humanidad* and the way in which they recount their stories illustrated for me the centrality of memory as an investigative tool. As Couto (1993) observed, narratives evoked through individual and collective memory nurture political resistance among repressed and subordinated groups. Through his work with rural leaders in African-American communities, he shows that these narratives “provide group members historical precedents of individual and collective resistance, an alternative explanation of the group's condition, and an exposition of the virtues of a group that others consider virtue less” (1993:61). Couto's arguments helped me to understand why the Zapatistas refer to their councils as “Good Government” in contrast with the “Bad Government” of the federal system.

Jelin (2006) contends that in times of repression, conflict, and atrocity, all groups in conflict struggle over memory as a space for legitimacy, a struggle that is clearly evident in chapter 3 of this work. The scholarly literature on memory is extensive and there is great debate within the social sciences on the subject. However, in the context of the histories of *La Humanidad*, I feel that the work of Jelin and Couto most aptly capture the relationship between memory and resistance as I witnessed it in this community. The principal information in the Zapatista spaces were gathered through informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. These discussions occurred while jointly carrying out tasks, for example in health workshops in the *Caracoles* La Garrucha and La Realidad. Other informal but more profound conversations occurred in the intimacy of people's homes while drinking coffee or shucking corn. The only structured interview I

carried out in this study was with the Municipal President of San Andres Larrainzar. However, he did allow me to conduct this interview without prior knowledge of my questions, and there was a five month interval between the initial request for interview and the eventual meeting. This episode was illuminating from a methodological perspective, as it instantly became evident to me that he had assumed an asymmetrical position in the proceedings: he was the acting president who would speak of the success of his administration, and I was just another student.

In some very concrete moments, it was possible for me to employ participant observation. Those moments occurred during health promoter workshops in the *Caracoles* La Garrucha and La Realidad. I was invited to participate in these workshops by a young female doctor from Mexico City. In the workshops, I gave a brief explanation of Mexico's health system, and based on these presentations, participants collectively discussed the autonomous health systems which the Zapatistas wished to construct. These situations gave me the opportunity to ask direct questions of the participants, all of whom were Zapatistas. I asked them - in general and with respect to health - what autonomy was for them, why they wished to be autonomous, and what they believed they had to do in order to attain autonomy.

During the entire study, I made many adjustments and changes to my methodology for purely practical reasons. I will cite just one example: initially I had considered carrying out semi-structured interviews with the members of the Good Government Council, but this became impossible due to the strict vigilance by the Zapatista community of their representatives in order to avoid acts of corruption. Therefore, the majority of the information referring to the structure and functions of the *Caracoles* and the Councils was obtained through constant observation and note-taking once I returned to my base in San Cristobal de las Casas. Given this complicated environment, it was necessary to corroborate the information I obtained with more experienced *Mestizo* and foreign collaborators with the different Councils and *Caracoles*.

The accounts of the origin of the community *La Humanidad* and its conflicts with the ex-landowner were corroborated with official sources such as reports carried out by Human Rights Center Fray Bartolme de las Casas ("Frayba"), located in San Cristobal. I also consulted newspaper articles and publications in alternative media. While I was reconstructing their accounts from informal conversations with one or another member of this community, Julia, who spent over nine years carrying out voluntary work with communities in Chiapas, lent me a series of interviews recorded at the time of the

foundation of the community which had already been published in alternative media. From these, I extracted only those passages necessary to allow me to reconstruct their history.

0.6. Challenges of multi-site ethnography:

My adjustments to my original research project with respect to methodology were due to the nature of working with a movement as dynamic as the Zapatista movement. In the process of obtaining the necessary permission and travelling from one place to another, specifically among *Caracoles*, one of the greatest and most evident challenges was the time consuming nature of my work. Due to the fact that I was not part of any project financed by any university or institution, during this period I depended solely on the budget provided by my scholarship. Similarly, to a certain extent, my project was limited to the calendar dictated by my program of studies. For this reason, I decided to carry out at least two short visits to each *Caracol*. Due to the fact that the members of the Good Government Council changed at least twice a month, as did those who carried out cargos in the *Caracoles*, I decided that the verbal information obtained in brief conversations could not be used to establish generalizations throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, with the objective of providing information on how these political actors are constructed, I decided to include general terms, jokes, commentaries, and interactions among those with whom I spoke. As they provides subtle but relevant details regarding how they perceive the world and how they react to unexpected situations, I believe these comments often provide more detailed information of daily life than that of official discourse and documents, above all given the complexity of the political actors (Wood 2006).

Bourgois (1990) has discussed the ethical difficulties raised by fieldwork carried out in conflict zones, and how these lead to a variety of methodological dilemmas. To cite a few examples, anthropology is based on construction of relations of confidence so that the anthropologist may become “submerged” in the reality of the other. In this environment of continual communication, it would be very awkward to ask all the people with whom one interacts that they interrupt an informal conversation because the anthropologist might record something that might put the people at risk. Potential problems as a result of this interaction could arise in the management and possible publication of information obtained. With respect to this, Wood (2006) points out that adequate management and storage of information is critical to protecting the identity of the participants in interviews or conversations. In this sense, none of the information obtained in my fieldwork has been

diffused in any media, but rather only with very few people recognized and trusted in the academic world. With respect to the potential risks that this study to be made public, in the writing of the final version, I verify that any information or event which could represent risks for any person or community has been previously published in national or international newspapers, by alternative media, or by the Human Rights Centre “Frayba”. Freidberg (2002) points out that one of the problems of multi-site fieldwork is that it is more difficult to build the relations of trust in which conventional anthropological fieldwork is typically based. In the face of this situation, I decided to only record the material conditions or the state of development of the *Caracoles*. This allowed me to establish the concrete material context in which the project of autonomy is developed. Ironically what initially presented itself as a difficulty, in the long run allowed me to capture the dynamism and coherence with which the Zapatista political project is developed. In carrying out multi-site fieldwork in zones of conflict, ethical dilemmas multiply due to constant changes of context and all the actors involved. However, due to my own historical context as explained above, my knowledge of the zone and my personal relationships with the actors involved in this movement allowed me to generate the conditions to get closer to this social reality from a privileged situation. According to Lugosi (2006), the situations mentioned above may contribute to determining what may be considered “conceal and disclosure” in ethnographic research. One fact which contributed to the construction of these relations of rapport and trust was that I began to establish these links 18 years ago. This allowed me to generate unique relationships which helped me to move about in diverse territories and with many types of people (Zaman 2008). Finally, as Murphy (2007) points out, perhaps one of the greatest risks of carrying out fieldwork in zones of conflict is that one tends to develop very empathetic relations with the people and these relations are difficult to predict or direct through research methods. In the case of the multi-site ethnography, these risks are greater. Nevertheless, this method allowed me to understand the complexity of the Zapatista government as a system (Marcus 1998).

0.7. Chapter outlines:

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I present the historical and political context in which the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) arose. These include various religious denominations, political parties, and Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist groups which arrived in Chiapas in the second half of the 20th Century. Due to the controversies that the autonomous Zapatista movement represents in academic and political contexts, and with

the objective of understanding the changes that this project represents to the Mexican political system, I present concepts such as state, government, political party, civil society, resistance, autonomy, and collective memory. I discuss how, in a context of violence and government counterinsurgency directed toward the autonomous communities, the Zapatista movement opted to create the Good Government Councils as an attempt to put into effect the 1996 San Andres Accords. In this chapter I also present some governmental social development projects implemented in Chiapas since 2003. Finally, I contextually analyze the La Sexta Declaracion de la Selva Lacandona (Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle) and some more recent Zapatista comunicués.

In Chapter 2, I include a brief discussion of the establishment of global governments as the result of liberal and neoliberal policies of recent decades. In this global context, I interpret the Zapatista Good Government Councils as a response to these policies. This discussion includes a brief analysis of the transformation of the Zapatista movement from an armed movement to a primarily political movement, and I present the Councils as a recent, innovative mechanism of their political initiative. I discuss the origin, evolution, and functioning of the Councils as well as their members, functions, and some surrounding issues which have become controversial. I analyse their differences and similarities, as well as some of their successes and failures. Furthermore, to understand them, I address the political context of Chiapas, the actors involved, and the difficulties the Councils confront.

Chapter 3 is a historical reconstruction of the founding of the Zapatista community *La Humanidad*. I discuss the life of this community of Tojolabal ethnicity in the times of the haciendas, and the difficulties they confronted in regaining the land which historically belonged to them but was taken from them in the 17th and 18th Centuries. A key aspect of this is the enactment of Agrarian Reform in the 1930s, which greatly affected their lives. This narrative serves as the scene for understanding the possible causes of the resurgence of ethnic identity as a political demand. This history allows us to see how a group of people create a collective identity in order to expose the negative effects of neoliberal policies applied by different levels of government in Mexico. I also relate the point in which this Tojolabal group became divided and a group of them decide to join the Zapatista movement in the 1980s. This narrative includes their participation in the 1994 Zapatista uprising, and the founding of their new community with the help of the Zapatista Good Government Council, based on an ethnic identity that they consider to be dignified.

Chapter 4 explores the current life of the community of *La Humanidad* and the manner in which they develop diverse strategies for maintaining what they call “resistance”. I explore diverse aspects of their daily communitarian life in order to help us understand how they live and imagine autonomy. This chapter also explains the networks and relationships they maintain with the Good Government Council, with the Zapatista movement, and with other external actors. I illustrate in a detailed ethnographic manner how members of this particular village live, organise themselves, strive to improve their living conditions, and build a Zapatista community. Although this could be considered to be just a single case study, it contains many interesting characteristics that would not be obvious to an outsider unfamiliar with the organisation and practices of the Zapatista movement, and lead us to the conclusion that Zapatismo as a grassroots project not only still exists but also continues to grow and develop strategies to build a better future.

Finally, in Chapter 5, exclusively based on the ethnographic information presented in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I begin to outline some general conclusions in relation to themes such as: memory, the new generations of Zapatistas, the contradictions between international cooperation and Zapatista autonomy, desertions from the Zapatista movement, and unequal development within the rebel communities. I end with the possible meanings which may be attributed to concepts such as autonomy, resistance, “lead by obeying,” and “as we walk, we ask questions.”

Chapter 1

Context of autonomy

In the first chapter, I will present some social actors that contributed to the historical and political context in which the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) came into the public light in January, 1994; these include various Christian denominations, political parties, and guerrilla groups which arrived to the State of Chiapas, Mexico. Following this, with the objective of familiarizing ourselves with the controversies which have arisen in the context of the Zapatista demand for autonomy, I will present useful concepts such as the state, government, political parties, civil society, political program, and municipal government, and explain the contradictions between the terms “state” and “nation state”. I will also briefly introduce the concepts of resistance, autonomy, identity, and collective memory, which will be fundamental to the development of this thesis.

Later, I will briefly review how the Zapatista movement opted to create the Good Government Councils, despite having undergone a remarkable process of negotiation, the San Andres Accords². I will also address the government strategy of counterinsurgency, which was developed during negotiations of the San Andres Accords and which was later directed toward the autonomous rebel communities during these negotiations, including some social development projects applied in Chiapas since 2003. Finally, I will contextually analyze the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, as well as some more recent Zapatista communiqués.

1.1. Context in which the EZLN arose:

The military takeover of the municipal seats of San Cristobal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, and Altamirano at dawn on January 1, 1994 in Chiapas marked the beginning of a brief period of armed confrontation between the EZLN and the Mexican army. The document The First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, published by the Zapatistas, explains their motivations and demands. Alluding to article 39 of the Mexican Constitution, they express that “National sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All public power emanates from the people and is instituted in their benefit.

² San Andres is one of the 16 municipalities which make up the Highlands Region. It includes 52 communities and has 18,000 inhabitants. (Chiapas State Government 2009).

The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify the form of their government” (First Declaration, 1994). With this, they call for the Legislative and Judicial powers to restore legality in the nation. The disproportionate federal military offensive against the Zapatistas inspired a large sector of civil society, unions, leftist political parties, and diverse organizations to manifest in the streets of Mexico City, the nation’s capital, demanding a halt to the attack against the armed forces of the Zapatista army and demanding dialogue between both sides.

These negotiations generated a debate which directly affected the Mexican political system, in which the topic of indigenous autonomy rapidly became central. To date, the discussion and negotiations regarding such autonomy remain inconclusive. However, despite the historic relevance of the Neo Zapatista movement, it is important to remember that “The search for autonomy has a long tradition among popular and indigenous sectors of the entire continent” (Zibechi 128; 2007). The history of social organization in Chiapas – context of the development and creation of Zapatismo- offers important examples. To name two: in the 1980s in the municipalities of Comitan, Trinitaria, Independencia, Altamirano, and Las Margaritas, the Pluri-ethnic Autonomous Regions (RAP) were created. According to Mattiace (2002), the RAP were one of the most advanced forms of indigenous autonomy. Second, in 1988 in the municipality of Las Margaritas, the *campesino* organization Union of Ejidos created the so-called Tojolabal Government (Mattiace 2002). After the Zapatista uprising, “at least four autonomic processes developed simultaneously: the RAP, the free municipalities, the rebel municipalities of the EZLN, and the autonomist movement” (Burguete 1996: 57).

Social research carried out in Chiapas after 1994 allows us to understand that these autonomic initiatives have resulted from a long process of struggle, unique geographic conditions, a very particular historic context, and the presence of diverse external political actors that favoured political forms of learning, training in trades, and experimentation. Despite very diverse opinions on the topic, authors such as Tello (1995), De Vos (2005), Estrada Saavedra (2007), and Harvey (1998), to cite a few, agree that five centuries of Spanish colonization in Chiapas greatly contributed ideologically and organizationally to the Zapatista uprising. These centuries were marked by constant confrontation between colonizers and original populations over the natural resources of these lands (De Vos 1988). Over the course of the centuries, the dominant classes had transformed their forms of domination. One of the classes which most benefited from this confrontation included Europeans who bought large extensions of land through the Company of Lands and

Colonization of Chiapas, Mexico, Limited, at the end of the 19th Century (Garcia and Concheiro 2006). The majority of these lands were dispossessed from indigenous groups (Eber 2001). Large coffee and rubber plantations were founded on these lands, some of which survived until the mid 20th Century. Eventually, the descendents of these foreigners mixed with the Mexican population. Those who settled in San Cristobal de las Casas referred to themselves as “*Coletos*”³ in order to allude to their supposed Spanish heritage separate themselves socio-culturally from the indigenous population. This powerful landowning class was weakened with the 1930s Agrarian Reform and subsequent land repartitions from 1940 to 1952 and from 1952 to 1964 (Perez Ruiz 2005; Mattiace 2002). With this reform, the hacienda system began to decline and many landless *campesinos* were set free from the haciendas, with nowhere to go. In the face of growing demand for land, the federal government granted land in the Lacandon Jungle. This period of colonization and domestication of the jungle led to the creation of agrarian colonies and forced the *campesinos* to organize around political objectives perhaps for the first time in their history (Estrada Saavedra 2004).

Another dominant class was made up of the Dominican, Mercedario, Franciscan, and Jesuit orders that arrived in Chiapas in the 16th Century (Brading 1997). Confrontations among the orders over control of the so-called Republic of Indians generated an indigenous resistance movement which did not passively tolerate domination. The 1810 Mexican Independence movement and the application of the Reform Laws from 1855 - 1860 limited the Church’s political power (Menegus Bornemann 1999). With these events, Gil Tebar (2005) holds that the Catholic Church temporarily lost much influence in the region. Only in 1952, with the arrival and increase of proselytizing activity of the Protestant denominations in Chiapas did the Catholic Church return to its missionary activity in order to avoid losing followers. With this, they first began to train indigenous catechists⁴.

In this renovation of the Catholic Church, the arrival of the diocese Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia in 1959 is particularly important. Ruiz initiated a new era inspired by Liberation Theology (Estrada Saavedra 2007), which seeks to manifest God’s preferential love for the poor (De Vos 1997). Along with this new theological posture, from 1962 on, interns

³ *Coletos* is the term used by inhabitants of San Cristobal de las Casas to refer to themselves. Many *Coletos* believe themselves to be direct descendents of the Spanish who settled in Chiapas during the Conquest (Garcia and Concheiro 2006).

⁴ Since 1964, the Presbyterian Church, and until the 1980s the Pentecostal and Adventist churches from the United States became more visible as they increased their evangelizing activities (Estrada Saavedra 2007).

learned trades and organizational skills. As part of this training, emphasis was placed on catechists learning the Gospel in their own languages, and bringing all they learned to their communities⁵ (Harvey 1998). All these changes made up what was called Indian Theology and the Indigenous Pastoral Ministry (Gil Tebar 2005). The activity of the different churches contributed to the formation of indigenous leaders and this eventually influenced the course of development of the life of the communities (Garrad-Burnet and Garma Navarro 2007). Leyva and Ascencio Franco point out that “in entire areas of Las Cañadas for many years electoral booths were absent. Elections were seen as something foreign, pertaining to the groups in power” (1996; 178). Nevertheless, since 1937, much political party activity was recorded; for example, the Communist Party led the creation of the Agrarian Committee Representatives (Perez Ruiz 2005). Eber (2001) documents how, since the 1970s, the communities of Chenalho allied with several political parties, including the Socialist Workers` Party (PST) and the Cardenist Front for National Reconstruction (PFCRN) in order to confront the PRI, arguing that their motive was to end “the injustice of being treated as inferior beings compared to the *Mestizo*” (Eber 2001: 329). With the Zapatista uprising, other self-denominated leftist parties were strengthened in Chiapas. These influenced the reconfiguration of political forces such as the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). Toward the winter of 2008, during my fieldwork, I noted the growing presence of the National Action Party (PAN) and the Green Ecologist Party (PVE) in communities which previously were completely PRI, such as San Juan Chamula.

The work of the Indigenous Pastoral Ministry (Tebar 2005), added to the indigenous people’s first participation in political parties, contributed to the holding of the First Indigenous Congress in 1974⁶ (Harvey 1998). In this Congress, topics such as the need for land and obtaining land titles, education in indigenous languages, and defence of indigenous culture were discussed. In the opinion of Perez Ruiz (2005), this experience reinforced the relatively autonomic *campesino* organizations which had been created to demand land after Agrarian Reform. Some of the most significant of these were the National Confederation of Revolutionary Veterans, the Confederation of Madero and Carranza Veterans of the Mexican Revolution, and the Agrarian Confederation of Chiapas. Many of these organizations were co-opted by the official party at the time (PRI). Others

⁵ “They were the theological expression of how the word of God lived within people rather than occupying a position of exteriority” (Harvey 1998; 73).

⁶ This was held in San Cristobal de las Casas, and Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Tojolabal, and Chol delegates attended.

maintained independence, such as the Independent Front of Indigenous Peoples, created in the 1980s, the *Campesino* Organization Emiliano Zapata (OCEZ) (Barabas 2000), and the Indigenous Organization of the Chiapas Highlands (ORIACH) (Eber 2001). Toward the 1990s, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, and Tojolabal agricultural producers' organizations were founded (Bartra 1992). The only organization which included ethnic revindication among its demands was OCEZ. Union of Ejidos Majomut, The National Union of Regional *Campesino* Units (UNORCA), and The Union of Unions Quiptiq Ta Lecubtesel of the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas were founded later, grouping together other smaller organizations.

In the national political context, in the 1960s and 70s, a period known as the Dirty War took place. This period is not officially recognized, as it is characterized by government repression against social movements (Waldman 2006). Government violence, the rural crisis, and worsening poverty propitiated the emergence of guerrilla groups throughout the Mexican Republic ⁷ (Cruz Paz 2012). Carlos Montemayor (2007) has classified them as rural and urban guerrillas, according to their origin and demands. In the 1970s, repression reached such heights that surviving members of urban guerrillas displaced themselves to the rural areas. In those years, small groups of guerrillas, principally with Marxist and Maoist orientations, arrived in Chiapas from Mexico City, Monterrey, and Torreon (Estrada Saavedra 2007). However, only in 1983 did the first members of the National Liberation Front (FLN) arrive, later to be transformed and made known as the EZLN (Tello 1995).

The abuses to which the indigenous communities were historically submitted by the Church and by state militarization in the 1980s (Tello 1995) spurred the *campesinos* to seek political alternatives which would primarily guarantee land possession, and eventually recognition of their cultural and collective rights as well. The variety of processes and influences which the original people of Chiapas underwent led to polarization within the communities with respect to taking up arms (Toledo 2005). Authors such as Estrada Saavedra (2004), De Vos (1997), and others agree that the

⁷ Guerilla groups arising in Chiapas in the 1960s included Revolutionary Action Movement (MAR) and in the 1970s The Lacandon Brigade. In other parts of the country, other groups were founded, including The Urban Zapatista Front (FUZ), The Communist League 23 de Septiembre (LC23S), The Civic National Revolutionary Association ACNR), and The Union of the People (UP), the Party of the Poor (PdIP). More recent groups include The Clandestine Revolutionary Party – Union of the People – Party of the Poor (PROCUP-PdIP), The Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), The Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People (ERPI), and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of the People (FARP) (Paz Cruz 2012)

Zapatista uprising may only be understood by considering the following elements. First was the work of the Indigenous Pastoral Ministry, which sought to raise the indigenous people's consciousness regarding their dignity, before God and the world. Second was the communities' previous political experience, through participation in *campesino* organizations and in their own community's agrarian commissions. Third was the communities' contact with diverse political parties and guerrilla groups which came to the region. Finally was the very specific adaptation of the FLN to the local forms and language of political organization (De Vos 2004).

Despite the social and geographic diversity of Chiapas, the case we will address is located in the context of subdivision of coffee and cattle plantations of the municipalities of Comitán and Las Margaritas (Ascencio Franco 1995). In this "hacienda fringe in the 1950s, emigration became increasingly intense toward the virgin lands of the tropical forest... this process of colonization meant for its principal actors more than liberation from the slavery of the farms" (De Vos 2004). In the following chapters, through a case study, we will see how these elements led a Tojolabal community to search for a different type of autonomy, which transcends territorial and political autonomy, upon deciding to join the armed movement of the EZLN.

1.2. Useful concepts for addressing the study of autonomy:

To introduce the topic of the creation of indigenous autonomy, a series of concepts will be helpful in understanding the motive of the controversies generated regarding this topic. The strong, centralized, totalitarian Mexican state which dominated the political scene until the end of the 20th Century arose from the revolutionary process initiated in 1910, which became progressively consolidated in the post-revolutionary period in the late 1940s (Knight 1985). According to Rodríguez' analysis (2007), on the one hand it is necessary to understand the state as an abstract structure which possesses political qualities necessary for creating a system of social relations⁸. On the other hand, the state is made visible in its operative phase, which is when it acts, for example, by creating laws. By "Function and action", we refer to the government's operative functions: who governs us, how they govern, what they do to govern, why they govern us. As part of its functions, the state allows its citizens a margin of social participation within its general political orientation

⁸ In 1919, Max Weber defined the modern State as an association of domination with an institutional character which has tried, with success, to monopolize a territory with legitimate physical violence as a means of domination.

but reserves the privileged spaces of its political rationality for the president, its political programme, and a small privileged group which sustains his hegemony to direct social life (Rodriguez 2007). Ideally, a state's political action should be based on decisions which conserve the interest of society as a whole, but which prioritize order and territorial control. With the objective of developing state action, the government is the institutionally constituted agent which detains or puts into practice the general sense of the state, defines political action, and concentrates state power and its administrative apparatus. These functions or qualities are only possible through the will which the collective voluntarily confers to this political entity, but its action is defined by its capacity to exercise power – that is, by the capacity to propose and make one decision rather than another before a group of individuals (Kaplan 1980). From a political-administrative point of view, the government, besides framing the rationality of the state, is permanently redefined in the face of its inherent need to preserve and maintain social order, under a group of operative norms which govern the “interests and expectations of the state” (Kaplan 1980; 187).

Another central concept in the discussion of autonomy is the nation, which is different from the state and the government in terms of its characteristics and functions.⁹ The nation in a strict sense has two meanings: first, in the judicial realm, it is referred to as the political nation. The idea of the political nation is abstract but based on this idea; the government argues that the force which legitimates the existence of the state arises from this political nation. On the other hand, the cultural nation is a more subjective, ambiguous concept which may be defined as a human community which shares certain common characteristics such as ethnic origin, language, religion, tradition, or common history. When a group evokes this concept, it is an indication that its members are conscious that that they collectively constitute a political - ethnic body which is different from others - for example, indigenous peoples. Despite these conceptual differences, it is common for the concept of nation to be employed as a synonym for state, country, territory, ethnicity, people, although they are not the same. Nevertheless, when a state identifies itself explicitly as the home of a certain cultural nation, one may speak of a nation-state (Smith 2005)

Despite the fact that the idea of nation is complex or abstract, politicians refer to the nation in order to construct “the original myth” which give sense and legitimacy to the state (Rodriguez 2007). The relation between nation and state is not completely harmonious,

⁹ Giddens (1985; 26) defines the nation as “A collective which exists in a clearly delimited territory, subject to a single administration.”

since, as pointed out by Diaz Polanco (2002), the ethnic diversity within contemporary nation-states represents a political challenge for Latin American democracies. In an attempt to consolidate the modern nation states, the state has enacted homogenizing integrationist policies, such as the “indigenist” policies. This has been done despite the fact that a great variety of ethnic groups exist in Mexico. This leads to conflict when the state speaks of a nation-state; for example, the indigenous peoples question the government, asking what nation they are speaking of, as they are a culturally different nation with different cultural values.

In the case of Latin America, indigenous peoples, citing the ILO Convention 169, demand to be recognized as the original peoples of a cultural nation. In a contradictory manner, in the construction of modern nation-states, the state recurs to the figure of a nation in order to establish national symbols which should collectively represent the population as a whole. It is in this process of homogenization in which indigenous peoples seek legal or informal tools to demand their collective rights in the face of the ethnocentric, integrationist focus of the state (Zambrano 2003).

In the rural Mexican context, these confrontations have been most evident at the municipal level. This is the smallest territorial unit which the Mexican government recognizes as a political unit. It is in the municipality where communities converge in search of political representation. Furthermore, it is at this level of government in which local matters converge with state politics. At the municipal level, community authorities are elected and federal and state social programs are administered. The introduction of public policy and political parties at this level divides, transforms, and affects local community forms of organization. The free constitutional municipality is established in Article 115 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution and was conceived as the central administrative, territorial, and political unit of the nation. The concept of the free municipality was conceived in 1916 by Emiliano Zapata¹⁰. As previously stated, in Chiapas, the municipality had often become a site of struggle between indigenous people who sought self-government on the

¹⁰ Emiliano Zapata wrote of the characteristics the municipality should possess once the Mexican Revolution triumphed. “Municipal freedom is the first and most important democratic institution, because there is nothing more natural and respectable than the right of neighbours of any population centre to arrange for themselves the matters of their common life” (CEHAM 1982: 7).

one hand and *Mestizos*, political parties, and government representatives on the other”¹¹ (Burguete 2007).

In these confrontations, the political party has been another important actor which seeks to intervene in the direction which the state and the government will follow, according to its proposals. For Lucas Verdu (1970), the political party is a stable, organized group which holds an ideology that is shared by its members. This ideology will govern its political actions, with clear objectives. The political party as a group solicits assistance among the members of a society in order to express its political program with the objective of competing for power and participating in the political orientation of the state. This desire to participate in the structures of the state distinguishes the political party from civil society. According to Enrique Brito Velasquez, civil society is the group of citizens organized as such in order to act in the realm of the political and the public in search of specific objectives and demands, without intentions of personal profit nor to seek political power or adhesion to a determined party. Members of civil society only wish to influence the direction which the government seeks to give to the state. This civil society is also by principal critical of institutionalized politics (Cano Zarate 2005).

Unlike civil society, the government and the political party have a political program, which “in a rigorous manner specifies institutional or structural changes or adjustments which must be carried out in society in order to achieve determined goals or objectives, such as application of “neoliberal prescriptions such as fiscal discipline, trade liberalisation and privatisation. The political program stipulates the political orientation of the state and allocates roles to specific social institutions” (Carroll 2007). A political program may even determine the type of government and governance which this program deems ideal for its own development. Application of such programs is not free of conflict. For example, for Burguete (2011), as part of the neoliberal multicultural program, the federal government has sought to municipalize the indigenous government. This political program seeks to satisfy indigenous demands for autonomy and political participation, but through institutional channels. Application of this program represents a challenge for the indigenous communities, as, on the one hand it contains an integrationist, assimilationist purpose, but

¹¹ The municipalities of Santiago El Pinar and San Pedro Chenalho are examples of those municipalities where the struggle to remove the *Mestizos* from government and return political power to the indigenous people has lasted from the 1930s to the present (Burguete 2007; Eber 2001).

on the other hand it is also a political opportunity to participate in national politics. In the following chapters, the general concepts such as state, nation, political program, and political party allow us to understand the complex relationship constructed between the political and economic elites of Chiapas on the one hand and the Mexican state on the other, specifically in response to the construction of the Zapatista autonomy project.

1.3. Resistance, collective memory, identity, and autonomy:

When analyzing contemporary social movements, it is helpful to highlight some key elements in the development of the strategies and discourses of these movements. First, we should identify the concept of resistance, which, according to Gledhill (2012), generated a wave of studies in the 1980s. In the context of Latin American dictatorships, this concept is conceived “as a tool for thinking about more radically democratic alternatives in an era in which democratization generally got off to a cautious start” (Gledhill 2012: 5). At that point, as now, the political and economic crisis generated a series of social movements, such as the Landless of Brazil, the *Piqueteros* of Argentina, the Zapatista movement, etc, some of which have a history of struggle of over thirty years. With respect to these movements, the concept of resistance may be very useful for understanding the evolution, goals, and strategies which have allowed them to persist. For Gledhill (2012), the contribution which anthropology may make toward this debate is to connect the theoretical discussion on resistance to practice, for example when social groups attribute this concept to actions such as defending their land or culture.

The 1980s and 1990s marked the period of transition of the creation of a European-style welfare state to that of the neoliberal model in Latin America. In this context, indigenous groups led many social movements, demanding recognition of their ethnicity. According to Sieder (2002), inclusion of ethnic identity and rights as a political demand was also due to modification in the framework of international law. However, for Diaz Polanco (2006), these demands are a product of historic struggles which seek autonomy and self-determination. Despite the fact that current neoliberal governments have developed “multicultural” policies which recognise ethnic identity and diversity, their social programs resemble old-style Latin American indigenism, in which neoliberal governments defined the significance of what it means to be indigenous and its basic characteristics. As Diaz Polanco (2006) argues, neoliberal governments which propose “neoliberal multiculturalism, in the effort to include the question of identity in public policy, are concerned with cultural diversity, while they repudiate or leave aside economic and socio-

political differences”. Such governments claim policies addressing indigenous identity need only relate to cultural issues, as they do not wish to allow the peoples to self-govern and make decisions regarding their natural resources. Contemporary indigenous social movements such as the EZLN which address these socio-political aspects are clearly demanding more fundamental changes in relationships of social and ethnic domination.

Given that the peoples of Chiapas have undergone a history of constant domination, displacement, and territorial uprooting, their use of memory plays a central role in reconstructing their histories. This history contributes to creating a more transcendental identity. The book *I Rigoberta Menchu* (Stoll 1999) is an example of the use of memory to construct the testimony of a collective life. According to Jelin (2005), memory in times of war, discrimination, and extreme poverty may contribute to generating a common space of shared significance for those groups which have undergone such experiences. According to Gossen (1999) the use of memory in a collective manner is particularly common in Mayan communities. This is evident in the manner of speaking of the past in the plural rather than in singular. The use of “we” displaces “I” in narratives which try to reconstruct a past in which the communities lived a situation of subordination. For Jelin (1996), the use of memory may lead to the adoption of an alternative concept of meaning which is created based on common cultural meanings for determined peoples.

As commented at the beginning of this chapter, the indigenous struggle in Chiapas in search of autonomy has a long history, and the protagonists of these efforts were newly inspired by the Zapatista uprising. In 1998, the Centre for Economic and Political Research and Community Action in Chiapas (CIEPAC) carried out a diagnostic study of the regions where autonomous territories had been created by different indigenous and *campesino* organizations¹². The central demand of these organizations was land possession, and they generally tried to achieve this through their relation to the state. Meanwhile, the Zapatista autonomous project has not limited its struggle to land; its principal focus is that it is openly opposed to, and proposes total autonomy from, the state¹³. Studies by Burguete (1996, 2007, 2007a, 2007b), Eber (2001), and Mattiace (2002)

¹² See information from CIEPAC: <http://www.rehberg.net/nonviolentways/mapas.html>. Although I lack the space to explore in depth the differences among these initiatives for autonomy, it is important to emphasise the variety of experiments which have emerged over the past three decades and the variety of organisations responsible for these. Some of those which still existed at the end of the 1990s, according to CIEPAC, were: 14 Autonomous Regions, 11 villages of the *Tzotz Choj* Autonomous Region, 17 Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions, 1 Autonomous Council, and 31 Zapatista municipalities.

¹³ From 1930 to 1990 in the Tojolabal region, several organizations have developed initiatives oriented toward obtaining autonomy as well as land possession. Van der Haar (1998) suggests that the Zapatista

have documented the diverse strategies and tensions in which the communities have been immersed in their search for autonomy, exhausting political channels upon competing with political parties and non indigenous governments for control of the municipality.

Bartra (2007), Diaz Polanco (2006), and others centre their debate on the legitimacy and viability of indigenous autonomy in the context of the Mexican state. In this debate, the capacity for the Mexican state to recognize the ethnic diversity of the country and thus transition to a fully democratic model is questioned. According to the more conservative posture, indigenous autonomy puts national unity at risk (Zambrano 2003), as the Zapatista vision questions how the nation was founded. Specifically, the proposal of Zapatista autonomy demands redefinition of the relationship between the state and the indigenous peoples, given that in the Zapatista territories, participants of this movement try to materialize this concept of autonomy. Throughout this study, we will try to elucidate the meaning that the Zapatistas confer to autonomy. By exploring diverse practices of daily life, we will see that Zapatista autonomy rests on the creation of their autonomous education models, on the establishment of new conceptions of health, or even on redefinition of gender relations. This study has allowed me to analyse how the Zapatista movement is renovating and bringing new meaning to the political practices of the nation state.

1.4. Creation of the Good Government Councils:

Immediately after the Zapatista uprising, intense military incursions took place in Chiapas. This was followed by a flooding of government declarations in the media in an attempt to create an official version of the events. The government's discourse revolved around the need to maintain national unity and the government's capacity to apply the law and dialogue with the rebels (El Universal, January 4, 1994). Meanwhile, newspapers focused their attention on the declarations of Subcommander Marcos, who affirmed that the uprising was to demonstrate the Zapatistas' rejection of the entrance into effect of the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). After January 7, 1994, both sides began to show signs of willingness to establish dialogue. The growing opposition of civil society to what appeared to be a government massacre forced then President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to

movement was a sort of culmination of a true agrarian reform initiated decades earlier by President Lazaro Cardenas. Taking advantage of the Zapatista conflict, many other non-Zapatista organisations carried out over 2000 invasions of private property in 1994 and 1995. The Zapatista rebellion had a broad impact on state policy toward local government and on the extent to which the indigenous population benefited from government social programs.

announce, on January 12, a cease fire and his intention to initiate a process of dialogue (Rodriguez 2007)

The first contact between the EZLN and government Peace Commissioner Manuel Camacho Solis was initiated in February in the so-called Cathedral Dialogues. Civil organizations, the Church, and the EZLN itself knew that the government was symbolically negotiating with the indigenous population of the country, and not with the Zapatistas (Reygadas 2006). The presence of 130 organizations in the Cathedral Dialogues, a majority of which were indigenous, gradually but decisively introduced the indigenous question and the demand for autonomy according to the Zapatista posture (Rodriguez 2007). 1994 was a Presidential election year, which complicated the political environment. On March 23, the candidate for the ex-official PRI party was assassinated, and with this the EZLN retreated from the dialogue

With the objective of maintaining dialogue with civil society, the Zapatistas announced that the National Democratic Convention would be held in August of that year. Many civil society and independent political organizations which participated in this Convention also expressed their desire to participate in the electoral process. In a parallel manner, from January, 1994 through 1995, a variety of indigenous forums were carried out, such as the National Indigenous Convention, the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA), and the National Indigenous Forum (Rodriguez 2007; Velasco 2003). In these forums, it was generally concluded that the Zapatista movement represented the principal political opportunity by which to fully express the demand for constitutional recognition of indigenous autonomy. In this manner, the question of indigenous autonomy was placed in the centre of Zapatista discourse because indigenous organizations throughout Mexico demanded this. This topic was included in Discussion Table 1 regarding Indigenous Rights and Culture in the negotiations held in the municipality of San Andres Larrainzar in 1995 and 1996. The Accords were signed on February 16, 1996, and were approved by the government of Ernesto Zedillo, the political parties and other powerful political groups of the nation, and indigenous peoples. At the same time as the negotiations were being held, the Zedillo government increased military incursions into the Tojolabal canyons, where the Zapatista military bastions were concentrated. In a parallel manner, communities of Chiapas – even some which were non-Zapatista – created autonomous municipalities and appointed autonomous authorities (Mattiace 2002).

As the negotiations between the two sides had been detained, the Commission for Concord and Pacification (COCOPA) was appointed by the government to draw up a law which

would compile the signed accords. COCOPA presented its proposal in November, 1996. This law proposed to recognize the indigenous peoples as subjects of public rights, which meant that they were free to select their representatives. Zedillo's government ended with incomppliance and lack of recognition of these accords. Furthermore, Zedillo presented an alternative proposal for law to Congress, which no longer contained the central points which had been signed. "It was not simply that the new law no longer bore any significant resemblance to either the original San Andres agreements or the COCOPA proposal first presented to the Congress; the new legislation actually represented a reduction in the level of existing rights applicable to Mexico's one million indigenous people" (Higgins 2001: 897).

The peace process was detained until April, 2001, when the Senate of the Republic approved the so-called Law of Indigenous Rights and Culture, which basically denied the indigenous peoples' rights to free determination and autonomy. The changes to the original law focused on "...the designation of indigenous communities as institutions of "public interest" rather than "public right". An entity of public right is part of the organizational structure of the state, while an entity of public interest is an entity that the state must protect" (Higgins 2001: 898-899). Hopes for achieving peace with accords worthy of the indigenous peoples were cast aside with the 330 complaints presented by a variety of political organizations before the Supreme Court of Justice in 2002.

Without dialogue or negotiations, in August, 2003, the Zapatistas declared the birth of the five Caracoles as homes of the Zapatista Good Government Councils. Although I will broadly address this theme in the following chapter, it is important to mention that the creation of both Caracoles and Councils may be interpreted as mechanisms for de facto living autonomously. They are an attempt by the Zapatistas to put the accords signed in 1996 into effect. With this, they have created the basic infrastructure to develop autonomous schools, clinics, agricultural projects, and stores which offer their services to the entire population. In order to function, they do not receive money from the government, but nor do they pay taxes to the state. The Councils represent the various Zapatista autonomous municipalities. The members of the Good Government Councils are part of the Zapatista population of the diverse territories where they have influence.

1.5. The governmental counterinsurgency strategy:

As mentioned, from the first few days of the uprising, the federal government offered the Zapatistas to initiate a process of dialogue and negotiations of their demands. Nevertheless, hostile military incursions worsened. These attacks were widely condemned, as they violated the law for Dialogue, Conciliation and Peace with Dignity in Chiapas. According to Aubry (1997), at the height of the negotiations in San Andres, the government began to apply counterinsurgency strategies to the territories of Zapatista influence. According to this author, “the two volumes of the Irregular War Manual edited by the National Defence Ministry (SEDENA according to its initials in Spanish)” include the strategies and actions to be followed by the Mexican army. According to these plans, those carrying out these attacks will not be regular members of the federal army, but rather groups of armed civilians called paramilitary groups who receive training, financing, and arms from the federal government. These practices which were applied in past decades in Nicaragua and Guatemala existed in Chiapas since 1988 with the paramilitary group The Chinchulines, created by Chiapas ex-governor Elmar Setzer Marseille (Aubry 1997). However, to directly confront the Zapatistas, the Indigenous Revolutionary Anti-Zapatista Movement (MIRA) was created and later Peace and Justice, Red Mask, The Decapitators, and others (Hidalgo and Castro 1998). At the start, they operated principally in the Northern Zone of Chiapas, and later in the Highlands Region, followed by the Canyons. Historically, independent armies were common in Chiapas. They were called white guards and were contracted by ranchers to keep away the landless *campesinos*, thus to avoid invasion of their land. However, in the case of Chiapas the composition of the paramilitary group is different; its members arise from the community itself. According to Aubry, young *campesinos* whose fathers and grandfathers had been landless see the paramilitary option as an easy opportunity for economic income and prestige they never had (Aubry 1997). Their objective has been to attack and weaken the Zapatista communities, cause panic among the population, and steal harvests and the *campesinos*’ few belongings. Nevertheless, paramilitaries in Chiapas are part of the plan of low intensity warfare which includes management of public opinion, military incursion, and some welfare actions toward the population (Hidalgo Castro 1998). One strategy of low intensity warfare implemented in Chiapas is management of public opinion with the media’s assistance in order to build a positive reputation of the army in the eyes of the population. Another strategy, with the aim of appearing friendly to the communities, is for the army will carry

out humanistic activities such as handing out food and providing health services. A third strategy of the military and paramilitary is the practice of surprise actions, such as those which have been carried out in many communities.

Since 1995, paramilitarization has increased the flow of displaced peoples. Many of those displaced by the war are currently living in the Polho refugee camp located in the Highlands Region. Another wave of displacement occurred after the massacre of Acteal in 1997. In the Northern Zone, indigenous people fled the attacks of the paramilitary group Peace and Justice. By 2002, over 12,000 people had been displaced in Chiapas (Frayba 2002). Harassment, threats, attacks, disappearances, and torture are government strategies which hinder development and maintenance of the autonomous communities. It has even been argued that low intensity warfare and paramilitaries in Chiapas are part of a global plan of demobilization of social organization (Marin 1998).

At the beginning, the government sought to diminish popular support, demoralize, and mine the spirit of the Zapatistas. Under new names and forms of organization, resurgence of paramilitary violence in the Jungle Zone is directed toward taking back the land which the Zapatistas occupied during the first days of combat. The Zapatistas refer to these as recuperated lands, and they are located principally in the municipalities of Ocosingo and Las Margaritas (Aubry 2007). Although militarization and paramilitarization forms part of a unique government program, in the following chapter 1 will document the diverse forms of attack and harassment which each Zapatista zone confronts. Here, it is important to highlight that the Zapatista intention to transform itself from an armed movement to a political movement is continually challenged by this counterinsurgency plan.

One of the groups in charge of reactivating the violence since 1997 in the Jungle Zone is the Organization for Defence of Indigenous Rights (OPDDIC). This organization seeks to destabilize the autonomous communities under the context of disputing the Zapatistas' recuperated lands. The fact that the founder of this organization, Pedro Chulin, has occupied the post of Congress member, with the complicity of governor Juan Sabines is an indicator of the agreements among the different levels of government so that these organizations may function (Bellinghausen 2007). In 2007, OPDDIC had regrouped Peace and Justice, Chinchulines, and MIRA. The particularity of this new group, OPDDIC, is that they now also facilitate access by member organizations or community members to government programs, (*La Jornada* 2007). Their double function as a group which promotes a given political party along with their paramilitary activities makes understanding their limits and capabilities more complex. According to Aubry's analysis

(2007), with these new strategies the government is dismantling the achievements of the Caracoles and Good Government Councils. This can only mean that we are at the start of another process which puts peace in danger – the professionalization of paramilitaries in Mexico. In order to understand the magnitude and implications of such a phenomenon, we have only to witness what has occurred in Colombia.

The expanding functions of the OPDDIC from a paramilitary group to one which also takes on political functions responds to a broad political program than that of 10 years ago, that of mining social resistance to carry out Plan Puebla Panama, making available natural resources of the region to private investment (Frayba 2007). For example, members of this organization dispossess Zapatistas of the recuperated land in order to later solicit property titles from the government. Until 2006, through PROCEDE, the government granted titles under a form of tenancy which makes possible their sale and later privatization¹⁴. In 2006, PROCEDE was substituted by the Fund for Support to Unregulated Agrarian Communities (FANAR) to address areas which remained to be certified. Members of OPDDIC received property titles for land which they took from other organizations, not only the Zapatistas. One of the most conflictive aspects of how this organization operates is the internationally renowned tourist attraction Agua Azul, in the community Bolon Ajaw, of the autonomous municipality Olga Isabel, in the Official Municipality of Chilon (Frayba 2010)

One *campesino* organization which has walked a fine line between allying itself with the government and rebellion is Quiptic Ta Lecubtesel, formed in 1976¹⁵ (Leyva and Ascencio 1993). In 1988, this organization was transformed into one of the most important organizations in the state, changing its name to ARIC (Rural Association of Collective Interest). At that time, it confronted official government allied *campesino* organizations for control of the new *ejidos* created in the Jungle Zone (Olivera 2005). In 1989, some members of ARIC joined the EZLN (Estrada Saavedra 2007, De Vos 2004). In the months following the Zapatista uprising, the federal government designated 20 million pesos to finance various social programs. With investment of resources from government programs, many organizations became divided, among these, ARIC. In 1994, a faction changed their name to Independent and Democratic ARIC and another faction to Official ARIC. In 1997,

¹⁴ PROCEDE (Program of Certification of Ejido Rights and Titles for Urban Plots) was in effect in Chiapas from 2003 to 2006, during which 2224 ejidos and 67 communities were granted titles.

¹⁵ Quiptic Ta Lecubtesel means ‘Our Strength is Our Unity for Progress’ in Tzeltal.

the official group was again subdivided, and from this the ARIC Union of Unions arose. The same year, after many negotiations, the ARIC Union of Unions reconciled with the Independent ARIC, and since then they work in conjunction. Later, a small faction left the ARIC Union of Unions and decided to join the Official ARIC (De Vos 2004).

In a context of poverty, low intensity warfare, militarization, and paramilitarization, *campesino* organizations transform their identity, and follow a variety of paths to satisfy their demands. However, many organizations are manipulated by the government to generate conflicts among the communities, heighten the conflict, and justify intervention by the armed forces (CIEPAC 1999). The development of the ARIC appears to be an example of this. In 2007, this former Zapatista – allied organization joined other organizations against the Zapatistas in dispute of 16,949 hectares of recuperated land and political control of the so-called zone of conflict. This involved 253 haciendas in the municipalities of Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, Chilon, Tila, as well as in the Highlands and the Jungle Zone. The relationship between these organizations and the EZLN began to change in 2000 when the PRI lost the State government elections against the alliance of the PRD, PAN, PT, Convergence, and Green Ecological Party. Since several leaders of these organizations were incorporated into the state administration, specifically the Secretariats of Social Development and Indigenous Attention, the ARIC broke off relations with the EZLN. In 2007, the confrontation among these *campesino* organizations worsened when the Secretariat of Agrarian Reform granted land to non-Zapatista organizations in at least 38 municipalities.

Currently, confrontations between the Zapatistas and Official ARIC continue, now over the community Casa Blanca, founded on recuperated land in the municipality of Ocosingo (SIPAZ 2009). In this confrontation, the Zapatistas have been victims of property destruction, robbery, and invasions. Meanwhile, the community Corozal, member of Independent ARIC, currently confronts the government, which tried to displace them for living in the zone of Montes Azules, a strategic point of interest for the government. In 1995, the government of Zedillo ordered the creation of the military base San Quintin, one of the largest and best equipped in the state. This borders to the west with the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, and is also very close to the Zapatista Caracol La Realidad. With the pretext of protecting the reserve, the government intends to displace the communities of the jungle, weaken Zapatista resistance, and open the path for the development of Plan Puebla Panama, now called The Mesoamerica Project (CIEPAC 2011). During my field work in 2008 and 2009, there was no access to information

regarding the situation of the EZLN's military structure; this aspect of the Zapatista movement does not correspond to my object of research. Nevertheless, constant threats and attacks on the Zapatista communities mean they must mobilize their few economic and human resources, which impedes or interrupts fulfilling the established objectives of continuing their autonomic projects. In Chapter 3, I will more closely examine this point, in the case of the defence of the Zapatista community La Humanidad.

1.6. Social development initiatives in Chiapas:

The numerous social development policies enacted in Chiapas from the start of the Zapatista uprising have required great economic investment. For example, in 1994 as a response to the creation of the many autonomous rebel municipalities, the federal and state governments proposed a re-zoning plan for some municipalities of Chiapas; this proposal was rejected by the EZLN¹⁶ (Bartra 2007; Burguete 2007b). These processes coincide with “temporary social and agricultural programs, or merely handouts, with the aim of drowning potentially subversive popular discontent with public resources” (Bartra 2007: 38). Bartra comments that due to the fact that the government had known of the existence of the Zapatistas since 1992, that year and the following, the state and federal governments invested over 180 million pesos in social programs in the municipalities of Margaritas and Ocosingo alone.

During my fieldwork, I observed that at least for the Highland Region, the program Oportunidades was widely applied to the communities which decided to affiliate with the federal and state government; later we will more closely examine the mechanisms of such programs. Particularly since 2003, another series of megaprojects have been initiated, directed toward combating possible forms of social organization in the zone which is opposed to government privatization plans. First, the government seeks to advance with Mesoamerica Project in order to open the way for free exploitation of natural resources and biodiversity in the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve (CIEPAC 2010). This is part of the more overreaching Mesoamerica Project, which has the objective of exploiting natural resources from central Mexico to Colombia. Secondly, the Chiapas government hopes to expand the megaproject Sustainable Rural cities as well as create large ecotourism centres in the zone of Palenque and San Cristobal. Both projects seek to privatize the natural resources of these areas (CIEPAC 2011). The program Rural Cities seeks to concentrate

¹⁶In 1998, the Chiapas state government created 12 new municipalities, and another seven in 1999.

indigenous peoples into new urbanised settings with the justification that, as the population is currently dispersed in their communities, the government cannot feasibly offer them services such as education and healthcare. This programme will involve the indigenous people losing their land and the natural resources located there. This programme will strengthen the relations of dependence of the communities on government finances and programmes. A similar project, called “model villages”, was part of the counterinsurgency plan in Guatemala in the 1980s and 90s.

In 2011, President Felipe Calderon signed the National Tourism Agreement which committed Mexico to becoming the fifth largest tourist destination in the world by 2018 (El Economista 2011). In the face of the advance of this plan, sympathizers and Zapatistas of Mitziton and San Sebastian Bachajon struggle daily to avoid being displaced from their land, on which state and federal governments hope to build highways to connect the tourist centres Palenque and San Cristobal. Another project affecting the communities involves open pit mines conceded to Canadian capital. For example, inhabitants of the village Nicolas Ruiz were displaced from their land in November, 2009. This was the final month of my fieldwork, and I witnessed dozens of indigenous *campesinos* who took refuge at the doors of the Cathedral of San Cristobal. Curiously, this group did not belong to the Zapatistas, but once arriving in San Cristobal, they sought to join the Zapatista Other Campaign, intuiting that this would offer them political backup and some sort of security. According to Cordoba Morales (2009), the Canadian mining company Black fire is just one of 300 Canadian mining companies with investments in Mexico. Such projects indicate that Chiapas is a key part of the development of Mesoamerica Project, which intends to exhaustively exploit the natural resources of Latin America through multinational companies. Thus, the Zapatista organization represents a great obstacle for this project.

One key strategy in this global privatization project is criminalization of dissent. This government strategy seeks to confuse the public regarding who the social organizations are and what are their intentions. For example, with the so called war against drug trafficking in 2006, the country was militarized to an alarming extent; in Chiapas, paramilitary attacks increased on Zapatista communities, even while the EZLN has been publicly recognized by the government as an important political force (Mestries 2006). Similarly, with respect to national security, in 2008 the government signed the Merida Initiative, a faithful copy of Plan Colombia. This plan, destined to combat drug trafficking, also has been used against organized social protest. Currently, Mexico is receiving \$1.4 billion dollars from the

United States per year over the course of a three-year package, to end in 2011. This is more money than Colombia received during the past two decades (Haugaard and Isacson 2011). All the projects cited above have been financed by countries which hope to benefit from these agreements. According to the Centre for Economic and Political Research for Community Action (CIEPAC), in 2008, mixed investment for these plans reached \$8,121,989,469 million dollars. Donors include the Inter-American Development Bank and the Mexican federal and state governments.

As stated in the introduction, in my fieldwork, I visited the Zapatista Caracoles throughout Chiapas. Throughout these long travels, I witnessed the material inequalities between the Zapatista and non Zapatista communities. The Zapatistas appear to be more impoverished. In this research, I witnessed that government “assistance” conditioned to political fidelity has only generated more inter-community division and confrontation. In the following section, I will discuss the case of a municipality affiliated with a political party affiliated, through which we may observe the effects of the state development plan and its links with national and global development policies.

1.7. The constitutional indigenous municipality and the Zapatista municipality:

One of the governmental policies used to combat indigenous organizations has been to channel the political demands of these organizations through government institutions and programs. One example of this has been the creation of the constitutional indigenous municipality. The case I will present here allows us to understand the limits of this institutionalized form of government. In particular, I will refer to the case of the constitutional municipality San Andres Larrainzar, located in the Highlands region¹⁷. I specifically concentrate on the municipal president, Santos, and conclude by explaining the existing relationship between the constitutional government, headed by Santos, and the autonomous Zapatista government, both of which are located in the municipality of San Andres.

¹⁷For PRI members, the municipal auxiliary agent is the leader of each community who obeys the constitutional government and must resolve all types of problems and controversies. When this figure is not able to resolve a certain problem, the conflicting parties recur to the Indigenous Justice of Peace and Conciliation. If the problem still may not be resolved, the party or parties recur to the judges of San Cristobal. With respect to minor offenses, rather than punishing, the Justice of Peace and Conciliation's function is to assist the conflicting parties in reaching an agreement, and the solution is based on the ways and customs of each community (Gobierno del Estado 2009).

The main plaza in the municipality of San Andres Larrainzar serves as a point of contact between San Cristobal and Oventic, Bochil, La Tijera, and other villages. Usually, a traveller cannot find public transportation directly from San Cristobal to these destinations; one must stop and take a taxi or minibus to continue the journey. During the year of my field study, I stopped here many times on the way to or from Oventic or other nearby communities. Through informal conversations, comments, and fortunate observations, I realised the significance of the official indigenous government in this town: first, the office of the “constitutional” government, as it is referred to by the population in general, and the office of the “government of the Zapatista autonomous municipality” coexist on the municipal plaza of San Andres. Secondly, the constitutional municipal president is a young PRI militant, winner of various prizes, and a good example of the model of indigenous government promoted by the administration of Governor Juan Sabines Guerrero (2006-2012), ostensibly a member of the self-defined left-wing PRD.

Having presented my request to interview the municipal president, after several visits Santos conceded. Some of the information presented here was obtained in informal conversations close friends, some of whom I had met in Mexico City seven or eight years previously but who are originally from the Highlands Region and others of whom live in the municipality of San Andres. In a very friendly manner, these friends showed me the area and introduced me to their friends and families. As they are well aware of the delicate nature of the political situation in the zone, at all times I followed their suggestions regarding security and the manner in which to conduct myself during my visits.

The constitutional municipal government recognized by the state and federal governments is officially called San Andres Larrainzar. Meanwhile, the Zapatistas call their municipality San Andres *Sakam ch'en* de los Pobres. Santos is originally from the village of Chalotoj, a small community of 30 or so families. Now he lives in the municipal seat in order to fulfil his duties. He is single, age 30, and studied in a private law school in San Cristobal. After receiving his law degree, he began to study Business Administration but interrupted his studies to devote himself to his political campaign. He says that because he is single and young, the traditional authorities and former government authorities of San Andres criticised and insulted him. With respect to being married, he says, “It’s one of the key requisites for being president. At first they laughed at me and said many things to me. But with the response I’m giving them, now they respect me.” When I asked him what he had done to win the respect of the elders, he answered, “I always go according to the law. The law is clear and no one can go above it”.

This modern educated personality is one of the “elite indigenous professionals” who leads the so-called re-indianization of government ¹⁸ (Burguete 2007). For Santos, professionalization of popular representatives has a concrete objective. He repeatedly commented that due to the fact that he has a law degree, he knows the law very well and “that has helped me confront all my political adversaries in a pacific manner.” The political adversaries he refers to include members of his own party; in fact, he ran against 14 other PRI pre-candidates for municipal president. I asked him for an interview in March, 2009 and he did not agree to speak with me until November of that year. I told him it was difficult to find him, to which he responded, “I was in Washington. When I was president-elect... I was selected for a prize as young president on a national level”. I asked him what he was doing in the United States - who invited him. “Beatriz Parades invited me, national president of my party”. He told me he is the first young indigenous municipal president of Chiapas who is visiting other countries due to his cargo. He has been to Spain, the United States, Costa Rica, and other States of Mexico. Shortly after I interviewed him, he received the national prize for sustainable development in Guadalajara, Mexico. “They give us recognition, a document. They don’t give us money, but it has national recognition”. He says that one thing he is passionate about is raising financial support for his people, and adds that through his efforts, he wishes to demonstrate that youth work hard.

1.8. Indigenous government and national politics:

Santos’ term is three years. When we met, he had been in office 1 year and ten months. When I asked how he was elected, he said through a plebiscite. This is the traditional form of electing representatives in the communities of the Highlands region. However, the process which Santos described refers only to the way in which members of the PRI, the official party, select their candidate who will later compete with the candidates of other parties for municipal government. All PRI men and women of the communities of San Andres are invited to participate in this plebiscite. Each community may present a

¹⁸ Although the stance of Burguete (2007a, 2007b) is that re-indianization of governments is a tangible process, the case of Santos provides more specific information regarding these new social actors who are being groomed for power with the backing of the Chiapas state government. Santos, for example, has held a variety of political positions since 1999. First he was Secretary of Productive Projects, which covers all types of agriculture. During the following municipal government he was Director of Productive Projects. Following this, he was Advisor of Sustainable Rural Development, Advisor to the Municipal President, and Director of the CNC.

candidate, but not all do so. First they vote among all the candidates, and those receiving the fewest votes are eliminated. Several rounds of voting take place until only two or three candidates remain. Some candidates who are eliminated later support other candidates who continue in the election process. This process lasts several months. According to Santos, voting is individual in assembly by raising the hand. In the final elections, the PRI candidate is selected to run against the candidates of other parties. Nevertheless, at the end of the process, the candidate should be ratified by the party's state coordinators. This entire process, which Santos called a plebiscite, incorporates several traditional communitarian practices, such as assembly, open voting, and raising hands. Although the candidate has been elected through a communitarian process, in the end he will represent the PRI in the official elections. This practice is similar to that mentioned by Recondo (1997) in the state of Oaxaca, where recognition of ways and customs in the end assures the permanence of, and strengthens, the political parties in the indigenous communities. I asked Santos if the same process is used to select the candidates of other parties. While his response perhaps reflects his vested interests, he said there are different parties in his municipality, but they are not very strong, and sometimes the candidates of the other parties join the campaigns of the PRI candidates.

He says he previously did not have political aspirations; he only wished to serve his people. He repeatedly speaks of his absolute respect for state institutions and of his personal triumphs. His arguments fully coincide with declarations by the president of his party, Beatriz Paredes who, upon visiting Chiapas on June 25, 2010, stated that, "Politicians who have truly served the state have been members of the PRI, which is the only true source of political preparation in our country" (La Jornada, June 25, 2010). In this context, the process of re-indianization means choosing an indigenous candidate for municipal president, but one who follows the government programs; that is, the same role played by *Mestizo* municipal presidents. This contrasts with the manner in which indigenous groups of other states have participated in politics. In the case of Oaxaca, for example, indigenous people have participated collectively and individually in politics since the early 20th Century, maintaining relative independence in electing their leaders. Historically in Oaxaca, indigenous people have won certain positions in the formal power structures. Oaxacan elites have been created as a result of their "power sharing" (Ramirez 2003). The case of Chiapas also contrasts with that of Michoacan, where indigenous candidates have won elections against their *Mestizo* rivals (Roth Seneff 1998). The conflict between *Mestizos* and indigenous people for political control of the community and municipality

has been a constant in the history of Mexico, although every region has developed its own dynamics of conflict and negotiation.

1.9. Government or political administration?

When asked to explain the “constitutional” responsibilities of his government, Santos comments that he must attend to the needs of the people with resources which the state government provides to him for social programs. His municipality receives 30 million pesos annually. Santos commented that he personally seeks out extra resources from state or federal Congress members and government departments such as the National Commission for Development of Indigenous Peoples (CEPIS) and the Secretary of Social Development (SEDESOL). In 2009, Santos received 20 million pesos in donations. He says this has been possible “with the unconditional support of some assembly members and senators”. He comments that he also goes to the Senate in search of financial support, “because that motivates me more to keep seeking, because I see those cents and later I see the people pleased and happy when we inaugurate the projects which are achieved”. Obtaining a donation of 20 million pesos is quite a feat, indicating that the PRI political network continues to be fully functional even though the State governor is of a different party, the PRD. As we will see in the following chapter, the fact that the present governor belonged to the PRI until shortly before his election may have something to do with the continuing success of PRI politicians.

For Santos, it is important to “give” things to the people. He calls this “administration of resources”. However, the opinions Bartra gathered from some inhabitants of other municipalities with respect to government programs suggest another reality: “The plan was that they teach us to beg” (Bartra 2007: 332). Santos believes that “giving and receiving” is a form of government. I asked him how the needs of the people are defined and by whom. He responded, “The community itself, the assembly, they themselves bring (the proposals) and we carry out an assembly in which the projects are prioritised. They have to ask for what is most important to them. They decide.” He holds that he and his government just receive the proposals of his people and later he presents those proposals to the governor of Chiapas. According to Santos, during 2009, housing was most solicited. Santos says that the objective is “that the people have a more dignified home. The people in reality are suffering. They are in very bad condition.”

Nevertheless, I observed that in the past few years, in other municipalities and regions bordering San Andres, the federal government programme *Oportunidades* had granted

material for building homes in Chiapas. I commented to Santos, “Pardon, but isn’t the programme Oportunidades already giving material to improve the homes?” He answered, “Well, yes, as you have seen, material to improve the homes is what we are giving to the communities”. As Santos himself says, the people “ask for certain things because that’s what they are giving out.” But really, the people receive what there is, not what they truly need. Thus, while Santos wishes to give the impression that his government allows the people to express their real needs and have them met, his job is to be an intermediary or a channel for the flow of resources which the federal government obtains from international development projects, funded by institutions such as The World Bank and The Inter-American Development Bank, which are also applied in other countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Levy 2007).

Santos’ strategy for applying housing programmes is as follows: he assigned the communities numbers from 1 to 52. When he receives resources - housing materials for example - he begins to distribute them from number 52 to number 1. He says that the first time he received materials, he distributed everything he had, but it was not enough for all the communities. He says, “The communities that didn’t receive had to wait 2, 3, or 4 years until they received resources.” However, by then, a different programme was being carried out, and instead of receiving a home, they received latrines, efficient wood stoves to replace their open fires, etc. He returns to the argument that he likes to see the people happy. But he concludes by admitting, “This has allowed us to control the people in a pacific manner.”

Without a doubt, the channelling of all these funds and programmes to the municipality has to do with the presence of the autonomous Zapatista municipality. According to my understanding, investment of federal and state resources in the region represents a strategy for combating the Zapatistas. Although the autonomous authorities do not have access to these programmes and financial resources, they represent direct competition. Tilly and Kennedy (2006) point out that in the autonomous Zapatista municipality Magdalena de la Paz, it was common for non-Zapatistas to go to the authorities of the autonomous municipality to resolve their problems and differences. I also observed this in 2009 in the *Caracol* of Morelia. The autonomous authorities of Morelia told me that members of political parties first went to resolve their problems with them before resorting to the official state authorities. This means that the needs of the communities involve more than just material goods and that non-Zapatistas, as well as Zapatistas, are seeking alternative

direct channels of political participation, or that they perceive such participation as a more positive application of justice.

I asked Santos about the situation of education and health in his municipality. He answered, “With respect to health, we provide. When the hospital asks for support, we provide. When the health centre asks us, we also provide, and the same is the case in the communities. For example, we know that health is very important. We seek out funds for the sewer systems and latrines. We know that some people don’t have latrines. These are direct resources (funds which come from the state government, outside of the official budget) which we are soliciting and fortunately they (the Chiapas state government officials) have heard us and we are providing for some communities with this.”

With respect to education, Santos says, “We are seeking out resources for classrooms with donations for primary school and preschool facilities. A week ago I was handing out 2 truckloads of chairs and tables for those who had solicited them.” Santos comments that his work has been successful. When I ask him how he measures this success, two elements stand out in his responses: firstly, that he has been able to “give” things to the people, and secondly that, due to the fact that he knows the legal system, he has been able to conquer all his “adversaries”, as he calls his more conservative fellow party members and candidates of other parties.

I comment to Santos that in my opinion, it is one thing to practise charity or “give things”, and another to govern. I ask him up to what point he is free to govern. He responds that he has also created some laws. For example, due to the high rate of alcoholism in San Andres, and as a consequence of domestic violence and street fights, he issued the first law regarding alcohol sales. “Here they are used to selling at whatever hour they want, that’s not right”. He also says that they have had many problems with evangelical groups in the region, and he has been accused of being intolerant. He says, “They have sued me, but I have won. So I am preparing a regulation about religious freedom.” I later realized that this law was not intended to broaden religious freedom, but rather to restrict it – to “make order”. Thus, according to this law, for example, not everyone may express their religion any time or place they wish. It should be noted that this local initiative to “prioritize order” was consistent with some earlier actions of the Federal government¹⁹.

The idea of progress is present in Santos’ discourse. He comments with pride that he has also managed to obtain cellular telephone service for San Andres. Ideas of change are

¹⁹ In November 29, 2008, over 3000 evangelicals carried out a demonstration on the streets of San Cristobal protesting the closing of 8 evangelical radio stations by agents of the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI).

mixed with ideas of tradition throughout our conversation. During the interview, a police car was outside his house. I asked him to which municipality those police belonged. He said they were the new police of San Andres. With so much insecurity in the country, he decided to implement a state government programme that provided a pair of police cars and uniforms. I ask him whether the traditional community guards still exist? He responds, “Yes, there are still guards. I’m not against the culture. They are there. Right now there are only 12 police. But next year we will have 20.” San Andres is a municipality where many things are decided by a council of elders. For example, if a visitor wants to take a photo in the public plaza, they have to ask permission from the traditional council. Thus, Santos continues to pay lip service to tradition so that those of his community will continue to support him. Meanwhile, he plays with the dual identities of professional politician and indigenous politician so that higher levels of government may say that the indigenous people self-govern and Santos himself receives the support from those politicians.

1.10. Continuity and change; indigenous government:

At the beginning of our conversation, Santos mentioned that he has been criticised and has encountered many problems, but that such conflicts were not new. The history of the communities appears to be a history of constant change and confrontation over control of the political life of the municipality. However, the level of tension and how the communities have responded to these changes have varied. For example, the 1917 Constitution prohibited exploitation of indigenous workers on the *haciendas*. With this, many communities - recently relatively free and tired of such abuse - closed in on themselves in an attempt to control political decisions²⁰. Other laws instituted in the post-revolutionary period likewise greatly affected community life. The communities were always affected by politics and political power which originated outside of their localities, but were denied effective participation in the wider political system or only allowed to participate in a controlled manner.

During the administration of President Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), he and the Chiapas state governor created the position of “municipal secretary” (Pombo 2007). Although the secretary’s functions were limited to administrative matters, the presence of this position affected the life of the communities which until then had attempted to self-govern. The

²⁰ Rus (1994) even suggests that a “flourishing” of tradition took place. In Chamula, for example, for the first time indigenous healers were permitted to officiate mass in the community.

secretary was a *Mestizo* elected by the Chiapas state government and was not from the municipality. His function was that of an intermediary between the communities, the state government, and the new post-revolutionary federal government. Rus (1994) comments that until 1930, in the community San Juan Chamula, the norm had been to choose a monolingual *Tzotzil* representative in order to reduce the chances of his committing treason or being bribed by the municipal secretary or the *guardias blancas*, agents sent by *hacienda* owners to recruit workers for the *haciendas*, often by deception and force. In contrast, the community of Zinacantan, unlike their neighbours in Chamula, had begun to choose young bilingual indigenous people who had contact with the *Ladino* world as their representatives from 1920 onward because they could benefit their community through their knowledge of the law (Rus 1994).

As conflicts grew between indigenous groups and *Mestizos* over control of municipal seats, the creation of the position of municipal secretary favoured the formation of what Rus (1995) calls “the institutional revolutionary community”, that is, the forced incorporation of the community into the so-called Revolutionary process. Since the armed Zapatista uprising, San Andres is one of 13 municipalities to which the state government has “returned control” to the indigenous population (Burgete 2007^a). However, personalities such as Santos, although indigenous, still seem to reinforce the presence of the state in the communities.

1.11. San Andres Larrainzar – San Andres Sakam Ch'en de los Pobres:

In the municipality of San Andres, the constitutional government and the autonomous Zapatista government coexist. This leads us to question the nature of that coexistence. According to the version of the constitutional Municipal President, so far in San Andres their side has sought negotiation and conflict avoidance. Yet, according to comments made on various occasions by ex-Zapatistas and anti-Zapatistas, until 2006 or 2007 in San Andres there were approximately 2000 Zapatista members, whereas now there are only about 200. Therefore, they give the impression that, due to the diminishing numbers of Zapatistas, the actual scope of conflict has been reduced. The following sections will further explore the nature of this coexistence. When Santos speaks of the past, he speaks in terms of “before, when the people divided”. I asked him when this happened and he said in 1994 when the EZLN appeared. At that time, he was very young, perhaps 13 or 14. Although he studied in another municipality, he says he remembers that the people were divided. “That was bad, because when someone wanted to do something, the Zapatista

group impeded them.” He says that the Zapatistas took control of some buildings, but that during his government, he has recovered them; by right they belong to “the people”. He also comments that some things have changed. “The Zapatistas now use the hospitals, and some Zapatistas go to the constitutional government schools.” In the face of so much conflict, he says his strategy has been unity and conflict avoidance. He comments that he has asked the constitutional municipal representatives of each community to avoid confrontation with the Zapatistas. I asked him if the Zapatistas cause problems with the PRI members. To this he replies, “Well, yes, there are Zapatistas in my 52 communities. But really they don’t get involved with us; they don’t come to ask for support. Yes, there are government projects in their communities where they live, but because the rest of the community asks for them”. Santos says that government projects are available to anyone who asks for them. However, he is quite aware of the fact that they are not going to ask for them, and the municipality does not oblige them to accept assistance.

The Zapatista members refer to the federal and state governments and their institutions as “the bad government”. For the Zapatistas, the opposite of the bad government is their autonomous government, consisting of the “Good Government Councils.” Santos says “they (the Zapatistas) say this because they want more than what the state and federal governments give us. Because as they give us very little, they think that’s bad.” I ask if he knows or imagines what the Zapatistas want. “What they want is to have factories, cars, and all that. But they don’t realise that that’s not possible. Factories? As they say, those are only established in the large cities, not in the villages; that’s not possible” Santos’ interpretation of the Zapatista demands is common in the communities. In another municipality, Tilly and Kennedy (2006: 3) found a young Mayan taxi driver, who swore he would never join the Zapatistas because he said, referring to the Zapatista slogan “everything for everybody.” “They want to run the country like Fidel Castro”.

1.12. Governments and negotiations:

The central plaza in San Andres has changed radically since 1997, when I first saw it. Now it is paved and in the centre there is a kiosk with a large clock tower. Everything is painted. There are benches and lighting. Next to the plaza is the church, which has also been painted. To one side of the church is the office of the traditional authorities. On the other side of the plaza, opposite the church, is the autonomous government building. Formerly, the market was in the plaza, there was no pavement, and during the rainy season

there was mud everywhere. This new plaza is a source of pride for Santos. "It's an extremely important project and the result of a very complicated situation". He tells me that the autonomous Zapatista government provided 50% of the finances to build it, and the constitutional government provided the other 50%. I commented that that must have cost a lot of money. "Yes, it was 4 million pesos. The Zapatistas provided 2 million."

I commented to Santos that I had visited some Zapatista communities and I had seen that the people have many needs, and so I was surprised by the fact that they would have spent so much money on the plaza. Santos told me that on his side, he took the money from the municipal budget, and he told me how they arrived at an agreement to work together. In May, 2008, he went to Gijon, Spain. He says that he was in a meeting when they told him that a Zapatista group had also arrived in search of financing. "So there we spoke about things. And it turned out that an international organisation was going to support them to improve the plaza. Because they say it belongs to them. I told them, no, wait, the plaza is for everyone. So there the official government and the Zapatista government committed to building the plaza together".

Campero (1999) holds that in San Andres, the struggle for power occurs in a political arena in which the government uses a dominant discourse and the Zapatistas use a marginal discourse. Nevertheless, the example I present regarding the connections between the Zapatistas and the Spanish organisation which financed the plaza show that the Zapatistas do not only act locally, since they have broadened their connections internationally. The Zapatistas' financial investment in the plaza has symbolic value for the Zapatista movement. Since this project was undertaken, according to Santos the two governments have carried out other joint projects. For example, a road was built, and a church was built in another community. Santos says that the two governments jointly inaugurated the road: "That was the contribution of both authorities; the two governments cut the ribbon." He comments that during his government was the first time they worked together, the former president tried to carry out a dialogue, but it didn't work due to lack of flexibility on both sides. He says that, "Without fights is how things are done."

Yet, cooperation has its limits. In the municipal seat, approximately 200 people continue to be Zapatista members. Until now, the Zapatistas have had to negotiate the use of certain spaces or they run the risk of not being able to use them. The former market, which was located in the plaza, included Zapatistas and PRI members. When they decided to remodel the plaza, they agreed that each "group" would have to build their own market. Santos is building a new market, but he will only provide space for the non-Zapatista merchants. I

asked him what would happen with the Zapatista merchants, and he said they already have their own market. The budget that the constitutional government invests in public works of this type reinforces the image of Santos as a modern president, and boosts the image of the PRI in the region. In terms of funding, the autonomous government of San Andres depends on donations by international organisations, and the budget is much lower than that of the constitutional government, but nevertheless much higher than that of other autonomous municipalities. So here, both governments receive funds from international sources: the autonomous government from international NGOs and grassroots solidarity groups, and the constitutional government from international development programmes.

1.13. The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle and recent communiqués:

The EZLN made its public appearance January 1, 1994 with the document titled Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. After twelve years of constant communication, the EZLN publicized the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. This document with which the EZLN recounts its years of struggle explains the reasons for the Zapatista uprising, of the failure to comply with the San Andres Accords, the tough stance of the Mexican government, the type of nation they desire, and what they propose in order to build it.

With this Sixth Declaration, they announced the new Zapatista initiative which calls for reinitiating national dialogue and seeking coincidence among the various social movements which are opposed to the neoliberal model. In this document, they explain how, through the Good Government Councils, the Zapatistas have developed the basic projects for construction of autonomy with the creation of health, education, food, and housing projects. They also criticize the plans for privatization and the negative effects of neoliberalism in Mexico and throughout the world. They call for building global resistance to these projects and the creation of a national program of struggle. With the Sixth Declaration, the EZLN seeks to reinforce its alliances with movements of the left which are independent of the party system, reiterating the political commitments the Zapatistas made over the course of the years.

With the communiqué titled “We Have Hope that Another World is Possible,” published January 1, 2009, the Zapatistas reviewed their first 15 years of struggle. In this, they denounced attacks by the paramilitaries, as well as the divisions generated by government programs in the communities, and made a call to continue to resist and strengthen the alliances of autonomous movements. In December, 2008 and January, 2009, during the

Dignified Rage Encounter, the EZLN presented seven communiqués titled “First Wind” consecutively to “Seventh Wind.” In these documents, the EZLN criticizes changes which have occurred from the end of the 20th Century to the present with respect to geopolitics in Latin America. These changes have been led by the strongest nations of North America which seek to strategically position themselves in Latin America with the objective of appropriating and exploiting the natural resources of the indigenous peoples. For their own benefit, the political and economic elites inflict death, plunder, and exploitation on impoverished groups of the world. Through short stories, Subcommander Marcos exposes the effects of neoliberalism and globalization. In “First Wind”, Marcos explains that the land recuperated during the first few days of the armed uprising had constituted the base of Zapatista autonomy. In “Second Wind”, Marcos returns to the theme of globalization and capitalism, but recognizes in this process an opportunity for globalization of social struggle. In “Fourth Wind” and “Fifth Wind”, he shares the achievements obtained with the Zapatistas’ projects of Good Government and speaks of the failures, learning, and what remains to be improved. In “Sixth Wind” and “Seventh Wind”, Marcos reiterates the invitation to all sectors excluded by the neoliberal model to resist and create a front in common struggle, but respect differences. In this manner Marcos concludes with a proposal for the world they desire.

In September, 2010, the Zapatistas made known the communiqué “Of calendars and geographies”, in which they express their ideas regarding the type of nation they would like to build. During 2011, they carried out an Exchange of four letters between Marcos and the academic Luis Villoro. This exchange was called “epistolary exchange on ethics and politics”. In these letters, Marcos spoke to Villoro of his criticisms of and reflections on the so-called “war against drug trafficking”, which has taken the life of thousands of Mexican civilians. The Zapatistas speak of this conflict as one more strategy to reactivate the war economy, and that war only leads to decomposition of the social fabric. In the following letters, Marcos presents Villoro with an analysis of how individual action contributes to the collective good in the autonomous territories, and how individual and collective actions grant a different meaning to political action. In the fourth and final letter, Marcos criticizes the institutional left and its closeness to the Mexican right. In this review, he makes an urgent call to reconstruct and defend communitarian life as a viable alternative for detaining the advance of neoliberalism in Mexico and Chiapas.

1.14. Final thoughts:

The struggle for indigenous autonomy in Chiapas has been met with a variety of adversaries: the conservative Catholic Church, the colonizers, political parties, hacienda owners, the army, and paramilitary groups. More recently, global privatization projects we have also seen how governmental policies confer only limited participation to the indigenous people of Chiapas. The case of the constitutional government of San Andres Larrainzar represents an example of channelling indigenous demands for political participation through institutional paths. Based on ethnographic information presented here, we may conclude that this constitutional government does not guarantee communitarian participation, nor transformation of relations between government and communities. Only recognition of the San Andres Accords may guarantee change in relations between the indigenous peoples and the state. However, accepting these Accords implies that the federal government will lose the opportunity to develop large projects involving national and foreign investment. Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly evident that accepting projects of autonomy no longer depends only on national governments; rather, global governments and their economic projects also intervene in these decisions.

Seventy three autonomous municipalities have been declared since 1994. As some of these autonomic proposals have been co-opted by the state government, the Zapatistas are now offering a new form of autonomy, which will be addressed in the following chapter. Creation of the constitutional indigenous municipalities has facilitated the tasks of the state government, which has practiced a policy of containment of social discontent through social programmes. However, since 2003, the new Zapatista political proposal of autonomy as an alternative to this official government response has taken a form which is different from other examples of indigenous autonomy. In the following chapter, we will explore part of the new meanings which autonomy has taken on after a long process of failed negotiation with the federal government. We will explore the meaning which the Zapatista movement attributes to the concept of autonomy through creation of the Zapatista Caracoles and their Good Government Councils. We will also examine in detail how the Zapatista make an effort to grant a different meaning to the exercise of politics throughout daily life.

Chapter 2

A Practice of Autonomy: the Good Government Councils and the Zapatista Caracoles

This chapter presents the Zapatista Good Government Councils as a political initiative oriented toward obtaining autonomy for the indigenous and *Mestizo* people of the Mexican State of Chiapas who are affiliated with the Zapatista movement. In order to address this phenomenon, I also show how indigenous people of Chiapas create the concept of Good Government, re-vindicating ethnic identity and rights with the object of defending their rural community life. The first part of this chapter briefly addresses the globalisation of neoliberal-style politics. This is followed by a brief explanation of the evolution and transformation of the Mexican political system, dominated by the state Party. Following this, I recount the events relevant to the transformation of the EZLN from an armed movement to a political movement, and discuss the emergence of the *Caracoles* as the seats of the autonomous Zapatista government. On the basis of ethnographic information, I explain their nature and context, principal political actors, and some of the difficulties confronted by each *Caracol*. I also explain the functions, membership, and decision making and conflict resolution processes of the Good Government Councils – the recent and ever changing Zapatista autonomous government structure. I conclude by showing how, in this context, autonomy is a product of collective decision making, and is sustained through an endless number of self-administered projects and practices, autonomous decision making, communitarian organization, and relative economic autonomy.

2.1 The globalisation of Good Governance:

According to Weiss (2000), the concept of “Good Governance”²¹ arose in the 1950s and was further developed in the 1960s and 1970s as a response to the model of non-representative and/or non-democratic governments established in socialist bloc and third

²¹ Although debate continues regarding its precise components, good governance is more than multi-party elections, an independent judiciary, and a parliament - the primary symbols of Western-style democracy. The list of other attributes and the resources which good governance requires is formidable: universal human rights protection; non-discriminatory laws; efficient, impartial and rapid judicial processes; transparent public agencies; accountability of decisions by public officials; devolution of resources and decision making to local levels from broader governmental levels; and meaningful citizen participation in debating public policies (Weiss 2000: 801).

world countries - for example Latin American military dictatorships. By 1980, discourse and politics regarding the practice of Good Governance were promulgated by international organisations such as the UN and the World Bank (WB). As Weiss (2000: 801) states, today “Good governance is definitely on the international agenda”. In keeping with the neoliberal spirit of the times, according to these institutions, “actions to foster good governance concentrate on attenuating two undesirable characteristics which had been prevalent earlier: the unrepresentative character of governments and non-market-friendly policies” (Weiss 2000: 801). According to Moore (1996), Good Governance discourse emerged during the period of de-colonization of Africa and was oriented toward sustaining old colonial models: “The discourse of good governance could be situated in the history of the first half of the 20th Century, in the age of neo-colonial development.” Esty (2005) calls the global application of Good Governance policies “the super-nationalization of governance,” where policies created in international spheres must be applied in all national contexts. Fulfilment of these policies is accompanied by loans and financing which permit governments to address social policy, security, democratisation, and human rights (Moore 1996:124).

Financing so-called Good Governance has generated two economic areas; on the one hand are the “donor” countries - members of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and on the other are the “recipient” countries. With respect to this, Nanda (2006: 603) points out that from the 1980s to recent years, “Donors have increasingly insisted upon performance of Good Governance as a prerequisite for aid, a practice called selectivity”. However, there are no objective standards for determining Good Governance. Santiso (2001:4) states that “Conditioning aid is not the most appropriate approach to strengthening Good Governance”. This has generated contradictions on the local level. For example, in 2000, UN President Kofi Anan declared that “Good Governance is ensuring respect for human rights and strengthening democracy” (Weiss 2000: 797). Nevertheless, Kiely (1998: 74) points out that “the relationship between structural adjustment and respect for human rights is problematic. The only clear link between them is that in some countries organised opponents of structural adjustment have had their human rights infringed”. The Zapatista Good Government Council is one local reaction by indigenous peoples to the global policies created by international organisations such as the UN, IMF, and WB, which reflects an attempt to redefine local models of economic development and political participation through local self-governance. The following section places the Zapatista proposal in the national context in which it

arises, and identifies the impact of the emergence of the Zapatista movement on the Mexican political system.

2.2. “Re-convergence” of political elites: the official Mexican party and the context of the Zapatista movement:

Since its origins, global politics of Good Governance have been intertwined with development discourse, on the basis of arguments about combating “the inefficiency of non-market systems” (Weiss 2000: 801). Such discourse strongly impacted development models in Mexico, which have transitioned during the past three decades from the government being responsible for providing goods and services to the population to a neoliberal model. As a consequence, the national political elites entered into competition to control this economic transition. The President is the mediator in disputes among elites, who delegate him great power (Mainwaring and Soberg 1999). Nevertheless, Weldon suggests that in reality, the institution from which power arises is what was referred to for over 70 years as the “official party”, the PRI, as the President is also the national head of his party. “The official party is central to Mexican politics. It is the most important determinant in establishing relationships among political actors and institutions” (Weldon 1999: 227). Mexican political and economic history is marked by a strong Presidential figure, a strong party, and the political elites which vie for power with the President (Hernandez 1994). Despite the victory of the PAN in the 2000 presidential election - a period referred to as “Transición democrática” (democratic transition) - the dominance of the political elite remained relatively unchallenged.

In this context, during the past 15 years in Mexico, a series of social movements have arisen which openly pronounce themselves to be against capitalism and neoliberal policies. This opposition to the dominant development model is principally coming from campesinos and indigenous people. In order to understand why this is the case, we must delve more deeply into the relationships between economic change on the one hand and the historic role and more recent transformations of the PRI in Chiapas on the other. According to Collier (2005), “Some peasants in Chiapas have been able to weather the changes wrought by Mexico’s economic restructuring by diversifying their farming activities. But many have not. Their successes and failures have often resulted from and contributed to politics dominated by local political bosses who have taken advantage of their ties with the PRI” (2005: 9). In this way, the life of the party and that of the population are strictly linked. In 1994, presidential elections were to take place in Mexico,

and in Chiapas. President Salinas de Gortari had signed NAFTA with the United States and Canada. On New Year's Eve, the moment in which NAFTA was to go into effect, the EZLN declared war on the President. With this uprising, the PRI was gradually weakened²².

Meanwhile, on January 12th in Mexico City, over 500,000 people protested to demand that the government stop the war in Chiapas. Consequently, President Salinas - as Supreme Chief of the Armed Forces - ordered a cease fire, and was forced to create the Comisión para la Paz y la Reconciliación en Chiapas (Commission for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas) to quell public dissent; he appointed Manuel Camacho Solis as Coordinador para el Diálogo en Chiapas (Coordinator for Dialogue in Chiapas) to negotiate with a group of Zapatista delegates²³. Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia was chosen by the Zapatista delegation as an intermediary. As a pre-requisite for negotiating, the EZLN demanded that the federal government ensure democratic elections (Valdes 2010:123). For Chiapas State governor, the PRI proposed Eduardo Robledo Rincon as their candidate. The main opposition to the PRI was the PRD with the candidate Amado Avendaño, who showed sympathy for the Zapatista movement, which led to him attract more votes. For the presidential elections, the PRI proposed Luis Donaldo Colosio, who was then assassinated during his campaign. Since one of the conditions for negotiations set by the Zapatistas was peace, in reaction, the Zapatista members who had been negotiating with the government cut off negotiations and returned to their respective communities.

In June, the EZLN published a document called "The Second Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle" as a call to civil society to carry out a National Democratic Convention. This meeting was held in the Chiapas village of Guadalupe Tepeyac. The site prepared for this meeting was called Aguascalientes²⁴. It should be noted that Aguascalientes is

²²The PRI obtained 90% of all votes in the 1988 Chiapas state elections. Meanwhile, opposition parties such as the PRD and the PAN did not have much presence in the state. In the 1994 national elections, the PRI won the majority of Mexico's 32 states. However, according to Valenzuela (1997), in 1997 the PRI only took 22 states, maintaining its hold over the poorest states - those with the greatest indigenous population, including Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Hidalgo. Voters with the highest incomes in Mexico also continued to vote for the PRI since "the economically powerful electorate always found more benefits and better protection under the PRI government" (Valdes 2010: 124).

²³This negotiation was carried out in San Cristobal, Chiapas from February 21 to March 2.

²⁴The objective of this encounter was to discuss a new constitution and transform the Mexican political system. For this event, dormitories, latrines, kitchens, and a large hall for the talks were built. This Aguascalientes was later transferred to the nearby village of La Realidad in the municipality Las Margaritas

symbolically important in Mexican Revolutionary history, as it was the location for *La Soberana Convención Revolucionaria* (the Supreme Revolutionary Convention), during which, in 1914, Villistas, Zapatistas and Magonistas met to discuss the political programme for the revolutionary government. The 6000 people who attended the 1994 Convention coincided only in their position against the government and in support of the Zapatistas (Valdes 2010). Some made a call to not vote, and others to support the leftist PRD. The agreement between civil society and the EZLN was to “continue to struggle, but without arms, and to organize a new type of political force without uniting or allying with any of the existent forces” (Elorriaga 1997). This event had two important consequences. First, the coming together of civil society with the EZLN transformed the latter into a political force, more than a military one²⁵. Second, the first Aguascalientes functioned as a permanent meeting space between civil society and the EZLN. In 1995, four more Aguascalientes were set up. Later, in 2003, these were transformed into Zapatista “*Caracoles*”, the geographic centres of the Zapatista Good Government Councils.

In the presidential elections, the PRI won with Ernesto Zedillo replacing the deceased Colosio. In Chiapas, the Electoral Institute declared Eduardo Robledo Rincon the winner, although independent organisations and Zapatista sympathisers mobilised to demand his renunciation based on accusations of electoral fraud. After four months in office, Robledo asked for a temporary leave of absence and never returned to office, and the PRI member Julio Cesar Ruiz Ferro was named temporary governor by the PRI. In 1996, the EZLN and the national government resumed negotiations in the municipality of San Andres²⁶, where agreements were signed regarding indigenous rights and culture, by which the

and other Aguascalientes were set up in the villages of Oventic in the municipality of San Andres Larrainzar, La Garrucha in Ocosingo, Morelia in Altamirano, and Roberto Barrios in Palenque (Castro Soto 1996).

²⁵The definitive rupture between the EZLN and Mexican political parties took place in 2001 when the Mexican Congress approved an indigenous law which ignored agreements signed in 1996 by the EZLN and the Federal Government. This new law was approved by all Mexican political parties.

²⁶“These accords have political and historic importance in Mexico; after 500 years, a pact was made with the indigenous peoples who had been politically marginalised with the construction of the Mexican nation” (Samano 2000: 106). In order to fulfil these accords, certain modifications had to be made to the Constitution and transformed into laws in order to be applicable for all indigenous populations of Mexico, not only the Zapatistas.

government committed to “recognizing autonomy, free determination, and self-management of the peoples” (Samano 2000: 107). In July and August of that year, the Zapatistas celebrated the so-called “Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism²⁷”.

During the government of Ruiz Ferro, violence in the region reached extremes. On December 22, 1997, a paramilitary group assassinated 45 women, children, and elders while they were praying in a chapel in the community of Acteal in the Municipality of Chenalho²⁸. Days later, Municipal President Jacinto Arias called Governor Ruiz Ferro. He commented on the dire situation, to which the Governor responded, “My president, don’t worry, let them kill them. I’m going to send the Public Security to pick up the dead” (Gonzalez 2007). Due to these events, Ruiz Ferro resigned in January, 1998. He was replaced by PRI member Roberto Albores Guillen, who reinforced military presence in the State²⁹. He also expelled a large number of human rights observers from the country (FRAYBA 1999). In January, 1998, the PRI, PRD, and PVEM presented another indigenous rights proposal to Congress, ignoring the agreement between the EZLN and the federal government.

This conflict-ridden panorama influenced the 2000 elections. In Chiapas, ex-PRI member Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia headed the “Alliance for Chiapas” coalition, which brought together eight parties in opposition to the PRI³⁰ (CIEPAC 2000). For the first time in its history, the PRI lost the governorship of the State of Chiapas. That same year, the PAN won the presidential elections with the candidate Vicente Fox Quesada. Following 71

²⁷More than 5000 people attended, from the following countries: Italy, Brazil, Great Britain, Paraguay, Russia, Chile, Philippines, Germany, Peru, Argentina, Austria, Uruguay, Guatemala, Belgium, Venezuela, Iran, Denmark, Nicaragua, Zaire, France, Haiti, Ecuador, Greece, Japan, Kurdistan, Ireland, Costa Rica, Cuba, Sweden, Holland, South Africa, Switzerland, Portugal, United States, Basque Country, Turkey, Canada, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Australia, Mauritania, and Mexico (Castro Soto 1996).

²⁸The PRI paramilitary group “Mascara Roja” (Red Mask) was accused of being responsible for this action. The victims belonged to the group called “Las Abejas”, and openly sympathized with the Zapatista ideology. However, they defined themselves as an unarmed pacifist group. For this action, 26 indigenous people were jailed. However, on August 12, 2009, the Mexican Supreme Court voted to release them.

²⁹In 2006, Albores Guillen was expelled from the PRI for having collaborated with Juan Sabines Guerrero, candidate for State Governor for the coalition of the PRD, PT, and Convergence parties. He is also linked with creating other paramilitary organizations against the Zapatistas, and with directing more than seven military incursions in Zapatista communities in less than three months.

³⁰Alliance for Chiapas was made up of the PAN, PRD, PST, PVEM, PT, National Socialist Party, Social Alliance Party, and Centre-Democratic Party (CIEPAC 2000).

years of national governance by the PRI, the new government, controlled by the PAN, referred to this period as the “transitional government.” This transition generated a series of political crises between state institutions and the sectors which they previously controlled, such as labour unions and campesino organisations.

The Zapatista stance regarding the elections was anti-party and anti-electoral. They called for an election boycott and criticised all candidates, especially those of the left, pointing out that a few years after having won several elections, they had allied with the old political classes. The electoral situation, the struggle among political groups, and nationwide consequences of the signing of NAFTA profoundly affected relations between civil society and the EZLN; due to the complexity of the Mexican political panorama, members of civil society who formerly supported the Zapatistas took on a variety of different struggles, and for many the EZLN was no longer a priority. Nevertheless, as Collier (2004: 38) pointed out, “The Zapatista rebellion deserves its reputation as the most powerful force for democratisation in Mexico”. By 2002, the media in Chiapas denounced alliances between Governor Salazar and the new party in power on the national level, the PAN. By the end of Salazar’s governing period, the state of negotiations between the new Chiapas government and the EZLN had worsened. The current governor Juan Sabines Guerrero, also a former member of the PRI, won elections for governor in 2006. He formally ran under the PRD, with the slogan “For the benefit of all”³¹. In December of that year, the existence of a pre-electoral pact between the PRI ex-Governor Albores Guillen and the new PRD Governor was made public: “Albores elaborated a government project called the State Development Plan³². He made Sabines sign it before a public notary and commit to making this project his own should he reach the governorship” (Mariscal 2006). Thus, the loss of control of the PRI in the State was only an appearance. According to Sonnleitner (2007: 117), “In reality, in the conflict two antagonistic sectors of the same political elite confronted each other – products of a party slate which was more fragmented and confusing than ever”.

Due to the Zapatistas’ rejection of the electoral process, many former Zapatista supporters distanced themselves from the movement, including students, intellectuals, and academics. According to their point of view, the electoral process was a viable option. During the

³¹Sabines created a coalition of parties which included the PRD, PT, and Convergence Party.

³²The son of Albores and many other PRI members occupied the most important positions in Juan Sabines’ Cabinet.

following eight years, relations have continued to weaken, due to a complex set of factors, including the PAN's media campaign of terror declaring the need for the country to militarise the streets in self-defence against increasingly powerful drug cartels, and the apparent electoral fraud which deprived leftist PRD candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of the Presidency in 2006. Nevertheless, many international organisations continue to support the Zapatista movement and its proposals. In my opinion, the transformation of the official party appears to be more of a re-alignment within the political elite than a transition to an inclusive system open to other sectors of society. In 2008 and 2009, while my fieldwork was being carried out, large signs could be seen on highways and roads with titles such as "honourable constitutional municipality" or "project carried out by the constitutional government" in an effort to convince passers-by of the power and legitimacy of the administration in power. These strongly contrasted with occasional small hand-painted signs, often made of old boards, announcing, "You are entering Autonomous Zapatista Territory", along with the phrase, "Here the people command and the government obeys." However, as Tilly and Kennedy point out, "There is a lot more to autonomy than simply declaring it. For the Zapatistas, autonomy was primarily a state of mind" (2006: 2). The ethnography that follows shows how, for the Zapatistas, autonomy implies generating material conditions in which their autonomous ideas and thoughts may also be developed.

2.3. The birth of the Caracoles:

In July, 2003, following their strategy for informing civil society of their decisions, the EZLN spokesperson Subcommander Marcos published a communiqué entitled "The Cinderella Syndrome," which announced the birth of the Zapatista *Caracoles* (literally, "snails"): "We don't blame you at all. We know you risk a lot to come and see us and bring assistance to the civilians on this side. It's not our need that hurts us; it's seeing in others what others don't see, the same absence of freedom and democracy, the same lack of justice... Regarding that which our people obtained from this war, I keep an example of "humanitarian assistance" for the indigenous of Chiapas which arrived a few weeks ago: a high heeled shoe, colour pink, imported, size 6½ without its pair. I always carry it in my backpack to remind myself... what we are for the country after January 1: a Cinderella... To the good people who, sincerely, send us a high heeled pink shoe, size 6½, imported, without its pair... thinking that – as poor as we are, we accept any old thing, charity and alms - how do we say to all those good people that no, we don't want to continue living in

the shame of Mexico? The support we demand - it's political support, not charity" (Chiapas: La Treceava Estela 2003).

With this, the EZLN formalised a series of self-government and conflict resolution measures which had already been practiced in their autonomous territories since 1998 by creating the *Caracoles*. The five *Caracoles* are made up of a series of Autonomous Rebel Zapatista Municipalities (hereon referred to as MAREZ). This Zapatista territorial re-zoning was laid out during the armed conflict. The geographic boundaries of the Zapatista municipalities do not correspond to those proposed by the State; a given territory simultaneously belongs to an official and an autonomous municipality. The Good Government Councils seated in the *Caracoles* function as administrative centres of these municipalities and the communities which make them up.

The offices of the five Zapatista Good Government Councils are located in simple wooden buildings. On August 8th 2003 in Oventic, a ceremony was carried out to announce "the birth of the *Caracoles*". The *Caracol* in the village of La Realidad was named "Mother of the snails of the sea of our dreams." The *Caracol* in Morelia became "Whirlwind of our words". The *Caracol* in La Garrucha was "Resistance toward a new dawn". That of Roberto Barrios was "The snail which speaks for all." Finally, that in Oventic was "Resistance and rebellion for humanity"³³.

The functions of the *Caracoles* were also formally announced: to mediate between national and international civil society and the Zapatista communities; spread development equally among the autonomous municipalities and the Zapatista members; record and redistribute donations to those communities which most need them; authorise, discuss, design, and carry out projects for the Zapatista communities which most need them; mediate conflicts between autonomous and governmental municipalities; supervise and improve the functioning of the Autonomous Councils; supervise compliance with the Zapatista laws in the MAREZ; and organise agricultural projects and market products of the Zapatista communities (Chiapas: La Treceava Estela 2003). As Villafuente and Solano point out (2006), "The government of the Republic was quick to hail this occurrence with respect and diplomacy and show itself to be satisfied with the foundation of the new autonomous government – "the free and sovereign republic of the *Caracoles*" - in

³³Each Caracol also has an indigenous name. As their population is multi-ethnic, some have two indigenous names; for example, the Caracol Roberto Barrios is also called "Te puy yax sco' pj yu' un pisiltic" in Tzeltal and "Puy munitit' an cha' an ti lak pejtél" in Chol.

adherence to the values which inspire the nation”. Nevertheless, as will be seen later, the *Caracoles* and the Good Government Councils soon found their strongest opponent in the federal government.

2.4. The Caracoles seven years later:

Five years had passed since the birth of the *Caracoles* and their Good Government Councils when I visited them in 2008. The functioning of these Councils proved to be much more complex than I had thought. The first time I visited a *Caracol*, they told me I had to speak with members of the Council. I presented them a copy of my project, and they responded, “Look compañera, it’s not that we want to give you a bad answer,” which I later realized meant no, “but really we are very busy because we have a big event. But you are invited. You can return every time you are able, but now, right now, we can’t give you an answer.” (Council representative).

Several times that month, I went to the *Caracol*. Each time, different people received me and no one knew of my petition. They all asked me for a copy of my proposal. During that time, I met three different groups of Council members. Meanwhile, I attended the 25th anniversary of the founding of the EZLN, and a celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 12th. Finally, I attended the “Dignified Rage” festival. By the second week in January, things started to go back to normal. So I once again asked about my project, and they responded, “Look compañera, we can’t give you a response, but why don’t you go visit the other *Caracoles*, the other Councils, and learn what we are, what we do.”

Thus, in mid-January, 2009, I went to visit the *Caracol* “La Garrucha”. There, I met a health promoter from the *Caracol* “Roberto Barrios” who invited me to visit the clinic. The following month, I met a former collaborator on agriculture who had worked in “Morelia”, with whom I visited that *Caracol*. Finally, in June, I went to “La Realidad”. At one point, I felt I would be absolutely lost with so much travel. Each council was different; their ways of working were different; the regions were different. Later I understood that this was the point; rather than an institution, the *Caracoles* were a system. As George Marcus (1998) indicates, “Any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of conventional single-site scene-by-scene ethnographic research” (Marcus 1998: 83). The geographic distribution of these *Caracoles* – the diversity of elements which made them up – offered me the opportunity to carry out a multi-site ethnographic study as opposed to classic anthropological studies of single communities of the kind that

were most frequently carried out in Chiapas before the Zapatista uprising. With this new concept in mind, I dedicated myself to trying to reconstruct this system. Above all, I tried to understand its underlying logic.

2.5. *Caracol I - La Realidad:*

This *Caracol* is situated in the Jungle-Border Region of Chiapas, and consists of the following MAREZ: General Emiliano Zapata, San Pedro de Michoacán, Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas, and Tierra y Libertad. Tojolabal, Mam, and Tzeltal Mayan indigenous peoples live in this region. This *Caracol* is symbolically important, as it replaced the Aguascalientes Guadalupe Tepeyac, object of constant military aggression. This is the area where the greatest armed confrontations between the EZLN and the federal army took place 1994³⁴. Also, most of the haciendas of the old land-holding families which the Zapatistas occupied in the period of the uprising were in this region. The EZLN refers to this land - given to Zapatista members to found their communities - as “recuperated land”. This *Caracol* was built in the middle of a community in which during the early years of the movement almost all its inhabitants were Zapatistas. Today, many have left the EZLN and have joined PRI affiliated *campesino* organizations. Since the community has a large river, groups of Priistas clashed with Zapatista families about who had more of a right to use the river water. Conflicts have existed since the foundation of the *Caracol*. Some Zapatista members have been robbed of their coffee harvest and members of other political groups have tried to wound Zapatistas with machetes. However, the greatest tensions are related to recuperated land in the different MAREZ. For example, according to reports of The Human Right Center Fray Bartolome de las Casas, Frayba, in August, 2007, inhabitants of the communities San Manuel and Buen Samaritano were violently displaced and federal and state police landed in these communities in helicopters, forcing thirty nine people between 1 to 50 years of age, principally children, into the helicopters. Another group of police burned houses and destroyed inhabitants’ belongings. Thirty nine people were initially registered as disappeared and later found to be held in an abandoned brothel (Good Government Council report: 2007).

The community Che Guevara was founded on recuperated land in 2009. In 2001, the state government had indemnified ex-landowner Guillermo Pompilio Galvez for losing this land.

³⁴One of the largest and best equipped military bases in Chiapas, San Quintin, is located an hour from La Realidad.

However, in 2007, Pompilio began to sell the same land to members of ACIAC, a PAN-supporting campesino group. As we will see, other similar cases have occurred during the past three years in Zapatista communities founded on recuperated land. Currently, the most serious conflict is in the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve area, where during the 2000-2006 administration period, the government developed a plan to re-locate 32 indigenous communities with the argument that this zone was a “protected area.” This area had been declared an ecological reserve during the Presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), although pre-existing communities were allowed to remain in the zone. Later, Governor Absalon Castellanos (1982-1988) promised these communities property titles. President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-2000) declared that they would be re-located to the Municipality of Comitán (Perez 2004). According to Ana Perez (2004), these relocation measures were due to the intended application of Plan Puebla Panama³⁵, which would take advantage of the jungle area’s abundant timber, crude oil, and water, which, according to traditional law, are property of the communities.

In 2010, many of those who had been relocated wished to return to their communities, but were threatened with expulsion if they did so. Militarisation in this zone has increased. Despite this tense social context, and amidst profound material deficiency, the *Caracol* has been able to develop a basic infrastructure which allows the council members to carry out their tasks. For example, a watch post was built in the main entrance. Nearby is the Council office. Other constructions include two kitchens - one for the Council and the other for those assisting training courses - a collective dining hall, dormitories, five showers, latrines, flush toilets, and a washing area. They have built all furniture and older buildings of wood. With the help of international organisations, they have built a school of brick and sheet metal roofing, an herbal laboratory, and a computer and information centre. There is an open area for projecting films, a large stage for cultural events and assemblies, and basketball courts. Two cooperative stores offer basic products such as soap, salt, batteries, cookies, sugar, coffee, oil, canned chillies, and clothing.

³⁵The principal goals of Plan Puebla Panama, now Plan Mesoamerica, were to extract and market natural resources of nine Central American countries and Southern Mexico. Implementation of this plan has required developing infrastructure such as highways and communications, financed by the Inter-American Development Bank, to facilitate connection throughout the region. The project has attracted the attention of international investors and companies interested in investing in infrastructure and/or purchasing natural resources such as gas and crude oil.

Water is quite abundant in this zone, and the *Caracol* has two pumps which cover their needs. The electrical system stopped functioning several years ago and they have not been able to repair it. Currently they use a gas powered electrical generator. However, the generator's capacity only allows for covering the Council's needs at night. The rest of the *Caracol* and the community are in the dark. There is a collective garden, and vegetables are harvested for collective consumption by those working in the *Caracol*. Two small buses, a pickup truck, and a dump truck make up the autonomous transportation system, travelling between the municipal seat and the *Caracol*. These and all services may be used by anyone, regardless of political affiliation. Fares collected are reinvested in collective needs. Outside the *Caracol* is the campamento (encampment) for visitors and human rights observers. This includes a kitchen, dining hall, five buildings used as dormitories, and four classrooms used for workshops and meetings. In order to carry out immediate tasks and coordinate long term projects, the following commissions have been organised: vigilance, kitchen, cleaning, health, education, agroecology, stores, campamento, and visitors. The organization "Linking the World" helps them organise meetings and cultural events and facilitates communication among the MAREZ. Frayba documents and publicises human rights violations.

Organisations from Spain and Italy facilitate communication between the *Caracoles* and the international community. Independent visitors, most notably from Greece, Germany, Spain, Basque Country, Italy, and the United States, often help organise cultural and artistic activities. The organisation Doctors of the World offers training courses in community health. An independent group of Mexican teachers assists in training indigenous education promoters. Periodically, groups of doctors and engineers from leading Mexican universities; such as UNAM, UAM, and National Polytechnic Institute (IPN) carry out health campaigns or assist with projects such as water systems and construction. However, given the tense political situation, most of the people's energy is focused on tasks of resistance and defence of recuperated land rather than other projects.

2.6. *Caracol II – Morelia:*

The Morelia *Caracol* is located in a mountainous area, and is made up of the MAREZ 17 de Noviembre, Francisco Gomez, Primero de Enero, Ernesto Che Guevara, Olga Isabel, Lucio Cabañas, Miguel Hidalgo, Vicente Guerrero, and Comandanta Ramona. The communities of this region are principally of the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Tojolabal indigenous

groups. One year after the founding of this *Caracol*, the Organization for Defence of Indigenous and *Campesino* Rights (OPDDIC), affiliated with the PRI, began to operate in the zone. Since then, the greatest confrontations have been between members of this group and Zapatista members. For example, in 2007, OPDDIC members invaded Zapatista land in the community of Bolon Ajaw and community members received written death threats. That December, Zapatistas were attacked with guns. Within four months, threats, attacks, and general violence extended to other municipalities in the zone of Morelia: Comandanta Ramona, Lucio Cabañas, and Francisco Gomez. In January, 2010, OPDDIC members violently invaded the community Bolon Ajaw. In February, 2010, armed members of OPDDIC and other PRI groups again attacked this community. The object of dispute is the tourist area Agua Azul; OPDDIC seeks to participate in management of tourism projects promoted by the state and federal governments, while the Zapatistas also seek to control the area, arguing that this land belongs to them by ancestral right. Finally, in February, 2010 a confrontation resulted in 12 wounded and 8 disappeared Zapatistas.

Another significant source of conflict in this zone is the recuperated land of the community 16 de Febrero. In June, 2009, ex-landowner Baltazar Dominguez tried to resell this recuperated land to 12 families of a variety of political affiliations from the official municipalities Ocosingo and Huixtan. This led to more violence in the zone. During the past three years, the conflict has spread to regions and communities where Zapatista families or sympathisers live. Nevertheless, the *Caracol* has been constructed amidst this violent context. This is evident in the infrastructure which they have developed in order to carry out their tasks, such as a watch post, the Council office, a kitchen, a dining room, three dormitories, dormitories for visitors, showers, close to 25 latrines, wash basins, a bread oven, and four jail cells for people who have committed a crime or a drunken scandal³⁶. There is a computer room and a large platform for cultural events, a school with three classrooms, a basketball court, a cafeteria, and a small general store. There is electricity, running water during the rainy season, and two large wells. They have a pickup truck and two cars for collective use. In another village in the zone, an autonomous post-secondary school was created with the aim of preparing health promoters

³⁶During my stay, I saw three prisoners in the jail. Crimes committed ranged from robbing a house to having asked for a meal twice during the celebration of the organisation's anniversary when it had been announced that there would only be one ration of food per person.

with advanced medical training. Despite tensions among various groups in the region, the Good Government Council recognises that “there are many times that even PRI people come to resolve their problems with us, because here we don’t charge and besides, we don’t just punish, we seek a solution and that’s what the people like” (Cipriano, age 34). The *Caracol* functions thanks to the work of the following commissions: vigilance, kitchen, cleaning, health, education, agroecology, appropriate technology, and autonomous police.

The organisation Linking the World collaborates with this *Caracol* to organise cultural events and encounters with civil society. Due to constant aggressions, the *Caracol* maintains contact with Frayba. The organisation Doctors of the World imparts community health training courses. Medical students from the UAM have helped them with vaccination and other medical projects, specifically in attending cases of tuberculosis. Independent architecture students have helped to construct wells. A young doctor from Mexico City, Alfredo, who has taught medical courses during summers for more than three years in several *Caracoles*, told me that until 2008, indigenous women participated little in the Zapatista political cargo system. Furthermore, in Alfredo’s training sessions, participation of women was almost absent. The Council in 2008 was principally made up of men. Although it is difficult to know why things function that way here, other medical trainers told me that in this *Caracol* in particular, the organisation is “not very good”. Furthermore, economic development cooperatives have not been well organised, due to conflicts among the different Council groups. Nevertheless, in 2009, when I visited, women’s participation in the Council was almost 50%, as will be seen later.

2.7. *Caracol III - La Garrucha:*

The *Caracol* La Garrucha is located in the jungle area, and its MAREZ are: Francisco Gomez, San Manuel, Francisco Villa, and Ricardo Flores Magon. Tzeltals, Chols, and Tzotzils live in this region. Although quite far from the Highlands region from which the Tzotzils originate, some Tzotzil Zapatista families were relocated to this area around 1998, when 21,159 people were displaced by war (Onesimo Hidalgo 1999). In this region, the greatest disputes are over land recuperated in 1994. “For over a decade, these communities have suffered military occupation in their territory, in which currently the presence of 56 permanent encampments of the Federal Army is recorded” (CIEPAC: 2008). Due to an increase in paramilitary attacks against this *Caracol* and its MAREZ, in March,

2009, the EZLN invited interested members of civil society to form human rights observation brigades.

Several months after establishing the Good Government Council in La Garrucha, two Council members were assassinated in the community Amaytic. From April, 2006 to March, 2007, violence increased in the centre of the *Caracol* as well as in the MAREZ which make it up. During this period, five armed incursions into the *Caracol* occurred, and Frayba recorded the kidnapping of three Zapatistas, several violent expulsions, displacements, and written threats. Furthermore, the office of another human rights organisation was broken into. In May, 2010, the Amaytic conflict was reactivated. When those presumed responsible for the death of Zapatista leaders returned to live in the community, they cut off the Zapatistas' water service, and detained five Zapatista men for not joining their group. In the following months, the violence spread to other communities in the area. For example in September 2009, in the community Casa Blanca, officially called Santo Domingo but founded on recuperated land in 1994, members of the organisations Independent ARIC and Historic ARIC attacked Zapatista residents. In a separate case, in January, 2010, federal soldiers and government functionaries entered the Zapatista community Laguna de San Pedro. They burned houses and took women and children in helicopters to a shelter in Palenque. They claimed they were going to relocate them to build an ecotourism centre on the land of San Pedro.

Those who participate in the *Caracol* do what they can to prevent such conflicts from interfering in their daily work. Meanwhile, in the *Caracol*, they have built a vigilance post, the Council office, a kitchen for each commission, a collective dining hall, two dormitories for promoters, two flush toilets for the women, latrines for the men, and wash basins. There is a school with four classrooms, a computer room, and a cafeteria where representatives of the autonomous municipality serve visitors and Zapatista members on commission. Handcrafts made in the Zapatista communities are also sold in the cafeteria. There is a stage for cultural events, a basketball court, and four stores. They have potable water and electricity, although opposing groups are constantly cutting off these services. There is a gas-run generator and a collective pickup truck. They have a laboratory for carrying out basic urine and blood chemistry tests and an ambulance. The women's health clinic "Comandanta Ramona" has two consulting rooms, a birthing room, surgery room, hospitalization room with six beds, pharmacy with allopathic and herbal medicines, an herbal laboratory, medicinal plant garden, classroom, dormitories for promoters, bathrooms, showers, kitchen, dining hall, and wash basins. Three health promoters, a lab

technician, a permanent doctor, and three advanced reproductive health promoters work in this health centre; all are inhabitants of local communities.

Within the *Caracol*, there is a campamento for observers and national and international volunteer workers. Despite such a tense climate, the following commissions have been organised in the *Caracol*: vigilance, kitchen, cleaning, general health, women's health, lab technicians, education, agroecology, and collective stores. Medical students of the UAM have organised brigades during Easter vacation and have assisted in construction and remodelling. The organisation Linking the World has helped this *Caracol* coordinate events with other international non-governmental organisations. Frayba has assisted them with follow-up and documentation of conflicts. Doctors of the World imparts health workshops on general medicine and assists with vaccination campaigns. Currently, the main health project is establishment of the women's clinic. External collaborators have commented that in this *Caracol*, there is an extraordinary level of organisation, as schedules are strictly followed and tasks are dutifully carried out. Collective work is highly coordinated despite the fact that they confront great need. Many external trainers and collaborators say that this is the *Caracol* which they most like to visit, that the people arrive promptly, attend training sessions, participate, take notes, ask questions, and are interested in learning and proposing.

2.8. *Caracol IV - Roberto Barrios:*

This *Caracol* is located near Palenque. The MAREZ which make up Roberto Barrios are: Vicente Guerrero, Municipio del Trabajo, La Montaña, San Jose en Rebeldia, La Paz, and Benito Juarez. Chol, Zoque, and Tzeltal groups meet here. The biggest project in this *Caracol* has been the autonomous secondary school which offers education, food, and housing to over 40 boys and girls. Unfortunately, the school has been the object of attack in the *Caracol*. In January, 2007, 4 armed PRI members entered the school and threatened students and teachers. In August of that year, seven men repeated this action. In October, 2009, two attackers pointed pistols at students. That month as well, several people robbed the collective stores. Often at night, soldiers or military trucks were heard outside the *Caracol*. The origin of the tension is that the *Caracol*, and consequently the autonomous school, is located at the entrance to the waterfalls of River Bascan, where the state government has planned to build a tourist centre.

In this region, Zapatista communities on recuperated land have also been objects of aggression. The community Choles de Tumbala was invaded on May 20, 2010 by

members of the PRI affiliated organization Xinich Oficial. Due to increased threats and aggression, in June, 2010, some Zapatista families fled to nearby mountains. The site and buildings in general are somewhat uncared for, but there is a watch post, Council office, five kitchens – one for each commission, two collective dining halls, dormitories for women and men, area for bucket showers, men's and women's latrines, and wash basins. There is a dental clinic and laboratory for making dental prostheses, a computer centre, library, basketball court, and a small general store. This *Caracol* has electricity and running water, as well as two collective pickup trucks. As mentioned, there is a large autonomous school where students study under a boarding system and return to their communities during vacations in order to help plant and harvest.

The autonomous Zapatista educational system has a unique programme of study. All students, organised in commissions, take charge of their dormitories and kitchens, including food preparation. Boys and girls participate equally. For example, a majority of the kitchen commission are boys aged 10 to 13. They calculate how much rice, beans, and pasta is available for each day of the week, cook, and make the tostadas (toasted tortillas). At the end of each meal, they remind the others to wash, dry, and leave their plates in the appropriate place. Frequently, those in charge of the kitchen are the last to be served; food often runs out before they get their portion, but they comment, "Tomorrow we will organise better". At three in the afternoon, the bathing commission watches over the security of their classmates while they bathe in the river. Those in charge wait until almost everyone finishes and then bathe themselves. Their function is essential, as almost daily young PRI men from the community come to the river to offend the women and girls bathing with obscene gestures and comments. The student in charge of this commission comments "We don't pay attention to them. We pretend that they don't exist. One day they'll get tired of it" (Violeta, aged 12). The river, cooperatives, and campamento for observers are separated from the *Caracol* by a road. Previously, they were together but the state government built the highway through the *Caracol*.

Commissions of the *Caracol* are vigilance, health, education, dentistry, collective store. All commissions related to health have received training from Doctors of the World, which offers courses in natural as well as allopathic medicine. Dentistry students from Mexican universities have also participated³⁷. The objective is to train the inhabitants of the

³⁷During my fieldwork, I did not see members of any external organisation. Nevertheless, the children commented to me that "the students of the university" are the community's dentists.

communities to be self-sufficient in healthcare. The organization Linking the World helps to carry out encounters between the autonomous communities and international NGOs. Frayba collaborates with follow-up and documentation of attacks against the *Caracol*. Under the pretext of promoting ecotourism in the region, during President Vicente Fox's term, the previously mentioned highway was built, along with a bridge very close to the *Caracol*. These constructions have divided the *Caracol* land. Therefore, the most important project in 2009 was to move the *Caracol* several hundred meters. This required much manual labour, for which they asked the other Councils to assist with workers, tools, and wood. There are also plans to build a women's health clinic in the new *Caracol*.

Relations between the commissions and supporting organisations are not always harmonious. The same is true among the different commissions of the *Caracol*. For example, during part of 2008 and 2009, the Council of Roberto Barrios was carrying out their work from the *Caracol* of Oventic. I asked a young health trainer from Doctors of the World the reason for this situation. She said that an international organisation³⁸ "is in charge of receiving financing for building the new women's health clinic, but they had not clearly demonstrated how the money was being used. So, the Zapatista health commission got mad, they showed me the papers and the figures and they didn't match up. I told them that I couldn't get involved because I'm from another organisation. Later, when members of the international organisation arrived, they argued and the health commission sent the members of the international organisation out of the *Caracol*, so the Council, which sided with the international organization, also went, but things in the *Caracol* continue to function" (Sandra, aged 24).

2.9. *Caracol V – Oventic:*

Oventic, located in the Chiapas Highlands, is made up of the following MAREZ: San Andres Sakamch'en de los Pobres, San Juan de la Libertad, San Pedro Polho, Santa Catarina, Magdalena de la Paz, 16 de Febrero, and San Juan Apostol Cancuc. The population is principally Tzotzil. This is the only *Caracol* which does not have recuperated land. Nevertheless, diverse motives of conflict exist. In 2007, the Zapatista authorities of San Andres received death threats from members of OPDDIC, allied with local PRI and PRD members. In a separate case, since 2006, Zapatistas from the town of

³⁸The organisation mentioned was made up of foreigners and Mexicans. Financing principally came from Spain. This organisation stopped collaborating in that zone, but continued in the other Caracoles. I was asked not to mention the name of the organisation.

Zinacantan had been detained, beaten, and robbed for refusing to vote for the PRD. In the community San Juan Cancuc, problems began in 2008 when the autonomous Zapatista School was inaugurated. Since then, the Zapatistas have been denied water and electricity, despite the fact that they participate in all community cargos. In 2010, violence resulted in two deaths, and nine Zapatista families left the community.

In February 2009, helicopters and small military planes flew over the community T'ivo', where Zapatistas live - in an anti-drug operation. PRI members of the nearby communities Talowits and Tsajalo guided the planes to a landing. During the past few years, violence has extended to the communities Sok'on, Elambo, San Isidro Chactoj, Lagunita II, and Pantelho. In all these communities, basic services such as electricity and water have been denied to Zapatista families. In some cases, their land has been occupied, and Zapatistas have been beaten, kidnapped, and tortured. The aggressors are PRI and PRD members. In 2010, an old problem worsened in the community Mitziton, where leaders of the PRI evangelical group "The Army of God" operate. From March to June 2010, this group harassed the Zapatistas, threatening that they would carry out a massacre worse than Acteal. In July, the Zapatistas held a road blockade to demand that the government relocate this organisation. PRI members asked PRD members for help to un-block the road.

There are many difficulties in this *Caracol*, but the Zapatistas have sought to reinforce their presence in the zone. Easy access to the city of San Cristobal has made this *Caracol* the most frequently visited. As a consequence, Oventic has developed more infrastructure than the other *Caracoles*. By the main entrance on the highway is the watch post. The other constructions are divided by area; there is the area of cooperative stores and the dining halls. Farther ahead is the health area, with an in-patient clinic which has three consultation rooms, a basic analysis laboratory, an herbal laboratory, and a pharmacy with allopathic and herbal medicine. There is also an ophthalmology clinic and a laboratory for making eyeglasses, an X ray room, a hospitalisation room, and an ambulance. A non-Zapatista friend commented to me, "I've taken my mother there. The service is good. They treat patients well, with more care than other hospitals. We're not Zapatistas, but while they don't talk politics, it's fine. You just arrive, register, and tell them why you're there. We just pay for the medicine" (Clemente, age 32).

There is also a primary and a secondary school, both of which follow the syllabus of autonomous education. The area includes a library and teachers' houses. Their goal was for all teachers to be graduates of Zapatista secondary schools, and there have been so

many autonomous schools that they have been able to employ all graduates. “That’s the idea, *compañera* - that we continue to form our teachers because they continue to come to give us classes. Other *compañeros*” referring to Mestizo Mexicans or foreigners, “in good faith come to do it, but when are we ourselves going to learn? Is that autonomy or not?” (David, age 56). The Good Government Council, Political Information, and Media and Communication are located in another area. At the far end of the *Caracol* are the sports courts and a large stage for cultural and political meetings. Each area has dormitories, kitchens, dining halls, and latrines. The Catholic Church is a large wooden building with a sheet metal roof. Inside is the altar, several images of saints, and candles. A commission obtains candles, flowers, and decorations for celebrations. The *Caracol* has electricity on a more or less permanent basis, and, as in other *Caracoles*, some neighbours often cut the cables. When this happens, a gas-powered generator is used. Two large pumps provide water to all areas of the *Caracol*. There is also a large collective truck and a pickup truck. By the end of 2009, the number of Zapatista members had diminished considerably. As one ex-Zapatista from the municipality de San Andres expresses, “Before, we were a shitload, almost 70% of the community was Zapatista. Now there are perhaps just 20 families... There was a lot of disagreement... some of us returned to the PRI” (Francisco, age 32). In order to continue to keep the areas functioning, many commissions have been created. The most evident is the vigilance commission. There are also commissions on political information, kitchen, cleaning, health, and education. Others are in charge of the cooperative clothing and shoe stores, organic crops, and the shoe-making workshop. The work of the *Caracol* has been possible thanks to logistical and economic support of many national and international organisations. Independent German doctors offer medical services. Independent Italian engineers helped construct the water system. Doctors of the World has never worked here, as the Good Government Council of Oventic decided that they did not require health workshops because they have permanent medical assistance and a large clinic. However I will later discuss this matter in more detail. I was told that several organisations no longer participate in Zapatista projects due to ideological differences. However, Frayba supports the *Caracol* with follow up, documentation, and by reporting attacks. Finally, an endless number of independent sympathisers visit daily in order to learn more about the movement or donate money or materials.

A future project is to continue to develop the autonomous education system. “Many pioneer programmes have started here – some health projects, and education, and from there the model is passed to the other *Caracoles*” (Francis, age 27). Their efforts are

focused on generating their own resources. They seek to strengthen the cooperatives and improve training of education and health promoters. “They ask, why do we want our own teachers? As if they did not know, here the teachers arrive drunk. If they want to, they come. If not, no. That was what I got when I was a little kid. Isn’t it true that the teacher came and touched the girls or that teacher is getting the girls pregnant here and in other communities? Just tell me, is it bad that I want something else for my children?” (Pedrito Fernandez, age 47). According to the opinion of external collaborators and ex-collaborators, many of the political decisions which concerned all the Zapatista territories were made in this *Caracol*. It is common for national or international organisations which hope to collaborate with the Zapatistas to first introduce themselves to this Council, although they may wish to carry out the proposed project in communities of other *Caracoles* as well. Many commentators have questioned the relationship between the *Caracoles* as an autonomous organisation and the EZLN as a military structure; namely with respect to how autonomous can the *Caracoles* actually be given the influence of the militarised EZLN. Thus, critics of Zapatismo often claim that such a structure inevitably leads to an undemocratic form of organisation. It should be noted that the EZLN is acutely aware of this potential contradiction, and while the EZLN is committed to purely political forms of organisation, the transition from militarised to politicised structures is frequently sabotaged by aggressive external forces, making it difficult for the organization to completely relinquish connection with their military structure.

2.10. The Good Government Councils:

Aside from the names of the *Caracoles*, each *Caracol* has a Good Government Council with a particular name. The Council of La Realidad is called “Toward Hope.” The Council of Morelia is “Heart of the Rainbow of Hope.” That of La Garrucha is called “The Path to the Future.” Roberto Barrios is “New Seed which will Produce.” The Council of Oventic is “Central Heart of the Zapatistas before the World”. When I had the opportunity to ask some Zapatistas about the Councils, without exception they responded, “They are our autonomous authorities.” The non-Zapatistas told me, “They are their autonomous authorities.” No one doubted the status of the Council. Nevertheless, in the daily life of the *Caracol*, Council members are treated like everyone else, without hierarchy. They are often even considered to be another commission. This concept of authority certainly is different from the idea of authority in other societies. However, it is necessary to understand the context, how they are organised and their functions, in order to begin to understand the idea of “command by obeying”, one of the most famous Zapatista

principles. With the uprising, the EZLN came to be known as a belligerent force. They combated the Mexican army for over two weeks in several regions of Chiapas. The first Democratic National Convention, held August 8, 1994, was an open meeting summoned by the EZLN, and included representatives of all social sectors of Mexico. The purpose was to oust President Ernesto Zedillo, install a transitional government, and discuss the possibility of a New Mexican Constitution. The EZLN and other groups in attendance jointly decided that the EZLN should be a political force which would lead democratic change in the nation. They also agreed that “civil society” would help with that transition. In exchange, the EZLN committed to not intervening in the state-wide elections, which were to take place in July, 1995. The EZLN assumed those changes as an example of their policy to which they referred as “command by obeying”. Thus, the transformation of a national liberation army to a political force was a “mandate” of civil society. The Councils and the MAREZ were a consequence of this process.

2.11. General functions of the Councils:

The Councils were founded in 2003. Due to their diversity in composition and internal dynamics, it is difficult to define them. Nevertheless, I will offer a local interpretation of the functions of the Councils. “First, we do not vote for any political party; we don’t believe in them. Nor do we receive any assistance from the bad government. For us, the Council is like our path. It tells us whether what we do is good or not. It tells us how to act because our situation is not like that of other people, because we are in resistance and we have to be united, so we do what the government doesn’t do for us” (Jaguar, age 45). In order to better understand this point of view, we should explore the general functions of the Council. In visiting the five *Caracoles*, I observed that internal communication is maintained among the Councils of all the *Caracoles*. The Councils watch over the *Caracoles* and control visits to the different Zapatista communities, providing written permission. In their territories, they ensure compliance with the Revolutionary Laws, which include prohibition of consumption of alcohol and drugs and violence against women, and the stipulation that women and men have equal say in who they marry. The Councils receive complaints regarding conflicts among members of the Zapatista communities, who have an agreement that they should avoid confrontation with other community members or other communities of different political affiliations. The Councils also provide information to national and international visitors who wish to understand the Zapatista movement. They offer advice, obtain resources for those in need, and seek

solutions to problems of daily life. The Councils receive, analyse, approve, or reject projects proposed by solidarity organisations for the communities. Once a project has been approved, the Council analyses how it might benefit the community and which community is most in need. They coordinate education, health, and agricultural projects of the *Caracol* and the MAREZ.

The Councils constantly monitor land use, ensuring that forests are not exploited, that rivers and waterfalls are not contaminated, and that communal land is not divided or sold. However, in 2009, they were very busy receiving and recording hostile acts toward their members. Occasionally they themselves call together the two parties involved. On several occasions, especially in Morelia and Oventic, PRI members agreed to meet with the Council. In other cases, when the conflict is very tense, the case is recorded and channelled to human rights centres. The Councils also attend to demands of non-Zapatista individuals or groups when those who have presumably committed a violation are Zapatistas. Effectively, their functions vary according to the local political situation.

2.12. Composition of the Councils:

According to Flor, a young health promoter, the Council is a good government because it is something with which they identify. “With the Council, we don’t have problems like we had with the government, because it’s made up of our own people, they speak our language, and understand our problems. The (federal) government doesn’t understand this because they are imposed, and the only thing they want is money. That’s the bad government, but our Councils of good government listen to us and don’t treat us as less because we are indigenous” (Flor, age 21). The structure of the Council is a “meeting”, in the sense of the Spanish word for the Council, “Junta”. They meet with a varied number of people to resolve problems and organise projects. The number of members of each Council varies from 8 to 16 or even more. Men and women are included indiscriminately. Each Council is divided into 2 or 3 groups, each of which fulfils their cargo for one to three weeks, 24 hours a day. Then another group comes to fulfil their cargo in a rotating manner. Each Council serves for one to three years. Due to the rotation of the cargo, it is common to find 2 or 3 Councils within a given month, depending on the arrangement of each *Caracol*.

Any person may be assigned a cargo – man or woman, married or single. They must belong to the EZLN and reside in one of the MAREZ. Age is not relevant. Council members in 2008 and 2009 ranged from 20 to 55 years old. It is not necessary to be able

to speak Spanish, read, or write. For example, in Morelia some members, especially women, did not speak Spanish when elected. “Bit by bit, here the *compañeros* explained to me. When I arrived here I didn’t speak. Now I almost understand more, I speak, and I can participate. I spoke in my language, Tzotzil. Now I’m even learning Tzeltal and Castilla (Spanish)” (Antonia, age 25). When I visited the Council in Morelia, I was asked for a list of the questions I wanted to ask the Council members. Once they were all available and reunited, they asked me to enter their office. The Council members and I, seated around a large table, began to talk. Each time I asked a question, they all took their notebooks and wrote. I asked why they were all writing, if it wasn’t easier for one secretary to take notes. They responded, “No, *compañera*, here we all have to learn. But some are already learning to write more, others already knew, so it takes time. But don’t hurry. We have work, but we can talk” (Council Member, age 37).

This example illustrates the manner in which they conceive work, and demonstrates one strategy they use to include all members. Furthermore, it is common for a Council to include members of at least two different ethnic groups: Tzeltals and Tojolabals; Tzotzils and Tzeltals; or Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Tojolabal. In this case, procedures take even more time. For example, those presenting proposals are asked to verbally explain their petition in order to allow for subsequent translation among the different languages. Later, if the visitor has a written proposal, the Council asks for a copy and asks the visitor to leave the office and wait for a reply. The wait may be several hours, a day, or more. In meetings, which are always closed, they discuss, comment, and translate for those who do not speak the majority language of the moment. One benefit of this type of collective government is that Council members typically learn a variety of abilities - languages, reading, writing, math, etc.

A Zapatista member from Oventic explained to me the process of electing their Council, though this may vary from *Caracol* to *Caracol*. He said that choosing the autonomous authorities is a very long process. Each autonomous municipality chooses among candidates proposed by the communities. When the autonomous municipalities have selected their candidates, a meeting of the MAREZ is held. Finally, assemblies which may last three or four days are carried out in the *Caracol*. During the assembly, those present vote for candidates by raising their hand. Those with the most votes make up the new Council. The schedule of service to the public also varies. In Morelia, for example, a sign announces hours from 9am to noon and from 1 to 3 and 4 to 7pm. Their work is interrupted for meal times. La Realidad and Oventic operate 24 hours a day without

interruptions – even at night in the case of a setback. In such circumstances, members take turns to eat or fulfil other duties. Furthermore, since all Councils have several shifts of members, each of which works for several weeks, when a petition is presented and the Council cannot give a prompt response, it is common that when the petitioner returns to hear the response, the Council in turn is not even aware of that petition or case. I asked a *compañero* from Oventic if this system was not inefficient, and he responded, “But there is no hurry, *compañera*. In any case, your problem will be resolved, but you can present your petition again. We move like the snail, haven’t you seen them?” (Adrian, age 44).

Not all Councils are accustomed to keeping an archive of petitions presented. I had the impression that few written records are kept, since urgent matters may be resolved right there. They also told me that it’s fine “how they do it”, since all representatives also have obligations to fulfil in their communities, with their families, especially in times of planting and harvest. In this manner, going to the *Caracol* to fulfil a cargo once a month or month and a half allows them to simultaneously participate in community activities. Nevertheless, there are cases in which Council members must extend their stay. This happens when there are urgent problems, or when members of other Councils arrive late to cover their turn.

2.13. Fulfilling cargos:

Those with whom I spoke expressed satisfaction with the process of electing their representatives. They had seen that they were elected in a democratic, transparent manner. Nevertheless, one person who lived in the municipality of San Andres and claimed to be an ex-Zapatista commented that there are cases in which elected candidates must be approved by the military commanders. “There above they see if the person elected is the right one”. I asked what the criteria were for approving a person, and he responded, “Only they know. But it has to be someone who is very skilful, who knows the zone, don’t you think?” (Esteban, age 37). This ex-Zapatista also commented that Council members may be removed for violating the Revolutionary Laws which the EZLN Commanders have established for all the *Caracoles*. Drinking alcohol; consuming, planting, or selling drugs; violence against women; robbing; or misuse of resources are examples of such infractions. I also found that members may be transferred. A member of the Council of La Garrucha had been moved to Morelia, for example. Upon asking this Council member the reason for the change, she commented that she had been invited to work in another *Caracol* to support the work being carried out there. In August, 2009, I visited the *Caracol* La

Realidad, accompanying a group of young French people coordinating a workshop for health promoters. They had visited this *Caracol* previously. On this occasion, neither they nor I nor the indigenous health promoters could enter the *Caracol*. We had asked the Council for permission to be in the *Caracol* and they told us to remain in the area of the visitors' campamento. The workshop which eventually took place in the campamento lasted five days. The second night I observed that over sixty Zapatista members arrived for a closed meeting. I asked Claudette, a French health promoter, what happened. She said she did not know that she had not been able to speak with Jose Luis of the Council. I commented that there was no Jose Luis on the Council; as I had met with the Council on other occasions, I thought I knew all the Council members. Claudette told me, "Yes, he is in charge of everything... Well, he's not on the Council, but the Council consults him about everything." I did not ask anything else, but that month, during another visit, I asked the Vigilance Commission if I could speak with Jose Luis. They told me, "No, you see, he was transferred to Commander." I told them that I did not know that, I just saw that he was at the meeting the last time I had been there. And they told me, yes, the meeting was to find a replacement for him.

I mentioned this situation to a Mexican health trainer from Doctors of the World, and she told me, "Of course, I met Jose Luis. He's not on the Council; I think that really he is a representative of the militia within the *Caracol*, because he was there for almost three years. I think he's the one who keeps an eye on them" (Carolina, age 25). She commented that she had known a woman military representative of the EZLN in the *Caracol* La Garrucha. Later, I observed that one particular person was consulted on everything in the *Caracol* Oventic. These three cases demonstrate that such figures exist whose functions are to observe, advise, and link local administrative tasks with the policies of the EZLN as a whole. Such figures appear to belong to the commanding ranks of the EZLN. This could be due to the fact that the "politicisation or de-militarisation" of the movement has been a gradual process and the EZLN's political-military core group still exists and must somehow maintain relations with the communities. However, it is not clear to what extent this influences the development of the *Caracoles* or the exact role of the military representatives of the EZN in the *Caracoles*. It is not clear whether the military structures are increasingly distancing themselves from decision making processes in order to allow the autonomy of the *Caracoles* to flourish, or to what extent this core group still retains de facto power over the outcome of the decision making process. As I witnessed throughout my fieldwork, the relationship between the political and the military

within Zapatismo is ambiguous; the transition to purely political forms of organisation is thwarted by contradictions and has been anything but smooth. It is important to remember that for over 20 years, many Zapatistas were trained under a military system in a clandestine organisation. As is often repeated, “we are learning.”

2.14. Government positions; voluntary cargos:

Council members do not receive a salary for their work. Usually, they must use their own money to go to the *Caracol* to fulfil their cargo. Those who do not have the money may walk up to six hours to get there. This cargo represents extra, very arduous labour in a context of extreme deficiency. They take their own tostadas from their homes and the *Caracol* provides them with beans, rice, coffee, pasta, and/or vegetables, depending on the resources available. Nevertheless, as I witnessed in a Zapatista community in the municipality of Las Margaritas, community members sometimes carry out collective activities to economically assist those who must travel to the *Caracol*. However, I cannot affirm whether this occurs in all communities. As the cargos are delegated by popular election, other community members assist men with cargos in working their land, whether it be planting or harvesting. Women with cargos receive help making tortillas for their families or taking care of their children. Meanwhile, in the *Caracol*, those fulfilling their cargos help to plant collective land or work in the collective kitchens, from which they all obtain food.

The Council makes daily decisions through collective discussion in assembly. The various commissions have a large margin by which to act independently without having to consult the entire Council. Commission members are expected to comment on the possible solutions to problems they confront. If problems exist within commissions, the Council is in charge of resolving differences. They also try to correct mistakes and dishonesties committed by Council or commission members. For example, in Morelia there are several stores and a cafeteria. The first day I arrived I went to the store to speak with someone more than to purchase. I bought a soda for 5 pesos. The following day, I went to the other store and bought the same soda for 4 pesos. I asked the person in charge, “Listen, isn’t it 5 pesos?” I was told, “No, here it’s the same price.” I told him what had happened and he recommended that I mention it to the person in charge of the stores. The following day they were speaking with the young man who was selling at a higher price. Each week the commissions of each *Caracol* meet. They speak of problems which have arisen among the commissions and organise the activities planned for the following weeks. These and other

decisions and conflicts are resolved within the commissions, but the Council resolves matters which have to do with the outside – civil society, other *Caracoles*, relations among the MAREZ, and all cases which the authorities of the Zapatista communities and municipalities cannot resolve.

2.15. Conflict resolution:

The preferred manner of conflict resolution is discussion, reflection, and analysis. This may be illustrated by the following situation: A couple with a three year old son who worked and lived permanently in a *Caracol* confronted a domestic problem. The woman was on the women's health commission. Her husband was a technician in one of the laboratories in the *Caracol*. One day the husband got drunk. When he arrived at his house, which was in the *Caracol*, he physically assaulted her and told her that since he was her husband he prohibited her from working and he accused her of not taking care of their son. A Council member became aware of the situation and notified the Council of what had occurred. The Council informed the vigilance commission and detained the husband and jailed him. The following day, the Council called together the families of the couple and the authorities of their community. When they were all present, they held a meeting to decide what to do. First, the Council explained the problem to the family. They asked the couple to give their respective versions of what happened, and then the families gave their opinions. All agreed that the husband had violated the revolutionary laws, offending his wife, their extended families, the community, and the organisation. They agreed that he would be suspended from his position and moved without his wife to a different community. He was assigned community work in the fields for a year. At the end of that period, they would all meet and basically she would decide whether they would continue the marriage. In this case, the Council resolved the problem because the offence was committed in the *Caracol* where they were living at the time and both parties were active members of commissions. In similar situations, as will be seen in chapter 5, first the community authorities deal with the situation; in an extreme case of repeated offence, the case is turned over to the Council.

This chapter has demonstrated differences among the Good Government Councils of the different *Caracoles* and has shown how their functioning often depends on the local and national political situation. Other social actors of the region also affect their functioning, for example political parties, religious groups, and paramilitary groups. Nevertheless, the Zapatista system of self-government and conflict resolution has also contributed to uniting

indigenous groups of a variety of political affiliations. An example of this is the community of Los Mangos in the autonomous municipality Santa Catarina, in the constitutional municipality of Pantelho. In December, 2007, the Zapatistas decided to take action to cancel a state government sewage system project because it contaminated the river where the local population obtained their water. Since 2005, indigenous PRI and PRD groups had been asking state authorities to cancel the sewage system. By 2007, they still had not solved the problem, so the different political factions of the community united with the Zapatistas and asked for their support in cancelling the sewage system project. As the Good Government Council of Oventic and their documents explain, members of the PRI, PRD, and Zapatistas went to the Council to seek support in resolving their problem. In the face of this situation, the Council, representing the three groups, spoke with the inhabitants of San Caralampio - one of the communities which had actually been benefited by the sewage system - and inhabitants of San Caralampio decided to join them in their protest. Together, dismantling rocks, earth, and boards, they closed down the sewage system. The Council publicly assumed responsibility for these actions, arguing that it was the will of the communities which had asked for their support, and it was their obligation as members of the Good Government Council to obey the will of the people. This example shows just one possibility of what may be achieved by an autonomous indigenous government.

2.16. Good Government Councils: proposed objectives and goals:

The *Caracoles* differ not only with respect to material resources, but also with respect to the local situation and national politics which affect them. Their goals are related to resolving short, medium, and long term problems. Although urgent needs constantly arise, their long term general goals and objectives include separation of the Zapatista military structure from the life of the communities, self-administration, and managing projects and resources so that development is equitable among communities (Chiapas: la Treceava Estela 2003).

Other long term goals include developing projects to improve their health and education systems as well as agricultural and other economic projects, and creating the infrastructure necessary for these. These goals are established between international solidarity organisations and the Councils. Relations begin when an external organisation proposes a project aimed at strengthening a certain area, such as health or education. For example, early in 2008, the Italian organisation *Solidarita Italia* (Italian Solidarity) went to the

Council of Oventic to present a written project³⁹. This group briefly explained the history of their organisation, the objective of the project, the stages in which they planned to develop the project, duration, how the project would benefit the Zapatistas, and to which communities they wished to direct the project. This organisation also stated that they hoped to make a documentary, write and publish at least three articles, and present these projects in international conferences. They argued that with the diffusion of this material in the town councils in the region of Naples, they could collect more funds and thus continue to finance the project through to the final stages. The Council said that if they decided to approve the project, they would then talk to the communities where it might be carried out, and community members would choose people to organise the project and let the organisation know their decision. If the communities accepted, the Council would further analyse costs and benefits. If all parties were in agreement, changes would be suggested, local commissions would be created, and the project would be carried out. Usually, negotiations take a long time, and goals and objectives may change or be adjusted to the current situation. This particular project was presented in November, 2008, and by August of the following year a decision still had not been made.

Immediate objectives have to do with unexpected needs or problems which arise. On such occasions, projects, events, or meetings may be cancelled midway. For example, in order for Doctors of the World to hold courses in the *Caracoles*, they held meetings for six months. After beginning to work, those of Oventic said they did not want to participate in the courses and thus the trainings were cancelled. In such cases, previously established goals are not achieved. There have been several cases in which organisations have been asked to leave communities where they are carrying out a project, or they are asked to postpone projects. This happens when the Council feels a project is not a priority, the communities have other needs, or urgent security risks arise. Sometimes communities tell the Council that the projects are not satisfactory. For example, as commented earlier, in the *Caracol* Roberto Barrios, health commission members objected to the management of funds for building the health clinic.

When the Council sees that a proposed project could be better administered in order to benefit more people, they ask the organisation proposing the project to restructure the

³⁹This organisation asked me to translate a proposal for a project for communities of the Highland region. In this way I learned of the process by which projects are carried out.

objectives so that aid may be better distributed. For example, a Basque neighbourhood organization donated funds for a health project in La Garrucha. The Council saw that if the funds had been better organised, the programme could have been extended to more communities and cover transportation of promoters from their communities to the *Caracol*, food during the training, and educational materials. From what I have seen, there is a great deal of correspondence between the long-term goals proposed upon creation of the *Caracoles* and the projects and activities which have been carried out since then. For example, the *Caracoles* have improved their education systems by training education promoters. In complying with these goals, they have generated an educational process for all *Caracoles*, especially for those who show interest. At the same time, training is voluntary. In La Realidad, I met Zapatistas who decided to leave their training as health promoters and only went to the *Caracol* in order to fulfil another cargo, such as kitchen work.

In Oventic, I found that many of those participating in the vigilance commission did not know how to read and write, despite the fact that one of this commission's functions is to write reports and fill out forms regarding visitors. However, when someone did not know how to fill out a form, another Zapatista explained how to do it, or helped the person. I observed this in several commissions throughout my fieldwork. However, it is also true that those with more reading, writing, and math ability are selected for tasks such as keeping accounts in the collective stores, organising large files, or writing letters or documents.

The First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle of 1994, the document with which the EZLN declared war on the Mexican State, clearly expressed that their army was made up of "poor people who have been denied the most basic education in order to continue to use them as cannon fodder and plunder the riches of our homeland." Thus, education became one of the EZLN's demands to the Mexican government. However, having given up on the official government, today autonomous education is part of their long term goals. Perhaps, according to my interpretation, the goal is that all come to be like Zapatista member Lorenzo, whose case is exceptional. He has attended many community health training sessions and workshops and has maintained contact and exchange with Mexican and foreign doctors. As a result, he has acquired sufficient specialized skills to be able to coordinate and train his compañeros, and for the last two years has been in charge of an autonomous clinic.

2.17. Fulfilling tasks:

In the *Caracoles* and Councils, collective self-regulation is the best way of guaranteeing that tasks and cargos are fulfilled according to previous agreement. Many cases illustrate the way in which those who are not carrying out their work are reminded of their responsibilities. For example, during a health training course in La Garrucha, a 37 year old man, Bonifacio, was commissioned to organize the meals. One day, the meal was not ready on time and as a consequence the other activities would be detained. His compañeros jokingly said, “I’m hungry already. Who knows whose turn it was for the meal?” He had no other option but to rush to fulfil his cargo. The jokes and comments continued two days later. Finally, when it all worked out according to schedule, his compañeros told him, “Look how good it tastes... the meal turned out well.”

Someone who does not fulfil their task or commission receives a great deal of pressure from compañeros, and their lack of commitment is usually publicly exposed. I observed that an infinite number of unexpected solutions may be applied to any problem. For example, in the *Caracol* of Morelia, over 25 latrines were built, although the permanent population rarely exceeds 20 people. The health trainer Annette commented to me that after many discussions regarding why nobody cleaned the latrines, they agreed that each autonomous municipality would have their own men’s and women’s latrines and be in charge of cleaning them. *Caracoles* and Councils have faced numerous difficulties, and often, more time and energy is dedicated to resolving problems than to carrying out projects. One of the most evident problems is the high rate of violence and the increase in attacks on Zapatistas. I observed that the Councils dedicated much time to recording and following up cases of attacks on Zapatista members. For years, they had been documenting conflicts confronted by Zapatista communities until a collective analysis concluded that the situation in which they live is that of low intensity warfare (Reyes 2007).

Another difficulty is dependence on solidarity projects and external financing. Independent organisations from Spain, Italy, Germany, Argentina, etc. continue to support them, but many organisations no longer do so. The needs are many and increase in the face of aggressive opposing groups such as OPDDIC, Union de Ejidos de la Selva (UES) and other PRI and PRD groups. Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties the *Caracoles* confront is effective communication with the solidarity groups with which they work. Many tensions have provoked rupture. As previously mentioned, great divisions arose

during the 2006 Presidential campaign. Thus, the EZLN lost the support of a broad sector of the population which still believed in the electoral process. In the national context, due to growing social discontent, increase in poverty rates, and militarisation in states such as Oaxaca, many groups and individuals who previously exclusively supported the EZLN have moved their attention and financial support to other movements.

To illustrate another type of rupture, I witnessed how Zapatista members asked the Council to end their relationship with Doctors of the World in the *Caracol* La Garrucha. The organisation had initially committed to disclosing their income and management of funds. Two years later, by September, 2009, the health commission had not yet received a report. In October, the health promoters asked the Council not to renew the project for the following year. This type of problem with certain organisations, and the Council's insistence on transparency, impede some projects from being carried out. According to the Zapatista members who spoke to me about this issue, this example clearly illustrates two points. The first is the type of relations which prevail between indigenous and non indigenous people in Mexico, according to which outsiders appear to think it is not necessary to keep their word with indigenous people. Second, and most important, is the way that in this process of self-government, the *Caracoles* and Good Government Councils are generating complex political actors that try to break with the patron-client relationships through which political parties, governmental agencies, and many NGOs have traditionally operated.

In order to strengthen their autonomy, the Zapatistas do not accept any type of government assistance. They do not pay taxes and some Zapatista members do not pay dues to traditional authorities in their communities. In the case of Zinacantan, this has led them to be the object of attack. In other cases, the communities are homogeneously Zapatista, such as in the case of the community *La Humanidad*, which is trying to install basic services such as water and electricity by themselves. This is what they refer to when they say they are building their autonomy. Zapatistas of Zinacantan comment that the fact that they do not receive any type of government support is a symbol of their resistance, and that they would like that no one in the community accept government aid. Lack of resources is one of the principal difficulties confronted by Zapatistas in general. This is reflected in some of their commentaries when they feel discouraged. During a health training course, a promoter commented, "Well, it's that I've seen this already," referring to the course. "Why am I going to see it again? I would be better off staying in my

community and working my land. I have a whole lot to do. Or for me, this course should finish tomorrow. I could learn this from a book, don't you think?" (Esteban, age 24).

Despite the fact that the Zapatistas continue to receive economic support from international organisations, this does not compare with the impact of projects introduced by the state and federal governments which include financing⁴⁰ for micro-industries, or mega-projects co-financed by international organisations such as the "Programme of Co-investment Project of OXFAM and the Government of Chiapas⁴¹", or the project PRODESIS⁴². The Zapatista programmes cannot compete with the programme proposed by the Chiapas government to combat poverty, called "Chiapas Solidarity: Social Development and Combating Inequality, 2007-2012". The 140-page document describing this programme synthesizes the series of strategies proposed by the State government with respect to food security, health and social security, regional and community development – which includes creation of Rural Cities, and indigenous and women's rights. Many indigenous families of Chiapas, including ex-Zapatistas, have joined this programme. All these programs are provided to families or communities of one or another party affiliation or which belong to an organisation recognised by the federal or state government. A friend from the Highlands region commented to me, "Well, if you want to receive benefits, you have to be in the PRI, because if you're not, they're not going to simply give you something for free. Here we receive material (bricks, sheet metal, and cement) to build a room, then material for a latrine or a bathroom, a kitchen without a smoky wood-stove, and a floor for the house⁴³" (Demetrio, age 27). Because the Zapatista communities live in situations of great material need and face constant threats, many families have left the EZLN, often to become PRI members.

⁴⁰The Chiapas State government has created a fund for a development plan for the period 2007- 20012, managed by the bank Banchiapas.

⁴¹This project announced as its principal goals, "to consolidate processes of sustainable social development, self-organisation, and social participation of the population which has been excluded from exercising their rights". For this project, 12.5 million Mexican pesos were to be invested during 2007 and 2008.

⁴²The stated objective of this project is to reduce poverty by re-zoning 16 micro-regions near the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve. The State and federal governments hoped to carry out this project from 2004 to 2007, for which the European Union loaned 15 million Euros and the Government of Chiapas invested an equivalent of 16 million Euros. All information is available in CIEPAC bulletin 489.

⁴³These programmes sharply contrast with the lack of resources destined to the State of Chiapas by the Mexican government in the 1980s and 1990s (Cerdeña 2007).

2.18. Common objective; creating autonomy:

A common element among the different *Caracoles*, their projects, and the daily activities of the Zapatistas is the objective of creating autonomy, which is sustained by three large ongoing projects - the autonomous systems of health, education, and economic projects. In carrying out these projects, they have to change old practices such as accepting state financing, thus breaking paternalistic relations. Although these actions may seem irrelevant, they are innovative forms of political action; in Mexico since the 19th Century, during election times workers and peasants have received material goods such as food, dishware, building materials, etc. in exchange for their votes, or at the very least to convince people to vote for the party in power. Through such manipulative practices, the “political class” has won the favour of the “popular” classes of Mexican society.

Another great challenge is to confront old fears of the power of local political bosses and hacienda owners, the so-called “Chiapas family” (Guillen 2003) - land-owning families that from the mid-1940s to the 1950s went on to constitute the party-affiliated political class. With autonomous education projects, the Zapatistas do away with the bilingual teachers who for many years played the role of intermediaries between the State and the community (Pineda 2002). At the same time, they have rejected elections as the space for political participation. In breaking relations with certain NGOs, they are demanding a new type of relation between indigenous people and outsiders. As someone commented to me in the *Caracol* of Oventic, people came to impose, not to listen – to tell them what to do and how to do it and the Zapatistas did not like this. They express the sentiment that “we create our autonomy”, and “they do not give us our autonomy”. For example, during a health course in the *Caracol* La Garrucha, I witnessed participants formulate their own projects and the program content they wished to learn and explain why they wanted to learn it. In one workshop, not only were medical techniques taught, such as how to inject medicines or cure a wound, but also collective analysis was carried out. The health promoter spoke to workshop participants about how the Mexican national health system was structured, who had access to health, and the problems with the system. Later she asked those present, all indigenous promoters, “Is this like the autonomous health system?” “No,” responded the majority. “How is it different?” she asked, to which a compañero responded, “Well, we give service to everyone. Several PRI members come here, so if they tell us, “Look compa, my wife, my little boy is sick. I don’t have money. Help me.”

Well, if that's the way it is, we can't not help them, we're humans, no? I'm not going to let them die, right?"

During the same workshop, participants were asked "What is health?" They responded, "Well, health is being content, singing, not just that nothing hurts. What if nothing hurts me at all but I'm all sad? What case do I have, no?" Later the trainers asked, "Why do you want to be healthy? How can you reach that state of health? What do you need to be healthy? Why is health important?" Answers varied; one illuminating conversation follows: "Well, if I don't have food, I'm unhappy. Health is important because God wants us healthy." Someone else said, "But, I'm sorry compañero, it's not just a matter of eating. If we eat just from those foods in the store – soda or from cans, that's not food. Haven't you seen the little PRI kids? Now they have their big belly, all sick – just candy that they buy." Another concluded that, "Well, if the government's health service isn't good for us, because they don't treat us well because we're indigenous, that's no good."

Thus, they gave their opinions, listened, proposed ideas and analysed whether or not it is possible to achieve the health they desire under the conditions in which they live. The ideas they expressed regarding health do not just speak of the absence of physical pain, but also a state of general well being – having sun, water to drink, and land to work. Amidst these discussions, they were asked what autonomy is. Responses included, "Well, autonomy for us is to make the words a reality, a truth for the communities, because I can say many things, but can I do it? That's different, don't you think." and, "Our autonomy is doing things right, to do the jobs of our Zapatista system." When they speak of autonomy, they refer to being free to act rather than not doing anything. After these reflections, they came to some conclusions. For example, while they continue to ask the government for things, things are not going to change, and the ways things are now are not good. Therefore, they must learn to provide for their needs so as to not ask for support or material goods from the government.

The creation of the *Caracoles* and the Good Government Councils is reconfiguring the landscape of Chiapas. For example, travelling along the highways in many areas of Chiapas, it is possible to distinguish between Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities. The non-Zapatista communities have basic services such as electricity, water, clinics, and schools. They receive financing for agricultural production, scholarships, food, and large plastic water tanks. They also have large bulletin boards which publicly announce how much money was invested by the "honourable" state government. As Guillen (2003) says, in less than five years, Chiapas went from a situation of abandonment to being a strategic

state interest. Nevertheless, registering for governmental programs has some negative implications. Some Zapatistas told me that in order to receive such programs, the non-Zapatistas must show their voter card, the principal form of identification in Mexico, with which they are often led to feel that they have committed to attending political meetings and voting for candidates of the official parties. This leads to dependence of the indigenous communities on the political parties. However, for the Zapatistas, creating autonomy implies changing this way of relating to the state. In their own words, the Zapatistas say “we do not sell ourselves” to the parties or the state or federal government. Gonzales (2008) comments that the autonomous Zapatista governments have created political spaces in which emphasis is placed on a new political ethic. This Zapatista discourse of autonomy is characterised by moral and ethical criticisms of the federal government’s actions. Thus, they call themselves the “Good Government” and create the category “Bad Government” to refer to the federal and state governments.

The information presented here shows that this autonomy project assigns new meanings to concepts and ways of doing things. This occurs through community practices such as the assembly, discussions, cargos, selection of authorities, and collective work. As a young woman in the *Caracol* La Realidad commented, “We are very content that our brothers and sisters of other countries come to visit us, but our idea is that we come to be autonomous, that we don’t depend on anyone, and that one day we can help other communities as they have helped us” (Amanda, age 27). Finally, this idea of collective autonomy also involves individual autonomy. For example, an education promoter in La Garrucha commented that her daughter also wanted to be a promoter. “When she was 13 we brought her to the authorities. There they told us to go to the *Caracol*. Here we visited the Council and they decided that she should go to Oventic because there the education is good and that’s how she had her first training. But, the first year we couldn’t take her tostadas because we were displaced. So the authority agreed to take charge of her. In the second year, they gave us land (recuperated land). Now we could plant, so every 15 days, my wife or I brought her some tostadas – sometimes few, sometimes more so she could share with her compañeros who didn’t bring any. There in the *Caracol* they give them coffee, beans. And that’s the way it was. Now she works in an autonomous school. She comes during vacations. But that’s what she wanted to do. She wanted to support our autonomy. She doesn’t receive a salary, but she gives classes to the children. The community just helps her with her tostada, her beans” (Juan, age 57). The information presented in this section demonstrates how concept of autonomy is basically constructed

from collective actions. As may be seen throughout this chapter, the autonomous Zapatista governments try to coordinate actions of daily life with the goal of bringing the concepts of individual and collective autonomy to life. As my ethnographic observations have shown, this concept is the product of joint reflection, such as that which takes place in health workshops.

2.19. Final thoughts:

When social movements seek some type of autonomy, official media sources and academic studies such as those by Stephens (1974), Casson (2002), and R.J May (2007) often argue that they are doomed to failure due to the lack of an official institution which regulates their political practices. However, this presents a contradiction: if an external organisation coordinates such “autonomy”, then there is no real autonomy. Throughout this chapter, I have shown how political actors are constructed outside of the sphere of the state and official institutions. The ethnography presented in this chapter shows how Zapatista members define “autonomy” as a matter of doing things for themselves, regardless of the time which this takes or the difficulties it represents. Autonomy is also understood as the need to stop depending on external help; this involves overcoming their dependence on NGOs and international solidarity movements. In this sense, the autonomous self-government represents absolute dissociation of the social life of the Zapatista communities from the state, and consequently a rupture with the plans of global neoliberal institutions such as the UN and IMF. The decreasing dependence of the indigenous Zapatista communities on government programmes, solidarity support, and external agents in the political life of the communities is one of the most positive aspects of the re-organisation of the communities into autonomous self-governments, despite the fact that this has resulted in a dearth of resources and problems of having to compete with well- financed state programmes.

Zapatista self-government is remarkable in the context of local and national transitions and coalitions led by the PRI, considered to be the official party and the most important political force in Chiapas until 2000. At first glance, the Zapatista communities seem to be as poor as or poorer than non-Zapatista communities. However, the difference is that the Zapatistas try to overcome their poverty and material needs through community participation, assemblies, voluntary work, cargos, or even social sanctions, without depending on government programs. Each of their actions, including those of daily life, has political weight. Therefore autonomy means giving a different meaning to life. In the

context of regional politics, Zapatista autonomy has involved a process of redefinition of the community which seeks direct involvement in the political life of the region. However, they seek to affect the political life of the region by separating themselves from official practices and parties. One important aspect in this self-government project is the Zapatistas' interest in developing their own human resources, from training teachers and health promoters to teaching reading, writing, and math, to promoting active participation of women in political life. Equally important is their search to redefine the most elemental meanings and basic aspects of their life, such as health, education, and gender relations. The Good Government Councils are not institutions in and of themselves. Rather, they are collective forms of developing political practices oriented to obtaining a variety of objectives, such as health, education, housing, and land, and the different Councils jointly pursue common objectives which were proposed before having publicly creating these Councils.

During my visits to the *Caracoles*, when I had a chance to talk to Zapatistas who were fulfilling their cargo, they told me that autonomy is the objective they pursue. As a consequence, in order to obtain their autonomy, they have created spaces where they socialize, participate politically, receive training in a variety of trades, and restructure the social fabric. In this type of government, authority does not rest in any clearly identified individual, but rather in the cargo itself. Due to the fact that the Councils were founded only few years ago, it is too soon to predict future changes in their structure and practices. Unlike the proposal of Good Governance created by international organisations, the Zapatista Good Government Councils are an absolutely local, heterogeneous political practice centred on community life. The idea of good government is to put autonomy into practice with the "Council", which synthesizes individual and collective desires of the communities that wish to actively participate in decision making and create conditions so that integral community life is possible. The Aguascalientes were created as spaces where the Zapatistas and Civil Society could meet in order to jointly create projects and exchange ideas. However, over the years, experience has shown that such communication has been difficult. The Zapatistas continue to invite Civil Society to be involved, but not all members of Civil Society share the same vision regarding the ideal manner of participating politically in Mexico. As a consequence, the Zapatista movement has dedicated itself to developing its internal projects aimed at community development. Hence, in the past few years, the Zapatista outreach strategy has taken a different course, particularly in relation to the initiative known as "*La Otra Campaña*". This project had

sought to unite the various social movements throughout Mexico and even abroad in a common struggle to address issues such as health, education, economy, sexuality etc. An interesting aspect of this campaign was that it distanced itself from class-based struggle, by which the lower class historically included workers, but not other marginalized sectors of society such as campesinos, street sellers, or homosexuals, for. Finally, with *La Otra Campaña*, the Zapatistas reaffirmed themselves as anti-capitalist, non-sectarian and opposed to corporate globalisation. Currently this campaign has received renewed interest as a model up for debate in light of some of the serious issues the country is attempting to deal with, most notably the Drug War. Meanwhile, those involved have been devoting themselves to developing projects which will have more profound, long term effects, such as living de facto autonomy; this means that without any governmental authority endorsing or recognizing their Zapatista territories, they practice the norms and agreements created by the Good Government Councils, which are their autonomous authorities.

As the objective for which the Aguascalientes were created was not carried out, as reflected in Subcommander Marcos' anecdote regarding the solidarity gift of the high heeled shoe, it was necessary to create the *Caracoles* in order to exercise greater control over Civil Society's projects and actions. From there, they had to return to one of the most elemental sources of organisation – their communities. Thus, the Councils and *Caracoles* are apparently building networks of individuals, locally, nationally, and even abroad in order to transform historic relations of dependence of the indigenous communities on the outside world and reinforce participation of the communities in local and national political life. With the construction of the Aguascalientes, *Caracoles*, and Good Government Councils, the most positive political practices of the communities have been made visible. The next chapter will analyse the specific case of a community created in 2006, founded land which had been recuperated in 1994.

Chapter 3

The political community: the case of the community La Humanidad

In the classic anthropological study *The Little Community* (1960), Redfield presents what he considered to be the common traits of indigenous communities; among other characteristics, he claims that they are homogeneous and very slow to change⁴⁴. Such an interpretation, combined with structural-functionalist styles of analysis, in the 1960s led to what Dehouve calls anthropologists' inheritance of "a vision of a closed, stable, homogeneous, and monolithic community" (Dehouve 2004: 11). In Chiapas, anthropological studies largely maintained this vision until the 1990s⁴⁵. However, two important developments led to a change in this anthropological vision in Chiapas. The first was the creation in the 1980s of the Institute of Anthropological Consultation for the Mayan Region, directed by Andres Aubry and Diana Rus⁴⁶. Researchers of this institute studied many different types of communities in Chiapas, and wrote of an indigenous community which had a relationship to the outside world, including to the Mexican state. Previously, in early anthropological studies of Chiapas, researchers spoke of a closed community, isolated from the exterior. The second development was the public appearance of the EZLN in 1994. Since then, researchers have paid attention to the relationship between local processes and global issues and have emphasised the connection between local history and the history of Mexico. Above all, they have focused on the impact of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas on the State and the nation, as well as on the nature of the relationship between the state and citizenship.

⁴⁴Redfield reviews different communities in Mexico, Japan, China, and India and concludes that common traits exist in all these countries. "The distinctiveness is apparent to the outside observer and is expressed in the group-consciousness of the people of the community. A compact community of 4000 people in India or Latin America can be studied by making direct personal acquaintance with one section of it... The community to which we are to look is homogeneous. Activities and states of mind are much alike for all persons in corresponding sex and age positions; and the career of one generation repeats that of the preceding. So understood, homogeneous is equivalent to "slow changing"... The community... is self-sufficient and provides for all or most of the activities and needs of the people in it... but the qualities are present in them in different degrees" (Redfield 1960: 04).

⁴⁵ The first large scale study regarding Chiapas was initiated in 1942, coordinated by Sol Tax in the Chiapas Highlands (Supplement, INAH 2000: 25). In this project, "community studies" were fundamental. The second large scale project, which focused on the *Tzotzil* communities of Zinacantan and Chamula, was the Harvard Chiapas Project, directed by Evon Zartman Vogt from 1957 to 1975 (Kemper and Peterson 2002).

⁴⁶ The writings of Mattiace (2001), E. Saavedra (2006; 2007), Collier and Collier (2004), Harvey (1998), and Rus (2003) are a small sample of this.

It is important to understand the reasons why social science researchers adhered to the previously dominant concept of closed and static community. Mechthild Rustch (2003:5) points out that after the high point of the Mexican Revolution – approximately 1930 – “the government supported social scientists in promoting the point of view that anthropology and other social sciences should contribute to national reconciliation and the foundation of a homogeneous republic which would unite the indigenous people with European descendents who remained in the country”. Such national reconciliation would be founded on a particular ideological vision of the way that ancient and modern Mexico should be united (Rustch 2003). An idyllic vision of native peoples allowed for establishing a historic past which should be left behind with the help of modernisation and development projects. Based on this concept, the Mexican government sought to plan a common future for generations of Mexican *Mestizos* as a product of the encounter among indigenous “races” and European immigrants. However, as indicated by the 1994 uprising, indigenous peoples neither disappeared nor wished to remain identified with a mythical glorious past. They were and are greatly affected by their constantly evolving relationship with the Mexican state, political parties, the church, internationalist movements, etc.

On the basis of a detailed case study, this chapter describes how the indigenous Mexican community possesses qualities such as elasticity, malleability, and capability of regeneration. This type of indigenous community is very different from the idealised image of indigenous Mexico as closed, romantic, apolitical, and removed from national life. This ethnography leads us to an understanding of a type of community which is the result of its own processes, actions, and choices. Materially and ethnically speaking, the community I speak of resembles other communities. However, behind this community lies an entire system of logic which differentiates it even from its closest neighbours. In presenting the case of the Zapatista community *La Humanidad*, I will argue that the indigenous uprising of 1994 in the State of Chiapas unveiled a type of community which openly contradicts previous preconceptions regarding the “static” Mexican indigenous *campesino* community. In this new type of community, new generations engage in breaking many of the social norms which their forbearers obeyed, generating changes through their daily life. Community members develop what they need through organisation and change, maintaining what is useful from the past. For residents of the Zapatista community *La Humanidad*, social and cultural changes do not imply disappearance of their culture. On the contrary, change is the only possibility they have for continuing to exist.

Through the history of the indigenous Tojolabal community *La Humanidad*, I will elaborate a narrative of their life using a historic perspective. I will point out three moments which I believe have affected the course of their history. First, I will discuss the period in which

they lived as agricultural workers on a *hacienda* in Chiapas in the second half of the 20th Century. Secondly, I will address the period from 1940 to 1952, when the large Chiapas *haciendas* were divided due to Agrarian Reform. Finally, I will discuss the period when members of this Tojolabal group decided to join the EZLN, to which I will refer as “the organisation”, as its members have done since before its public appearance.⁴⁷ Their history culminates with the founding of the community *La Humanidad* in 2006, which is the beginning of another stage of their collective life, to be addressed in the following chapter. It is not my intention to establish generalisations from this particular case. Rather, the importance of this case lies in the fact that it provides new insights regarding the collective daily life of a Zapatista community and how they construct political resistance and autonomy within their community. This case sheds light on the reasons that have led one community to decide to remain in the Zapatista movement despite the desertions and difficulties which the movement has confronted during the past few years.

I wish to highlight two aspects of this case. On the one hand, I delineate the collective idea of community held by its protagonists. On the other, I demonstrate how this social group makes an effort to create, recreate, and maintain a collective memory in order to achieve their goals and objectives, experimenting with a variety of forms of organisation⁴⁸. This narrative is based on three different sources of information. The first consists of first hand information, obtained through informal conversations with community members. Some were children in the time of the *hacienda*, and their reports are reconstructed from their childhood memories or what their parents and grandparents have told them. In our conversations, they mention, “My parents told me” or, “Our grandparents told us”. However, they speak of events in the first person plural, even when they did not participate in them. On numerous occasions they say, “Then we did...”, “they told us“, or “the patron told us”. Gossen (1999), in *Rigoberta Menchu and Her Epic Narrative*, emphasises the use of the “collective Mayan voice” to communicate certain events from the first person, in this case Menchu as the spokesperson of a collective past. In contrast to the manner in which they describe their current individual daily thoughts and actions, in general in their historic narrative, the use of “we” displaces “I”. Gossen plausibly argues that this form of “telling stories” comes from an ancient Mayan tradition or vision in which all elements - animals,

⁴⁷ Due to the fact that the EZLN continues to be under military and paramilitary attack, there is no access to information related to their military activity.

⁴⁸ Dietz poses an important question in the case of the P’urhépecha community of Michoacan: In what way do the different organisational experiences accumulated by the community since colonial times contribute to the generation of new ethnic movements which led to the establishment of new methods of organisation on a regional level? (Dietz 1999: 21). For the present case, we might pose the question in the following manner: How has the accumulation of past non-collective experiences led to the creation of the current community?

the earth, and humans speak and construct a common history. This use of the collective memory is one manner in which the members of *La Humanidad* reconstruct a common past in order to justify their present existence, which leads them to visualise and create a future which they understand to be uncertain but strive to make meaningful.

The second source of information consists of interviews which I carried out with two Mexican *Mestizo* ex-collaborators who participated in the human rights observation *campamentos* in this community. Both accompanied the Zapatistas during the first few months of the founding of their community. Although I cannot qualify them as expert witnesses, I believe that as they are some of the few available sources of information, their reports are very important because they heard the same stories before me and coincide with my understanding of the information obtained in the interviews of current community members. They were able speak of these events more openly and thus helped me to fill some information gaps. Furthermore, their versions concord with each other, despite the fact that the interviews were carried out separately, outside the community.

The third source of information is a current collaborator and friend of the community. This German woman has accompanied them at different points since 2003, when she carried out voluntary work with members of a number of Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities. Later, she formed friendships with some families. Although she is not an academic, while accompanying the community in 2007 and 2008, she accumulated an archive of articles and recordings published electronically in order to share this information with the community, as some members hoped to one day construct a historic memory of their community. These documents include independent radio interviews in which the Zapatistas narrated their collective history during the first few months after the founding of the community and in the heat of the conflict. These were recorded when they were not yet sure if they would manage to remain on the land. These recordings reflect the point of view of the community at a very specific moment, and have been selected with the objective of reconstructing their history, which will allow me to place this local history in the broader national context.

3.1. The Tojolabal people:

Since the 1940s, studies of communities in Chiapas have focused on villages such as Zinacantan, Chamula, and Chenalho, ignoring large parts of the indigenous population and territories. Due to the mountainous geography of the Highlands, the villages of this region were largely able to maintain their land and community structure (Cruz and Robledo 2003). By contrast, the Lacandon jungle region and the area bordering Guatemala, where the municipality of Las Margaritas is located, have undergone different dynamics. Due to abundance of natural resources, Dominican monks built missions in this region in the 16th

Century, but by the end of the 17th Century, the indigenous population had been largely decimated by constant epidemics. In the 18th Century, new generations of Spanish settlers founded *haciendas* and gradually incorporated the remaining indigenous population onto their estates as agricultural labourers (Ruz 1992). The Tojolabal people of Las Margaritas who, as a cultural group, had been forced to work the *haciendas* during the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries are in many ways different from other groups in Chiapas; compared to other indigenous peoples who never worked on *haciendas*, their language, dress, and social forms of organisation were largely lost. As Mattiace (2001: 74) states, “The community structures common to other indigenous regions of Mexico were destroyed among the Tojolabal in the Nineteenth Century by *Mestizo* landowners”. Since the Tojolabal people had lost the most overt indigenous traits, they were not attractive objects of study for the social sciences, and, due to their dispossession from the land to which they were subject during the previous four centuries, they were excluded from most regional processes of political participation (Rodriguez and Quintanar 2008).

Ruz (1992), Cruz and Robledo (2003), and Estrada Saavedra (2007) agree that due to their life as peons, the Tojolabal did not have a community life as did other free peoples; rather, the *hacienda* or as it was known in this region, the *finca*, functioned as their community. Tojolabal life was shaped by the life of the *hacienda*, with its routines, rules, and restrictions; it was the principal space in which Tojolabal culture was recreated and preserved⁴⁹. The oldest current members of *La Humanidad* comment, “On the finca it was just work. That’s right. On festival days, the patron gave us tamales and the marimba, that couldn’t be left out” (Dona Estela, age 56). An ex-collaborator commented, “Yes, you could organise and do things, but only when the patron allowed it; that is, almost only with things that had to do with the church” (Alvaro, age 34). According to Mattiace (2001), despite the circumstances, the Tojolabales have demonstrated that they possess an identity which is quite adaptable and resistant to change. They are capable of interacting with other groups and - as we have seen in chapter 1 and will see again later – are quite politicised. As an indicator of changes they underwent, in 1930, 90.7% of the Tojolabal population lived on *haciendas* as peons. After 1940, colonisation of unpopulated tropical zones was the state’s alternative form of land redistribution as a means of satisfying the growing *campesino* population’s demand for land. In the 1960s, as a result of agrarian reform, 57.8% of the *hacienda* population was freed and went on to populate the jungle. During this period, they founded the largest Tojolabal *ejidos* (Estrada Saavedra 2007).

⁴⁹ According to Lenkersdorf (1996), Tojolabal means “true people”. This researcher, in his work *Los hombres verdaderos: Voces y testimonios tojolabales* (1996) explains that the man – *winik* – has a moment of being *tojol* – or true, and this moment occurs when he or she faces and takes on a challenge. According to this logic, *tojol* is a possibility available to all for all situations but not all reach this state.

3.2. Agrarian reform: the permanent struggle for land:

The history of the Tojolabal people is strictly linked to the history of the land. As mentioned, since the 16th Century, the Dominican missionaries, and later the Spanish *finca* owners, took over the land of the Tojolabal and Tzeltal populations. In 1856, Treasury Secretary Miguel Lerdo de Tejada promulgated the “Law of Disentitlement of Rural and Urban Properties”, commonly known as The Lerdo Law. Under this law, the government expropriated land which belonged to the Church and sold it to private individuals (Villegas and Porrua 1997). The *Mestizo* families Castellanos and Dominguez, originally from the municipality of Comitán, Chiapas, were greatly benefited by this Liberal Reform⁵⁰ (Ruz 1992; Cruz and Robledo 2003).

As we have seen, land redistribution was one of the principal demands of the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Yet, although it was incorporated into the 1917 Mexican Constitution, depending on the region of the country it took from two to six decades to implement the Agrarian Reform. In the case of Chiapas, *campesinos* who participated in the revolution fought on the side of the *hacienda* owners to defend the very lands on which they were exploited (Marielle 1994). According to Benjamin (1995), the *campesinos* were too controlled and divided by the hacienda owners to organise an independent armed uprising of the kind that Emiliano Zapata led in Morelos. While in the rest of the country the primordial objective of the armed struggle was the destruction of the landowners as a social class, “in Chiapas the social movement was transformed into a counter-revolution led by landowners against the post-revolutionary federal government” (Marielle 1994: 04).

As a result of this confrontation between elite Chiapas landowners and the Revolutionary forces, the two sides agreed to carry out limited agrarian reform and 17,000 hectares were redistributed throughout Chiapas (Benjamin 1995: 190). In the area of our study, the border jungle zone, also called the Tojolabal Canyons, the land remained in the hands of the most powerful landowning families until the 1950s. Nevertheless, President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) initiated important changes. Under his administration, the first petition for an *ejido* by *hacienda* labourers in Las Margaritas “was registered as early as 1933, and the first *ejidos* were transferred to the beneficiaries in 1938. By 1950, 43% of the land occupied by haciendas had been turned into *ejidos*, and by 1960 the figure was 61%” (2005a: 487). A

⁵⁰ La Reforma ([The Reform](#)): Liberal political and social revolution in Mexico between 1854 and 1876 under the principal leadership of Benito Juárez. La Reforma Liberal was a period marked by implementation of laws known as liberal, as they openly confronted the powers and privileges of the Catholic Church. Application of these laws principally affected the Church’s large landholdings, which generally were not put into agricultural use. According to Juárez’ liberal perspective, these lands should be put into use in order to foment Mexico’s economic development.

large part of the redistributed land which was later domesticated by the ex-peons was federal land located in the Lacandon Jungle (Estrada Saavedra 2007)

Vaan Der Haar (2005) points out that from 1933 to 1938, *haciendas* and new agricultural colonies co-existed in a tense relationship. For example, Victorico Grajales (1932-1936), then governor of Chiapas, initiated a campaign against organised *campesinos* who solicited land, using tactics such as assaults, fines, arrests, forced labour, and assassinations (Ferrel 2010). Despite this hostile environment, the *campesino* organizations were strengthened. For example, the League of Agrarian Communities and Campesino Unions of the State of Chiapas was developed. Nonetheless, as Van Der Haar holds, this *campesino* organisation was rapidly incorporated into the National Campesino Congress (CNC), a government controlled organisation. In a subsequent stage of land reform which began in 1950, Tojolabals who solicited land confronted great difficulties. They had to comply with the lengthy bureaucracy of government institutions and face pressures by ex-*hacienda* owners to impede their obtaining land tenure (Estrada Saavedra 2007; Perez Ruiz 2005). The demand for land distribution was, however, sustained by the continual pressure of *campesino* groups. The federal government, in trying to advance agrarian reform, came into confrontation with the Chiapas State government. *Hacienda* owners, who by the 1940s had still not been affected, had the support of the Chiapas State government in creating independent armed groups (Marielle 1994). For this reason, private property owners were not affected until much later, and a large part of the land distributed from the 1940s to the 1970s had belonged to the state, and was referred to as “national land”.

Another cause of the growing pressure by *campesinos* for more land is that the *haciendas* produced coffee, but continual crises in international markets negatively affected production, making it difficult to pay workers (Harvey 1995). For workers who were now free, the *ejido* became the only option for economic subsistence (Ferrer 2010). In the face of economic crisis, *campesino* organisations increasingly pressured the government for land repartition. This led to constant negotiation and reconciliation between *campesino* organisations and representatives of governmental agrarian agencies. As a result, the presence of the post-revolutionary government was consolidated in the region, generating a relationship of political dependence of the new *campesino* class, now “corporativised”, on the PRI state. Nevertheless, during the late 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between *campesino* organizations and the state again entered into crisis. Worldwide increase in coffee production led the *haciendas* to stop producing coffee; most sold their land or invested in cattle. The state once again tried to mediate, attracting *campesinos* to official organisations such as the CNC, and offering credit, seeds, and other benefits (Rus, Mattiace, and Hernandez Castillo 2003). Independent organisations also arose in the 1970s, but the

administration of President Luis Echeverria (1970-1976) had some success in re-incorporating them into the state's corporativist organisation; in the Tojolabal region, he created the Supreme Indigenous Councils (Mattiace 2002).

After privatization of the economy and debt crisis in the early 1980s, policy changes toward structural adjustment favoured privatisation of public businesses such as phone services and banks, thus opening the national economy to private national and foreign capital. Rural areas were affected as well. Agricultural subsidies were greatly cut. During the presidential administration of Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), neoliberal modernisation projects were carried further, along with a series of modifications to the Mexican Constitution, specifically Article 27⁵¹, oriented to ending agrarian reform (Quintana 2003). With these reforms, the possibility was opened to selling, dividing, and privatising the *ejido*, thus threatening the existence of indigenous *campesino* families⁵².

3.3. The context: the municipality of Las Margarita:

The case study presented here should be understood within the specific historic and political context of the region of Chiapas in which it is located. The community *La Humanidad* is located in the municipality of Las Margaritas⁵³. Until 1871, Las Margaritas, which lies between the southern part of the Lacandon Jungle and the border with Guatemala, was a village which belonged to the municipality of Comitan. In 1871, Chiapas governor Pantaleon Dominguez decided to separate Las Margaritas from Comitan and convert Las Margaritas into a municipal seat. In 1981, Las Margaritas was formally recognised as a city. In 2006, Las Margaritas had 87,034 inhabitants, of which 48.5% of the municipality's population was indigenous, and 48% of these indigenous people were Tojolabal.

In the 19th Century, Comitan and Las Margaritas were run under the predominant economic system, that of the *fincas*. According to Rodriguez (2008), this favoured the formation of a *Mestizo* elite. In 1930, many members of this elite owned 3000 hectares, but the most influential property owner, the grandfather of former Chiapas Governor Absalon Castellanos, mentioned later in this text, possessed approximately 20,000 hectares. The relationship between the *Mestizo* elite and the indigenous people of the region, principally Tojolabal, was based on forced labour. The Tojolabales were therefore forced to work as

⁵¹ Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution (1934) states that ownership of land and bodies of water belong to the nation, which has the right to transfer their ownership to individuals as private property. The creation of this article was considered to be one of the greatest achievements of the Mexican Revolution.

⁵² According to Quintana (2003), this project was created under the assumption that an excess of the population is dedicated to agriculture, and rather than the farming population hovering around 20-25% of the economically active population, it should be reduced to 5%. This means that over six million small scale *campesino* producers should abandon agriculture in order to leave agriculture to modern, efficient producers who concentrate the land and work with economies of scale.

⁵³ National Census, 2006.

indentured servants on the very land which had belonged to them after the Conquest (Mattiace 2001: 77). The *finca* owners lent the indigenous people small plots of land within, or on the border of, their property where they could live and plant their food. In exchange, the indigenous people worked the *patron's* land many hours a day, six days a week without pay. In *hacienda* stores, the *patron* sold products such as salt, oil, soap, and sandals, typically on credit. Through these transactions, the workers accumulated large debts which they had difficulty paying. Thus, they were forced to work more hours in order to pay off their debt. The indigenous people in this exploitative relationship were referred to as *peones acasillados* (indentured servants), subjects of the *patron*. Working on the *finca* was their only option for survival; if they lost their work, they were destined to wander through the jungle, homeless, without land to plant. The patrons called indigenous people who did not work on the *haciendas* “*baldios*”. This term, while commonly used at the end of the 19th Century as an adjective to refer to uncultivated or barren land, in this region of Chiapas implied that a *campesino* was useless or a tramp and should work as a labourer on the *haciendas* or otherwise wander in the hills, without food or shelter (Rodriguez and Quintana 2008: 8).

3.4. Tojolabals and Mestizos in Chiapas⁵⁴:

Almost five months had passed since I had arrived to Chiapas, and I had only visited four of the five Caracoles. I felt unsure of going to the final *Caracol*, called La Realidad. Friends told me this *Caracol* was unpleasant and dangerous, that it is very difficult to spend time there alone since there is no electricity and there are too many insects, that the road to get there is very bumpy, that it takes almost five hours to get from the municipal seat of Las Margaritas to La Realidad, that the trucks are not comfortable, that the people have very strong characters, and “if the Zapatistas don’t receive you what are you going to do to get back?”. My fears only increased in the face of the arguments of my landlady in San Cristobal, who after interrogating me on numerous occasions, one day told me, “I don’t like it that people come from the city (referring to Mexico City) to “help” the God Damned Indians, who receive more help from the government than the people from the city (referring to the *Mestizos* from San Cristobal).⁵⁵” Finally one day she asked me to vacate

⁵⁴ The history of this community was reconstructed in part based on testimonies of current residents, through conversations when their countless tasks permitted; even with so much to do, they accepted us in their homes. Added to this, these testimonies were enriched by guided and open interviews with volunteer human rights observers who accompanied community members throughout this process and in some cases during periods previous to the foundation of this community.

⁵⁵ San Cristobal is a city of approximately 200,000 inhabitants, but an endless number of Non-Governmental Organisations have established themselves there, many of which support or advise indigenous communities. Surely she saw me visiting an NGO, or speaking with people who she considered to be non-grata.

the room she had rented me with the argument that, “I’ll not have it that one day you bring those people here... Let me tell you that everything they touch stinks” (Doña Paty, age 54). My fieldwork experience had already sharpened my awareness that class relations are constructed in terms of “race” in Chiapas. My ex-landlady defined herself as “*Coleta*”, a term which many *Mestizos* in San Cristobal use to allude to their supposed Spanish ancestry. In San Cristobal, Comitan, and Las Margaritas, it is still common for *Mestizos* to refer to the indigenous people in a derogatory manner. This racist conception was spread during the so-called Caste War of 1869⁵⁶. During this rebellion, the political authorities of San Cristobal made a call to the *Mestizo* population in general, “warning of the grave dangers faced by the white race and insinuating the potential shift backwards that civilisation could experience if the ‘masses of Indians’ managed to defeat the armed forces that combated them” (Esponda Jimeno 2007: 195). Such concepts of race and class were strengthened by the close relationship that the elite local *Mestizos* maintained with the government of Porfirio Diaz. In 1910, the *Coletos* proclaimed themselves faithful to Diaz while the Mexican Revolution sought his fall.

When Las Margaritas was declared a municipality, a self-denominated group of “authentic Margaritans” arose (Rodriguez and Quintana 2008) in order to differentiate themselves from and confront the *hacienda* owners from Comitan who bought properties in Las Margaritas. However, this new group of *hacienda* owners from Comitan was more powerful and rapidly took over local political power. These were “the power blocs based on the alliance of *Mestizo* families such as the Dominguez, Castellanos, and Albores families, from which the governors of the State of Chiapas Absalon Castellanos Domínguez, Roberto Albores Guillen, and Jorge de la Vega Dominguez arose” (Rodriguez and Quintana 2008: 06)

In this context, as I was neither *Coleta* nor indigenous, but rather a *Mestizo* from Mexico City attending a British university, I found myself in a complicated situation. In the face of the prevalent racist San Cristobal ideology and with my labour evaluated as “helping the Indians”, from one day to the next I found myself in the street seeking a home. Luckily, a friend from Mexico City who was working in Chiapas as a dentist invited me to spend a few days at her house. During this time, I was visited by a friend from Eastern Europe named Juanita Beatriz. The day she arrived, we decided to take a walk through San Cristobal. A cultural event was taking place in the plaza of the cultural centre. Among the participants of a ballroom dance presentation was a young woman who appeared to be a foreigner. Juanita Beatriz began to speak with her in English. This German woman named Julia has lived in Mexico for over eight years, teaching language classes. As a result of Juanita Beatriz’s

⁵⁶ In the so called caste war, the indigenous Tzotzils of San Juan Chamula and other communities of the Chiapas Highlands rebelled against the *hacienda* owners of San Cristobal.

extroverted nature, I got to know Julia, who commented that she was looking for a housemate. The following day I visited her and decided to move in. With time and growing trust, Julia told me she had worked with Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities for several years. I told her about my thesis, and she said that in order to learn more about the Zapatistas, it was best to visit a community. She was especially familiar with one community, in which she even had “her family”. When I asked her what she meant, she commented that after having accompanied the Zapatistas for many years, she had developed a particularly close relationship with one family. She invited me to visit this community, which required asking permission in La Realidad. At last I was going to visit that *Caracol*.

3.5. The finca days:

Once in La Realidad, we were received by members of the Zapatista Good Government Council, who authorised our visit to the community but asked us to remain in the *Caracol* another day before departing. Julia commented to them that meanwhile we might help with a bit of work. The Council agreed and gave us a task in the community garden. While we were working, I asked Julia what she had meant by accompanying the people of the community. She told me that initially she had visited Chiapas as a tourist and become acquainted with the topic of the Zapatistas. Years later she visited some communities as part of a sister ship project and later decided to move to Chiapas. Once residing there, she attended international solidarity-based gatherings in the communities and worked voluntarily with women artisans and a literacy project.

Finally, we travelled to the community “*La Humanidad*”. That small Tojolabal Zapatista village was in the midst of many difficulties, as were many Zapatista communities. Despite this, community members took the time to offer us coffee, beans, and tortillas and speak of their lives. In this way, I learned of the fascinating history which helped me understand the reasons behind their actions and what they are striving toward. The land currently occupied by the community of *La Humanidad* was part of the *hacienda* “El Momon”, which belonged to Matias Castellanos and was later inherited by his son Absalon Castellanos Dominguez, who was governor of Chiapas from 1982-1988 and held high ranking posts in the Mexican Army. The oldest current members of *La Humanidad* and their parents and grandparents were indentured servants of the Castellanos family. Manuel first told me the history of the community. Four of his adult children live in the community. His other eight living children have married and live elsewhere. His stories referred to when he was a child and many current community members had not yet been born, but he spoke in terms of “us”. In his version of history, times are mixed, and the voice is collective, in which all, living and dead, participate: “We lived on the Momon hacienda, as our parents and grandparents

did, as there they were born, lived, and died. The patron at that time was called Matias Castellanos. We worked the land very hard. If you didn't want to work, the other day they took you away - the people of the patron took their things to the road... We didn't have a salary; they gave us sugarcane to work and that was ours" (Manuel, age 60).

The second time I went to the community with a student whose focus was oral history. The objective of our visit was to recreate the collective history of their life on the *hacienda*. We decided to carry out an oral history workshop because we found that telling stories is an activity they very much enjoy. Although the workshop was directed toward the children, Doña Esperanza, who is around 50 years old, joined the group and told her story to the children who quietly listened. She did not recall her age; at the time of the *hacienda*, she was a young girl. She says, "The patron lent us a bit of land on the farm for a bedroom and the wood fire kitchen. Also he gave us soap and salt. We dressed with sandals made of sugarcane leaves or corn leaves. The wealthiest used sandals of leather. The man used white "*calzon*" (muslin pants) and his shirt. The woman used a "*nahua*" (woven skirt), her hair in a braid, and a shawl. There we lived. We worked every day with the "*pichito*" (baby) on the back. The grandparents also worked, the little ones – we all worked" (Doña Esperanza, oral history workshop, June, 2009).

On another occasion, while serving dinner to her husband who had arrived from working the fields, Doña Flor told us, "Just on the holidays or weddings or baptisms, the patron gave tamales, coffee, and the marimba, that couldn't be left out, but otherwise, nothing. If you wanted salt, soap, another thing, you had to go ask the patron. In the hacienda store, they wrote down how much we owed. So, at the end, they figured your bill: 'You owe me such and such, so there's no money left' " (Doña Flor, age 58). They had to work extra hours to pay these debts. As they explain, in this time there were no hospitals or roads. Many pregnant women and small children died. Their homes were made of wood, "but the patron said when and how much wood we could take... we had few things... but even so, people prepared their coffee, their tortillas, they were hard times... we are Tojolabales, because such were our grandparents..." (Doña Esperanza, oral history workshop).

This was the first time that someone had spoken to me directly of their ethnicity. This identity endured despite the material and cultural plunder they suffered due to the landowners. In the Tojolabal case, their identity seems to have been strengthened in the face of the difficulties they confronted. Until the 1970s, they asked for land arguing that they were *campesinos*. The ethnic resurgence can likely be traced to Carlos Salinas reform of Article 27 (1993), after which claims of indigenous identity became a more effective basis for demanding land rights than that of being *campesino*. After the Zapatista uprising they argued that they deserved the land because they were indigenous. Apparently, a type of

ethnic resurgence occurred, spurred by the process of land restitution which began, as I have stated, in the 1930s.

3.6. Land purchase:

In their large wood fire kitchen, the wife eats a roasted corn cob while her husband drinks coffee. It is night, and the light of the fire partially illuminates the faces. The husband, a very active community member, tells of an event which definitively marked the history of this village. “Many, many years ago (in 1946 according to the EZLN⁵⁷), the patron told our grandparents that he would sell the land – that he had to sell it. At some point, the patron offered to sell it to them, and as they already knew the area, they decided to buy it, and an agreement was made. The contract said how we were going to pay because we didn’t have money. The patron made a proposal; it was written in the contract, when the people pay 11,000 “*marquetas*” of *panela* (11 kilo blocks of brown sugar) that same day he was going to go to Comitán to write up the deeds so the land would belong to the people. But also that contract said that if the people didn’t fulfil it, even if they were lacking just one kilo of *panela*, then there was no agreement (Don Miguel, age 69). The contract also specified that each block of sugar was worth one Mexican peso (Julia’s files).

This transaction apparently coincides with what Van Der Haar (2005) refers to as the second stage of Agrarian Reform, during which 43% of the land which had been in the hands of the *hacienda* owners was distributed by the government to the *campesinos*. By then, the *hacienda* owners had become a very powerful political class, and therefore the *patron* could impose the terms of such an un-advantageous contract. Toward the end of the 1950s, the *haciendas* had been increasingly divided by the Agrarian Reform Institute. Before the revolution, Chiapas was ruled by local landowners. In 1924, after the triumph of the Revolution, the federal government wished to act as the local authority. For this reason, the indigenous people were given land so that they would support the government and not struggle against it, as in the Revolution. The strategy of offering to sell the land to the poor *campesinos* seems to have been the landowners’ way of containing the division of their estates. That is, they appeared to be complying with Agrarian Reform, but in reality, they never intended to let the *campesinos* take ownership of the land.

Don Miguel continued the story while his wife ate kernels of roasted corn and stared at the floor. She flipped the *tortillas* and occasionally blew the fire while she listened. “I was already somewhat big and so I had the chance to watch, my wife also, the women working

⁵⁷ Complete speech, see: <http://www.bibliotecas.tv/chiapas/feb94/16feb94b.html>

there with the sugarcane, there carrying the baby. They were carrying the sugarcane so they could pay for this land. There the work of the sugarcane began but also we worked the patron's land, his crops, his animals, everything". He drank his coffee, looked away, and continued. "It took years to grind the sugarcane (nine years of work). For years, men and women, me too as a *chamaquito* (little kid), all of us worked. It took years" (Don Miguel, age 69).

"We made a large room for the *trapiche* (implement for grinding the sugarcane to extract the juice which would later be boiled down to produce the solid *panela*), big, like two hectares, there we put the *panela*. The work continued and when there were 800 *marquetas* left to be made, they sent someone to inform [the landowner]... "Tell the patron to come, that the *panela* is ready, that there isn't any more room to store it." The work was backing up, and he sent someone to tell us, "No, my children, keep stocking it up there, and in a while I'll take it away. In the next few days I'm going to take it to Comitán." (Don Miguel, age 69). "One day, like at one in the morning, we were still there working and a fire began, a great big flame in the collective shed. The flame finished off everything that had been there, our tools for the work of the sugarcane, everything, there was no way of putting it out" (Julia's files). Don Miguel speaks slowly, but as his story advances, he speaks with more emphasis. "We sent someone to tell the patron and he came, but before that, those of us of the community said, "No, no one should leave the community because we are going to investigate what happened. Before daylight, we are going to see where the fire came from". As they recall, they organised a commission to investigate on the outskirts of the community. He pointed toward the remains of the *ex-hacienda*. "We saw that the footprints, that they came from there below and behind the *trapiche* and yes, there the footprints were found" (Don Miguel, age 69). He pauses. His wife adjusts the clay pots and puts more water in the coffee. He looks at her and continues. "When the patron came, we told him and he said no, it wasn't true, that it was us, that perhaps it was a lit cigarette of ours, a spark. Then he got angry and said, 'If what you say is true, well, prove it'. But we couldn't. There were just footprints". This was not an isolated event. According to a document read before representatives of national and international press in February, 1994, the EZLN made public another similar history. They hold that in 1945, the same *patron*, Matias Castellanos, offered to sell the irrigated land of the farm San Joaquin to 60 campesinos of the village Nueva Libertad, also in the Municipality of Las Margaritas, at the price of 10,000 *almuds* (a local measure of volume) of corn, to be paid over the course of 10 years. They worked for several years. "Matias never gave them receipts and after they finished paying, he refused to turn over the property, taking advantage of the ignorance of these poor *campesinos*" (EZLN 1994). In the 1950s, the Agrarian Reform Institute was pressuring landowners to

divide their *haciendas*, but furthermore, the region faced constant crises in coffee prices. In the face of this, fabricating the appearance of a sale rather than handing over the land apparently allowed the *hacienda* owners to borrow time and contain the loss of both income and property.

The people of *La Humanidad* took precautions and, as they tell it, this event led them to accelerate their process of self-organisation. “The people were worried; what were we going to do?” We thought, “How can we lose our labour? Here in the community we all talked and made an agreement and called the patron to another meeting. He came, and in the meeting, we asked, how are we going to arrange things. We told him, “Look patron, we want to pay. We want to fulfil the contract. Look, if you want, we will buy the *panela* in Comitán and we’ll hand it over to you”. Then he says, “No, my children, I don’t want that *panela* because it’s not from the same mould like I have.” Then we said to him, “Look, we’ll pay you money,” and he said, “No, my children, I don’t want money.” Then we replied, “So what is it that you want? Or will you give us permission to renovate the “*galera*” (room where the *panela* was made) and make the *panela* again?” And so he responded, “No, my children, because the forestry department doesn’t give permission anymore to cut lumber.” So we thought, “So what are we going to do?” (Don Miguel, age 69).

He says that according to their reflections, the people learned to understand what was happening by living on the *hacienda*. With difficulty, they learned to organise. On another occasion I asked some of the youngest members of the community their opinion of this story and they said that an experience like that gives the people bad feelings, but their grandparents knew how to organise and continue moving forward. This coincides with other stories of *La Humanidad* which repeatedly highlight that in times of difficulties, they went through a process of reflection which preceded their actions. “We thought, what do we do here? We have our *ejido*. That was about a half kilometre from here, but he (the patron) used that land too. Because he told us, “You live here, (referring to the *hacienda*) and here you’ll plant your bananas, your coffee,” because in the *ejido* we planted our corn. But when we gathered our harvest, he put his cattle there, his animals, and they ate the “*rastrojo*” (harvest residues)” (Julia’s files). This was the first time that they spoke of the fact that they owned an *ejido*. That means that despite the fact that they had been working on the *finca*, they had previously presented a petition to the Agrarian Reform Institute, and they were given land, sometime between 1930 and 1950. Nevertheless, they remained on the *hacienda*. As Ruz (1992) points out, the *hacienda* served as a Tojolabal cultural space where they reproduced their cultural patterns. Furthermore, in a context in which they had never possessed anything, perhaps the *hacienda* meant a refuge for them.

According to their stories, the burning of the *galera* made relations difficult between the *patron* and the indentured servants and unleashed a series of much more overt confrontations. “After that, we began to arrange our *ejido*, going to arrange the papers in Las Margaritas and trying to remove the animals of the patron. I mean, there was more organization... Then the patron asked another landowner, one who had his land adjoining our *ejido*, to watch out for the individuals who were going to arrange the *ejido*” (Julia’s files). On the one hand, the Chiapas governor Victorico Grajales (1932-36) was obliged to attend to the *campesinos*’ petitions for land, as dictated by the federal government of Lazaro Cardenas. However, on the other, he defended the interests of *hacienda* families of Chiapas, to which he himself belonged. According to Ferrel (2010), Victorico Grajales himself defended and promoted violent acts against the *campesinos* who organised and solicited land. These measures of containment of the *campesino* organisations continued into the following decades. In the face of threats and potential problems if they organised, the *campesinos* sought alternative forms of organisation and action. “Well, the patron wanted to offend us. He did many things to us, so it was better that we went about at night. We walked in the woods at night and returned at night so they wouldn’t see us” (Don Miguel, age 69).

During that period, they turned to a variety of alternatives to resolve their situation. “We already knew some monks who studied the Word of God there in San Cristobal. So, they helped us to arrange our papers. They helped us to denounce [the patron] before the Agrarian Reform Institute” (Julia’s files). Estrada Saavedra (2007) recorded the work that the Catholic Marists carried out in the zone with the indigenous population. Don Enrique, a resident of *La Humanidad*, commented that in those times, they still believed in governmental institutions. As they clarified their demands and began to seek recourse, they confronted another type of difficulty. “The Agrarian Institute called the patron to present himself before them. But one day we went and he didn’t arrive. Another day we went early and he arrived in the afternoon, or the following day, such that we could never tell him of all the injustices before the eyes of the Agrarian Reform Institute. But one day he called us and said, “Look, my children, I’m going to give you these 550 hectares so you can make your village” (Don Enrique, age 58) “But that land wasn’t even half of the land that had been paid with the *panela*. That village is now what is called Nuevo Momon” (Julia’s files).

Although these events coincide with the greatest land repartition of the 1950s (Van Der Haar 2005), the situation became more precarious for the inhabitants of the new village. “It all started from there, he prohibited everything. He prohibited us from cutting lumber, taking things from the woods. We couldn’t do this or that, he made things difficult. Later, we had a meeting and came to an agreement to move to Nuevo Momon. Some

grandparents stayed with the patron, but all of us who made *panela* went. We all grew up seeing those problems” (Don Miguel, age 69). These events, which began in 1946 and ended with the creation of Nuevo Momon around 1975, coincided with other indentured servants also leaving their *haciendas* and seeking their own land. In the long run, they would face further consequences, as we will see in the following section.

3.7. The Tojolabal community after the life on the hacienda:

The Mexican federal government tried to strengthen its influence in the region by continuing Agrarian Reform in the 1960s and 1970s. However, during the 1960s to the 80s, the agricultural situation continued to worsen. With falling coffee prices, the remaining *haciendas* converted their land to cattle raising, which requires little manual labour, leaving *campesinos* unemployed and landless. Furthermore, continual waves of Guatemalan refugees added to the pressure for *campesino* land. Since *hacienda* owners still obtained the most important political and military positions, advancing *campesino* organisation was difficult. During these decades only land belonging to the government was distributed. For example, several Tojolabal villages, referred to as agricultural colonies, were founded in parts of the Lacandon Jungle (Estrada Saavedra 2007; Ascencio Franco 1995). In the absence of a *patron* as an authority, the ex-peons had to experiment with new forms of social organisation. According to Estrada Saavedra (2007) and Van Der Haar (2001), the *ejido* became the unit of political representation and organization of Tojolabal social life, though the Tojolabales adapted this state-sponsored institution to their own ways of doing things.

When I asked them how they felt with respect to leaving the *hacienda*, members of *La Humanidad* generally expressed that this experience helped them to organise. They felt obliged to discuss the situation and come to an agreement, to seek help from outside the community. As one community member says, “It made us defend our lives for the first time.” Upon leaving the *hacienda*, they faced other types of difficulties which required them to develop organisational strategies. “Here before, there was nothing, no highways, doctors, even less hospitals. So we held demonstrations, marches, but they didn’t pay attention to us. When we asked for land, they just threw the army at us”. (Julia’s files)

Estrada Saavedra (2007) refers to the 1960s to the 1980s as the period of post-*hacienda* life, during which new local forms of organization arose: the Mixed Agrarian Committee, made up of families who solicited land; the Ejidal Commissary; and the Community Ejidal Assembly. In their new environment, they faced increasing agricultural crisis. In the region of Las Margaritas, the Supreme Indigenous Councils were created in the 1970s by the federal government with the goal of institutionally channelling discontent. During the same

period, very influential independent *campesino* organisations were created, such as The Union of Ejidos *Quiptic ta Lecubtesel*, The Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Campesinos (CIOAC), and the ARIC (Hernandez Millan 2007; Estrada Saavedra 2007).

With the changing economy of the *haciendas* in the 1970s, many *campesinos* who remained without work followed those who had been given land in the jungle, although themselves had not been granted land by the government. This has been referred to as land invasion. Arguably to deter further land invasion in the Lacandon Jungle, in 1972 President Luis Echeverria Alvarez (1970-1972) handed over 600,000 hectares to just 66 families of the Lacandon ethnic group⁵⁸ (Cruz and Robledo 2003). From then on, when other *campesino* groups asked for land, the response was that there was no more land to be distributed. Furthermore, from 1960 to 1977, the activity of the Catholic Church in the entire State underwent significant transformation under Bishop Samuel Ruiz, who adopted the doctrine of Liberation Theology and initiated campaigns to train indigenous catechists. The vision of the Catholic Church in Chiapas was influenced by the principle of social justice. The church implemented workshops to reflect on and reevaluate the concepts indigenous and Tojolabal (Estrada Saavedra 2007). This contributed to strengthening the organisation of the new communities.

During the early 1970s, the first members of the National Liberation Front arrived in Chiapas. In 1983, this Front was transformed into the EZLN. These first Zapatistas had been strongly influenced by the doctrine of class struggle of the 1960s social movements. (Hernandez Millan 2007). In the 1980s, as some members of *La Humanidad* recall, they learned of “the organisation.” This once again changed the course of Tojolabal life. Some say they met EZLN members in 1983, others in 1984, 1986, or 1988. One resident of *La Humanidad* says, “Some friends of the community knew that another organisation existed, that they told of the exploitation that was being lived all over the country... We followed them because we were tired of the exploitation.” And another: “My wife and I joined the organisation in 1988. They spoke with us; they asked us what we thought. We saw that it was true that we were dying of sickness, that the government was killing us with hunger, so we decided”. The following commentary sums up their decision to join the EZLN: “One day we realised that we also were humans” (Julia’s files).

The motivations they expressed for joining the organisation included the fact that they were tired of exploitation and that since the 1950s they had been petitioning for land without

⁵⁸ In 1972, the Mexican Government decreed the creation of La Zona Lacandona with the argument that “this communal land has since time immemorial belonged to and will continue to belong to the Lacandon people”. However, the granting of this land meant that the Lacandons had ceded all rights to exploit the natural resources exclusively to the Mexican Government, and thus, in 1974 the President decreed into existence La Compañía Forestal de la Lacandona (De Vos 2002: 33).

government response. “Landowning families which controlled the economic and political power of Comitán and Las Margaritas impeded those petitions from being fulfilled (Rodriguez and Quintana 2008: 6)”. In an attempt to confront this power, the *campesinos* had experimented with different forms of organisation until finally they found “the organisation” and some decided to join. All the residents of *La Humanidad* are Zapatistas. However, some of the ex-peons who participated in the *panela* production did not become involved in the early stages of the EZLN. Many remained in other organisations which had advanced in their political process, such as the Tojolabal Council, an independent organisation which originally had been opposed to government programs and projects. This Council eventually decided to follow the electoral path and even proposed an indigenous candidate for Municipal President of Las Margaritas in 1982 (Burgete 1996; Rodriguez and Quintana 2008). Other ex-peons of Matías Castellanos who did not become Zapatistas joined the Union of Ejidos of the Jungle (UES)⁵⁹.

3.8. *Exile:*

In January, 1994, the first confrontations between the EZLN and the Mexican army took place. In mid-January, a cease fire was declared, and conditions were established to begin a first round of negotiations between the two parties in San Cristóbal. Meanwhile, President Ernesto Zedillo ordered military incursions in the municipality of Las Margaritas, which escalated in 1995. At that time, most of the current inhabitants of *La Humanidad* lived in the community of Nuevo Momón. With the arrival of the army, they fled to the nearby mountains, leaving behind all their belongings. From that moment, they began to live in exile. They say they were pursued for eight days, during which they had no food or water. They were eventually received in other communities by extended family members or other Zapatista families, but, to avoid pursuit, they constantly had to move from one home or community to another. As they say, “The others who had lived on the finca of Momón, but who did not enter the organisation, went telling the soldiers where to follow us, they told them where we were” (Julia’s files). Antonia, a young mother of five girls, told me that they went through very difficult moments. “First we ate wild plants. We drank water from the rain or rivers or, well, from puddles. When that finished too, we went down to some communities. We went with the children. But only some were received in some communities, some weren’t” (Antonia, age 27). That was the beginning of a long period of exile which lasted many years. “On the one hand, they (the government) negotiated with our delegates (in the 1996 negotiations in San Andrés Larrainzar), but also they sent us the

⁵⁹ See the July, 2007 report of Human Rights Centre Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.

army. So our organisation decided what to do and we decided that we were going to resist... From there, we decided that we couldn't wait more" (Julia's files).

While we were shucking corn, Pablo told us, "When we were living here and there, with the army following behind us, we realized that we had a shitload of natural resources on our land. I think that that's the only way we realize what we have, don't you think?" (Pablo, age 36). In February, 1995, the federal government offered amnesty to the Zapatistas, which they did not accept. Rather, they decided to enter a process of resistance. In order to be able to resist and find a place to live, they divided into different groups. "They couldn't stay together; at the end they divided. Some went to San Juan, a group went to San Huixcoatl, others returned to *Momon*, others to San Jeronimo, and others to San Jose" (Pale, ex-collaborator, age 32). Despite the distance, they continued to be organised. "We were in different places, but yes, there was a representative of the community, he took charge of seeing what happened with us" (Pedro, age 38). Bomba, an ex-trainer from the Marist church, met them over nine years ago, and knew them during this period. "In that time, before they founded their community, they attended several training courses, although they lived in different communities. In that time, I met them, but I didn't know they were Zapatistas. They attended the same courses with (non-Zapatista) people of other communities" (Bomba, age 42). The constant presence of the army and of anti-Zapatista groups in the zone obliged them to keep their political affiliation and activities a secret. During those years, they maintained their organisation in a clandestine manner, and they committed to continuing their struggle to obtain land and autonomy. I asked them what motivated them to remain in the organisation despite such difficult conditions. "As Zapatistas, we decided that with them (the government) or without them, that with the law or without the law, we had to live, we saw that it had to be in an autonomous manner" (Andres, age 44).

In order to obtain their autonomy, they had to resist, and although they split into different groups, they confronted common problems. "We were in several communities, but they just lent us the land for awhile. Later, we had to return them, and thus, do a lot of work. We didn't have land, nothing" (Antonia, age 27). The families which received them in their communities were families who sympathised with the Zapatistas, but in the face of the possibility of being detained or attacked by anti-Zapatista groups, those in exile had to move constantly. At the same time, they attended training courses offered by non-governmental organisations and the Marist religious order of Comitán (Estrada Saavedra 2007). In these courses, they learned about agriculture, sewing, carpentry, and marketing of their products. Bomba, Julia, and Pale, all ex trainers of these workshops, comment that the Zapatistas usually attended their courses. However, due to community tasks or lack of

money for transportation, sometimes they could not attend. Each of these three ex-collaborators stated that at the beginning, they didn't know who was Zapatista and who wasn't. Over time, the trainers became involved with the people on a more personal level. Years later, two of these trainers accompanied them in the process of constructing their new community. "They insisted a lot that in those workshops we shouldn't address political topics. Rather, they had to be trained in things such as agroecology, family unity, community unity, workshops on education, on recuperation of traditions, how to improve the situation of women, and ecology" (Pale, age 32).

This ex collaborator comments that the courses were not directed toward Zapatistas, but rather toward the entire indigenous population, as the idea was to contribute to the development of the communities. She believes that these courses began before 1994, but that the topics which were most addressed before the uprising were religious themes. Possibly, it was in those spaces where Zapatistas in exile maintained contact with each other: "From where we were displaced, each group had its authority... From there we organized" (Julia's files). That period lasted eleven years. Julia says that toward the end of 2006, they told her that the land on which they lived in La Piedad was borrowed and the owners had asked for it back. In the face of this, they accelerated their petition for land with the Good Government Council in order to found a new community. Julia commented that in the following months, those who went to live in *La Humanidad* were prohibited by the Council from attending the courses in order to focus on constructing their new community and maintain security amidst a tense situation. This experience of learning new concepts and skills has been transmitted to the older children of the current community, most of those who were born during the period of exile. During a workshop on oral tradition, we asked a group of children age five to twelve what they know about their community. An eleven year old girl responded, "There where that path is (pointing to the entrance to the community) was the house of my grandparents, in the times of the *patron*." Other older children also began to point where the homes of their grandparents and other family members were located in the times of the *hacienda*. They commented that their parents and grandparents had told them the story of how they lived. Their stories related to the days of *panela* production, the sale of the land, and the time of exile. These stories represent a collective inheritance which offers them the possibility of representing themselves outside the community as a defined group capable of defending themselves in interactions under conditions of inequality with other groups in the region, such as *hacienda* owners and other people from Las Margaritas, Comitán, and San Cristóbal. It also provides a basis for creating a collective identity through a common history.

3.9. *Recuperated land:*

On January 3, 1994, an armed group of Zapatistas invaded the farm in Momon, then property of Absalon Castellanos. On the same day, Absalon was captured on another ranch of his and held prisoner of war for 45 days, during which he was made to eat, sleep, and work as his peons had on the farm. On February 16, 1994, he was handed over to the International Red Cross before Mexican and foreign media (Casasus 2008). With this act, the EZLN took control of the *hacienda* land and called it “recuperated land”. In 1994 and 1995, Zapatista members who lived in Nuevo Momon went to the land daily to work and keep watch, planting corn and sugarcane, but no one lived there. With the cover of the Zapatista uprising, throughout Chiapas more than sixty Zapatista and non-Zapatista organisations took over a large quantity of land, affecting several *haciendas*. The Chiapas government created the Program of Contracts for Trust Funds of Administration and Complementary Guarantee, or Prochiapas, and the Program for Acquisition of Rustic Terrains in the State of Chiapas, or “Fund 95”, from which landowners affected by invasions were indemnified⁶⁰. According to Frayba, this governmental action publicly recognised that the former *hacienda* land now belonged to another owner or owners (Frayba: 2007). When Absalon Castellanos was freed, he donated “the recuperated lands” to the Zapatistas. In 1998, under Fund 95 through the Rural Credit Bank, the Chiapas State government indemnified him for the loss of this land. However, the government never provided official land titles to the Zapatistas, but rather created a military camp there called “Base of Operations Momon”.

Although agrarian redistribution had been declared at an end of the administration of Salinas de Gortari (1988 to 1994), in 1994, trust funds were created in order to finance the creation of new *ejidos*. In 2003, property titles for the land for which Absalon had been indemnified after it was recuperated by the EZLN were granted to members of the organisation Union of Ejidos of the Jungle (UES) who had been peons on the *hacienda* Momon, but who had not become Zapatistas. They called this land *Ejido Gracias a Dios* - the same land which the Zapatistas in exile had solicited from the Good Government Council from the different points where they were living, and which they now call *La Humanidad*. Toward the end of 2006, their petition was accepted by the Good Government Council. According to Bomba, those were moments of great tension, because immediately after they arrived on the land, members of UES began to threaten them and build houses

⁶⁰ In 2006, Human Rights Centre Fray Bartolme de las Casas stated that more than 60 Non-Zapatista organizations occupied approximately 251,000 hectares after the armed uprising of 1994. (Van Der Haar 2002).

near them. Additionally, the Preventative State Police set up an encampment near the community and the army base lies just several hundred meters away, on what used to be part of the Momon *hacienda*. “We came here between the 24th and the morning of the 25th of December. We came here with some (sheets of) plastic. There we were like a month, we saw before how the village was going to be built, thinking how we would cut the lumber... thinking, that’s how we arrived here” (Julia’s files).

They comment that upon planning the occupation of the land, everything was coordinated with the Good Government Council. “First, everyone was one complete month in the encampment with a common kitchen. We could have left it a few days before, but we decided that it was better to allow that the month finish so that this way it could pass on in history... After the month, everyone transferred at last to their individual plots and began to build” (Cima Noticias 2007). They confronted innumerable difficulties. To cite one example, “They had barely cut five trees so as not to have to sleep exposed to the elements when those of UES denounced them for illegally cutting trees and they reported them to the forestry department. After the denunciation, several truckloads of armed people arrived to fence them in” (Cima Noticias 2007). At the beginning, it was possible to visit the community as a Zapatista sympathiser or a friend of the families, but in 2007, this changed. It was announced that all permission for entrance, exit, and other matters related to the community had to be solicited before the Good Government Council, because from the beginning, the Council assumed strategic and political coordination of this community. According to Bomba, Pale, and Julia, after the community was occupied by members of the UES and the police, the Good Government Council organised the resistance. This required avoiding confrontations between Zapatistas and Members of the UES, “since members of the Union and the local authorities referred to this situation as a conflict among campesinos” (La Jornada: August 3, 2007). The implication was that there was no political motivation or land conflict involved. However, as we have seen, this conflict was created by the State government, which gave a land title to those of the UES after having accepted the Zapatista taking of the land.

3.10. A unique project: the new community:

Regarding the first few months after the founding of *La Humanidad*, Julia comments, “When they arrived, they didn’t have food, because they had abandoned their crops in their former communities before harvest time and they didn’t have any money. Some asked for loans, mostly in the form of corn and beans, from family members. Also, almost all their chickens died due to an epidemic. It was the dry season, and there were no wild edible plants in the fields or woods, nor water sources” (Julia, age 40). To make matters worse,

UES members began to block their paths and destroy the first plantings of the Zapatistas. According to the women, the presence of the soldiers from the military base made the situation even tenser, but they had decided to resist. They confronted every type of need, everything was urgent, from building a room to sleep in, to obtaining food, water, and firewood for cooking, to protecting themselves from those of the UES. Under these conditions, the founding of the community was only possible with the full participation of everyone, including women and children (Cima Noticias: 2007).

As they say, one of the greatest difficulties they confronted was that after being separated for close to eleven years, they had gone through diverse experiences. They had learned different things, and now they had to learn to work together. With respect to this, the Good Government Council played a crucial role; it coordinated mechanisms of defence and resistance, while those of the new community dedicated themselves to other important tasks. Those of the community organised in assembly in order to decide upon the most urgent tasks. Even to resolve the smallest problem, they turned to the assembly, or village council. This assembly served as a strategy for reaching all types of agreements. From the start, they appointed male and female *ejido* commissaries, municipal agents, and education and health promoters. David worked in the fields from 4 in the morning and participated in endless community meetings. After his work, he sat with us awhile outside the camp and told us, “While we followed the path of education, health, the organisation, and the church, everything else is nothing more than work” (David, age 32). That is, the community was mostly concerned with the successful functioning of the commissions and their relation with the larger organisation of the EZLN. Meanwhile, their arduous tasks of daily rural life were carried out without their realizing the effort they put in to this work. On another occasion when the workload became overwhelming, David also commented to us, “Really, it’s very difficult to walk in community.”

3.11. Defence of the land:

The occupation of the land has been rife with conflicts, such that during the first two years, they focused all their efforts on resisting potential incursions by state police and armed attacks and threats of being kicked off the land by the UES (CAPISE Report). In the face of this situation, they developed a variety of strategies. For example, the day they took control of the land, a commission of women went to the military base El Momon, located just 300 meters from the community, to deliver a letter to high ranking officials. The letter was written by the Good Government Council and a commission from the community, and explained the intentions of those of *La Humanidad*, told their history, and argued the reasons for which they believed they had the right to the land. Perhaps as a result, the

soldiers never committed overt aggression toward the community. With this action, those of *La Humanidad* sought to emphasise the pacific nature of their actions, which strongly contrasted with the actions of members of UES. Those of the UES had taken more aggressive measures. For example, “They said that they were going to remove us and repress us but the Council planned how to resist, and that’s the way we were seven months. In July, those of the UES came in and took some of the land and threatened that they were going to kill us that they were going to burn our houses. So we told the Council and they organised a *planton*: they sent us Zapatistas from other communities so that they wouldn’t confront us, so we would be calm” (Antonia, age 27).

In order to implement this action, the Council sought support from all the Zapatistas in the zone of La Realidad to create brigades to keep watch in *La Humanidad*. These brigades, referred to as a *planton*, or sit-in, were maintained for several months. The Council also solicited the presence of Mexican and foreign human rights observers in the community. With this support, the residents of *La Humanidad* were able to dedicate themselves to building their houses, planting, and planning their community life. The Zapatistas from other communities who participated in the *planton* brought only their *tostadas* and beans to cook in the community. The Council also supplied items such as rice, oil, soap, and candles, and the members of the community provided coffee and *pozol* – a drink made by mixing corn dough with water. The council also “supervised the constant flow of Zapatistas in keeping watch over all points threatened on the outskirts of the community... They formed groups of up to one hundred. They changed every five days. They were called a “permanent *planton*”, with the objective of protecting the population from threats received” (Cima Noticias 2007).

Julia participated as a human rights observer. “At that time, there was a lot of tension. For that reason, they asked civil society to install a permanent *campamento*. The objective of our *campamento* was basically to have a presence, take photos, make reports about human rights violations... but not intervene at all” (Julia, age 40). Regarding the activities of the human rights observers, she says, “From the beginning, it was clear to us that everything that we did was to support the community members, not impose our own ideas”. While observers’ intentions may range from spending a couple of weeks in a hammock in the jungle, to learning from and supporting the Zapatistas, to sharing their own political visions, the community members are clear in their vision and collectively decide upon practical tasks necessary to achieve this. Thus, the tasks of the observers are to support the community in the ways they specify.

The observers and *planton* members accompanied those of *La Humanidad* to work in their cornfields and coffee plantations in order to prevent members of the UES from bothering

them on the path or in the fields. Those of *La Humanidad* are aware of the importance of organising and the function of the Good Government Council. “We also have forms and means of not falling into provocations... and that’s the way we have learned to resist... because we know that when they get involved, the police also get involved... That’s why as the Council has said, we have to avoid confrontation” (Julia’s files). In this stage, the Good Government Council played a central role in creating and strengthening the community. The Council is the local government to which one may turn in the face of difficulty. Also, the Council helped them maintain contacts with the outside world, with other autonomous municipalities, autonomous communities, and national and international organisations. The people of *La Humanidad* say that the Council members are their authorities because they have helped them attain at least five of the eleven demands presented to the federal government in January, 1994: land, housing, food, health, and education⁶¹.

3.12. The Good Government Council in their new daily life:

Once the *planton* and the police left, they began to face other problems. The soldiers of the Momon army base did not carry out direct aggressions against them, but rather opted for other actions which prejudiced their wellbeing. For example, in the days of the *hacienda*, there had been a river which provided water to that part of the community, but the soldiers defecated and urinated in the river. At the same time, despite the fact that they live half a kilometre away and the land is very mountainous, members of UES sent their cattle to graze on the land of *La Humanidad*. Those of *La Humanidad* communicated with the Council about the new problems. Thus, whenever they planned an activity, they consulted the Council regarding what they were going to do, when, and how.

Pale and Julia comment that in response, the Council told those of *La Humanidad* that they should round up the cattle on such and such a day. Accompanied by members of other Zapatista communities to lead the march on horseback, the men and older boys of *La Humanidad*, along with several human rights observers, went to the fields to collect the cattle and begin to guide them to Momon. Halfway along the route, upon reaching the path from the main road to *La Humanidad*, the younger women joined them. Once they reached Nuevo Momon, the authorities of *La Humanidad* delivered a letter to the *ejidal* commissary of Nuevo Momon, explaining the problem. The letter was jointly written by community authorities and the Council representatives. In this manner, they delivered the cattle back to the Momon community. Julia recalls, “There was a moment of great tension in which there was a confrontation, because those of Momon wanted to fight. The youngest of *La*

⁶¹ See First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (EZLN, 1994)

Humanidad were on the brink of responding to their provocations. However, the Council's instructions were very clear: to avoid confrontation at all cost and not respond to aggression in any manner. Perhaps they were about to fight when suddenly the State Preventative Police arrived and the groups separated.” (Julia, age 40). The Zapatistas knew that if the police got involved, they could face serious consequences.

3.13. Final thoughts:

One community member says, “In order to contain the aggression of the bad governments, 30 families went to a good government, or the Council, to impede being kicked out” (Cima Noticias: 2007). The history told here illustrates several aspects of the life of the Tojolabal people, as well as the political and social life of the municipality of Las Margaritas. It also allows us to understand how social relations were constructed on the basis of race as well as class within the *haciendas* of the past century, manifested as inequality which persists in Chiapas even today. The history of this Tojolabal village, plagued with conflict, shows how its inhabitants have constructed “an identity through a process of continuous change and re-elaboration” (Hernandez 1994). This Tojolabal village has undergone distinct, clearly marked processes, starting with confronting the *hacienda* owner. Later they tried to resolve their demands through government institutions. As they were not satisfied, some of them decided to join a more radical organisation, the EZLN, which resolved their needs in a different manner. Meanwhile, those who decided to join UES generally continued the path of government - allied *campesino* organizations.

In contrast to following the path of officially recognized organizations, the Zapatistas, alluding to their past history of exploitation, are determined to re-elaborate their collective identity, and based on this, develop a project of autonomy. Their experiences at the time of the hacienda and the problems they confronted with the powerful groups of the region have led them to construct the concept of “bad government”, which includes all state and federal governmental institutions. This image strongly contrasts with the image of the Good Government which they have created, which satisfies their needs and assists and supports them. This history illustrates the complex processes which the indigenous people of Chiapas have confronted. Furthermore, it illustrates how a sense of community may also be elaborated from collective experiences which transcend a sense of territoriality and even ethnic belonging. The experience of the Tojolabal people in general, and that of the community *La Humanidad* in particular, strongly contrasts with the idea of the homogeneous, closed, apolitical, static community promoted following the triumph of the Mexican Revolution. The complex history of the Zapatista community *La Humanidad* suggests the existence of political strategies and practices which have not been widely

explored among indigenous communities. The 1994 Zapatista uprising surprised many people because it demonstrated the existence of highly politicised groups amongst the indigenous population, something very different from the passive, apolitical communities that many had imagined to exist in a state that had always voted so massively for the PRI in elections. The case of the community *La Humanidad* provides information which may contribute to the debate initiated by Pitarch, who, in 1994, questioned the intellectual and political capacity of the communities that joined the Zapatista movement. This author suggested that Subcommander Marcos' work of communication was an extraordinary ventriloquist act upon constructing an inexistent indigenous language, a political-indigenous language which the communities were not capable of constructing by themselves. However, the information provided in Chapter 1, with respect to the broad range of influences to which the communities of Chiapas have been exposed throughout the second half of the 1900s, demonstrates the complexity of the process of construction of these political actors. The case of Chiapas, although a very local history, may contribute to our understanding of how the Mexican government has sought to legitimate its existence and strengthen its presence by alternatively including and excluding indigenous peoples in the local and national political system, thus impacting the life of the communities in the following ways: it has affected their possibilities of living their own ethnic identity; it has determined the limits by which they may develop their social life; and it has determined their place in the national, regional, and local social structure . It has also generated a context in which some groups, such as those of *La Humanidad*, seek alternatives in order to create basic conditions for community life, and as a consequence participate in national political life. One lesson from this experience which the population of *La Humanidad* has learned well is that without effective political participation and basic conditions for subsistence, advances in the quality of social and cultural life are not possible.

Chapter 4

The government is all of us!

The previous chapter discussed a series of collective experiences which drastically affected the life of this Tojolabal group. We might say that the community *La Humanidad* is a product of these events, particularly their open confrontation in 1946 with the landowner for whom they worked, and the moment they joined the EZLN in the 1980s, stand out. This chapter outlines the complex network of participation, voluntary work, exchanges, and inter-communitarian mutual assistance that make up their social life. Furthermore, the everyday connections between the community and the autonomous Zapatista Good Government Council are explored. In the context of daily life, material conditions and infrastructure achieved during the first three years of the community's formation are discussed. This includes social organisation, ways in which the communitarian economy is developed, and autonomous health and education projects. Based on ethnographic information, transformations which occurred with respect to participation of women in political life, division of labour, and generational changes are revealed. I will also discuss aspects of conflict resolution and the role of religious life in social organisation, and conclude by exploring differences within the community and the principal problems they confront in trying to reach their objectives. I stress that the social structures and other elements of community life that constitute this grassroots experience of building autonomy are being developed in a context of extreme economic deficiency, despite the incipient forms of economic self-development which I will describe.

4.1. The political community:

The Zapatista uprising has been considered to be “the most significant agrarian movement in Mexico... and it attracted world attention” (Washbrook 2007: 5). With this movement, classic studies of community were left aside, and the new wave of research focused on macro analyses of the Zapatista movement, its discourse, commanding groups, and its place in the broader struggle for indigenous rights, human rights, and democratisation. Thus, studies in sociology, anthropology, politics, and history went from one extreme to the other, leaving gaps regarding the social life within the Zapatista community. Countless books and journalistic notes echo the movement's most famous phrases, such as “command by obeying,” “another world is possible,” “democracy, justice, and liberty.” However, very

few explain the meaning of these axioms. In my process of getting to know the Zapatista community, I identified features which may help to understand some their significance. However, absolute answers do not exist. As a member of the community *La Humanidad* said, “Look *compañera*, they criticise us a lot because we don’t do this or that well. But the truth is that we are learning. It’s not easy. We do everything simply, but if we screw it up, it has to be done over again.” (Manuel, age 54).

With these considerations in mind, this chapter demonstrates what I believe to be the most politically innovative project of the EZLN, which is the transformation of the life of the people through the creation of political actors and alternative spaces for political participation in contrast to the official electoral process. The political practices of this community represent the opposite of what Abeles (2006) refers to as the “predominant and omnipotent political place” which includes political parties, the state, and its institutions. This stands in contrast to “places of politics” (Abeles 1998), which include daily life, family and neighbour relations, and other spaces in which decisions which affect community life are taken. With respect to collective life, if the Tojolabal people were previously a passive product of the 1930s Agrarian Reform process and the *haciendas* (Gledhill 2006a), they now express their desire to decide to what point they wish to take their project of autonomy and self-government.

As servants, they lived for decades on a *hacienda* in the municipality of Las Margaritas, Chiapas. As Zapatistas, they spent 11 years hiding in the mountains and in various communities, until founding their own community in 2006. During the first two years, they went through a conflictive process in order to gain possession of the land. Currently, in informal conversations and political spaces outside of the community, they express their desire to remain on this land and create spaces in which social, community, and family life are possible. The word they use to name their actions is “resistance”, which may be translated as the act of creatively confronting paramilitary attacks, military incursions, and lack of material resources. This resistance is carried out with alternative actions, as will later be seen. In its broadest political sense, the EZLN officially used this concept of resistance in January, 1995 in the document “The Third Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle”. They state: “The Mexican Flag, the Supreme Law of the Nation, the Mexican National Anthem, and the National Shield will now be under care of the forces of resistance until legality, legitimacy, and sovereignty are reinstated in the entire national territory”.

Although the Zapatistas first made headlines as armed rebels, the growth of academic studies of “resistance” in the 1980s was, ironically, associated with a declining belief in the possibilities of changing societies through revolutionary collective social action and a new focus on more modest challenges to power relations which may be feasible even while the

repressive power of the ruling classes makes open rebellion a suicidal option. Scott's (1985) early research on everyday resistance among Malay peasants "documented the political effects of apparently trivial everyday actions... and described these activities as the peasants' disguised attempts to resist and thwart appropriation of their labour, property, or production" (Gal 1995: 408). Scott's perspective and the analytical use of "resistance" as including alternative approaches derived from Foucault and the Indian Subaltern Studies School - have been widely discussed and often criticised in Anthropology (see, for example, Abu-Lughod 1990; Mitchell 1990; Tilly 1990; Ortner 1995; Brown 1996; Moore 1998; Fletcher 2001; and Gutmann 2002). Yet, despite the significance of some of the complications and qualifications introduced into these academic debates, it is noteworthy that the idea of "resistance" continues to be present in discourse and self-understanding of a wide variety of social actors and movements in Latin America. Therefore, it is necessary and worthwhile to continue to explore the meanings and effects of what people do when they themselves say that they are practising "resistance". This may be carried out by means of close ethnographic studies of particular situations. In cases such as that of *La Humanidad*, where every day practices of resistance do not always take place in an entirely hidden manner behind the backs of the powerful, they nevertheless need to be uncovered through research in a community context if they are to be fully understood. In this sense, the meaning of resistance has two dimensions which are conventionally considered to be contradictory. On the one hand, people resist state structures and politics. On the other, they create their own autonomous government organisations.

4.2. The community *La Humanidad* today:

In 2006, when the Good Government Council of *Caracol V* supported their petition to occupy this land, which the EZLN had seized during the first few days of the 1994 armed uprising, the current inhabitants of *La Humanidad* arrived with plastic bags, some boards, blankets, some dishes and pots, and few other possessions. In 2009, when I first visited⁶², the primary school had recently been built in the centre of the community, with donations by international civil society and the labour of community members. This one story wood and cement building has three classrooms without doors, open holes for windows, and no

⁶²Ethnographic information presented here corresponds only to 2009. It is important to remember that we are speaking of a community in constant construction and movement; things may change from moment to moment according to their interests, points of view, orders from higher up, and other situations which might arise in the local area.

school furniture. At the time, there was one chalkboard and a small wooden table. In the entry way, an altar with flowers and candles had been set up for the Virgin Guadalupe. All communitarian, religious, and political meetings took place in this building.

Nearby is “the big house”. It was still under construction, but they planned for it to have three rooms: one for the *ejido* commissary, another for the health centre, and another for an herbal medicine workshop. A small collective store is located between these two buildings. Facing the school is the “*campamento*”, kitchen, and latrine for visitors. These are all built of wood and sheet metal roofing. Most visitors are national and international human rights observers, generally referred to as “*campamentistas*.” The *campamento* buildings are painted with a world map which is “upside down” with respect to convention, the face of the Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, and other colourful symbolic paintings. These buildings surround a small field and wooden benches. This area marks the village centre. The presence of international observers was necessary from the start in order to prevent violent displacement by the Federal Army, other armed non-Zapatista *campesino* groups, and the State Police. The *campamentista* presence has been slowly diminishing, as those who come to the region are asked to remain in the *Caracol*, where their presence is also needed in the face of constant threats of displacement in other areas.

Another extremely important point of reference for the community is an 1100 litre water tank installed after the first dry season made obvious the need for improving upon natural water availability. As with the school, a group of international observers provided the money, and the community provided the labour to set up the system. In order to fill the tank, a plastic hose runs from a well dug 1 kilometre up the mountain. It can take up to 7 days to fill the tank, depending on the rain and whether the well has filled. When there is water, the person “in charge” opens the tap and distributes the water among the inhabitants. The village assembly has agreed that three large jugs of water will be distributed per “worker”, that is, each person who participates in village work projects and commissions in the *Caracol*. This is the preferred water for drinking or cooking. In its absence, they gather water from several other makeshift sites, such as a small spring in a stream, which is about 2 meters wide and less than half a meter deep. The village assembly has established rules for its use. One may not bathe or wash clothes or dishes closer than 20 meters from this spring, water should be taken with a clean recipient, and one should make an effort not to stir up the water. The water is typically mixed with leaves from overhead trees which decompose below, as well as dirt and other items. However, they take care of this well, as it is the only permanent water source. In case of misuse, the offender may be sanctioned.

Previously, a river crossed the land. However, in 1995, as explained in the previous chapter, the ex-owner of the *hacienda* donated this territory to the Mexican Federal Army and

established the “Momon Base of Operations”. The soldiers blocked the natural flow of the river and the water no longer reaches *La Humanidad*. Currently, the military base and the community are separated by only 300 meters. The soldiers have a small pond where they bathe, wash their clothes, and spend their spare time. The soapy water runs through canals which spill out on the highway and other ravines. Sometimes, during droughts, those of *La Humanidad* re-use this water to bathe or wash clothes. Aside from the buildings mentioned and their houses, no other buildings have been built. They have been careful about using their natural resources, including lumber extraction, as this requires seeking permission from the Good Government Council. Nevertheless, they have built wooden houses. Each family dwelling has two main buildings - the kitchen and the dormitory, which is a separate building in order to prevent damage to personal items from wood smoke and insects or other animals which may frequent the kitchen. Aside from these buildings are the latrine and a small shed for storing corn. Inside the kitchen they have only the most indispensable implements: hand mill for grinding corn, “*comal*” for cooking *tortillas*, pots, table and chairs, dishes, jugs of water, and other recipients. They re-use 2 and 3 litre plastic soda bottles to store water and carry *pozol* which sustains them throughout the day when they work in the fields. The dormitory has wooden beds without mattresses. Rather, the boards are typically covered by a straw mat and/or blanket. Clothing is stored in sugar or coffee sacks, or piled on a line typically strung over the bed to prevent animals from nesting. Few other possessions are found in the dormitory, which is not considered to be a place to spend time except for sleeping. Some women had previously taken sewing classes and have a pedal sewing machine for sewing clothes for the family, as a favour for extended family members, or to sell within the village or in communities within walking distance. Those who do not have sewing machines sew by hand or use old and torn clothing.

Joining the Zapatista movement, spending eleven years persecuted by the Federal Army, and defending community land has consumed a great deal of their time and energy. Even in times of relative calm, there is little possibility of obtaining a paid job. Resisting - as they call it - is full time work. Seeking a job is not a viable alternative when 70% of the population in this municipality works in agricultural activities. The 2000 national census⁶³ recorded that 43.87% of *campesinos* did not receive any salary, and the minimum wage for that year was 45.81 Mexican pesos⁶⁴ per day, although in rural Chiapas, agricultural workers, who are typically hired for several days or weeks at a time, often receive less than

⁶³ INEGI: Definitive Results, Chiapas XII Population and Housing Census, 2000. This census refers to conditions a decade ago; the agricultural situation and general economic crisis have worsened during the past few years. www.sat.gob.mx

⁶⁴The exchange rate for the dollar to the Mexican peso currently hovers around 12.50.

this. Furthermore, within the area, everyone knows who Zapatista is and who is not. This lessens their opportunity for being contracted; they would have to seek work in another municipality. Consequently, little money circulates within the community. Some families have just enough to purchase the most essential items such as salt, sugar, and soap. Corn, beans, coffee, and sugar make up the basic diet, which is sometimes supplemented with semi-wild fruits and vegetables such as leafy greens, mushrooms, avocados, or chayote and occasionally rice or pasta when a bit of extra cash is on hand.

On the other hand, when there is a need, one may ask a neighbour for a knife, salt, thread, or medicinal herbs, with the understanding that she in turn may ask a favour on another occasion. This series of exchanges includes childcare and advice giving. However, in such a situation of constant stress and need, children rapidly learn to find supplements to their basic diet and even take care of each other. For example, six year old Margarita has learned to pick wild herbs which are fit for eating. Her grandmother taught her, as she taught her to keep out of view of the soldiers who camp very close to the community. When several of the men from the community have to leave for several nights, sometimes soldiers shout and make a lot of noise, pretending they are going to enter the community. In such cases, women whose husbands are away, illuminating their path with a small flashlight, take their children to sleep in the house of an extended family member. In such a situation, the community organises a group of two or three men to keep watch during the night. Drinking coffee around a small fire, with little protection from the rain, they monitor and walk around the outskirts of the community until daylight.

In this context of almost total need, the community economy is primarily based on reciprocal exchanges and mutual assistance between families and individuals. Furthermore, another way of extending relations beyond the community is exchanging goods with and offering services to other communities. For example, Nico and other men of *La Humanidad* helped another community which belongs to the Autonomous Zapatista Municipality of San Pedro de Michoacan to build their houses. They borrowed tools and worked for over a month, receiving a wage. Some of this money was divided among the men who worked, and a part went to a community fund. It is important to note that collective work is the result of many individual and family efforts. However, only by organising watch groups and working together in their fields can they guarantee their physical security and cover basic needs of food, water, and healthcare.

4.3. Internal organisation:

Twenty families live in *La Humanidad*. The approximately 150 community members range from newborns to 70 years of age. Of these, 52 are children, and babies are born frequently. The newest family was formed during the summer of 2009 when a 19 year old youth fulfilling his “*cargo*” on the vigilance commission in the *Caracol* La Realidad met his 16 year old girlfriend. She belonged to another Zapatista community close to the border of Guatemala. She told me they met while both were fulfilling their *cargo*. After seeing each other each month, they ended up reaching an understanding. They spoke with the Good Government Council, and she went to live with him. There was no civil or religious ceremony. She said that they simply arranged a meal and the families were introduced to each other. The constant interaction among communities which converge in the different *Caracoles* or during the EZLN’s political events has transformed the composition of the communities while facilitating social reproduction. Without a doubt, this has a significant impact on rural society, as the Zapatista communities include different ethnic groups. For example, the *Caracol* La Realidad is made up of *Tojolabales*, *Tzetzales*, and some *Mames*. Such interaction through organisational work also has the potential to broaden the nature of personal relationships. Traditionally, a young man observes a girl outside her house or at a dance. There is rarely much chance to exchange more than a few words before entering the formal process of asking a girl’s parents for visiting rights on consecutive Sundays, which implies that the young man has very serious marriage intentions. The *Caracol* setting, where men and women age 15 and over work side by side in courses and discussing a variety of matters, opens the space for a more profound relationship where the woman is also seen as a thinking person.

This mutual marriage agreement shows the impact of the creation and application of the Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Law, which in article 7 establishes that “women have the right to choose their partner and not be obliged by force to marry” (EZLN 1994). This contrasts with the general situation of non-Zapatista communities and families such as those of the municipalities San Pedro Chenalho, San Juan Chamula, and Santiago El Pinar, in which even 11 or 12 year “women” may be forced, bought, or sold with principally matrimonial purposes, but they are subject to the decisions of those who buy them (Cuarto Poder 2008). Even in *La Humanidad*, a woman just nine years older than the young woman I have mentioned had been forced to marry the man her father chose for her. However, it would be difficult for this to take place nowadays in the same community.

During the first few days of our stay in *La Humanidad*, I had seen women, children, and some adolescents, but very few men. The women in their houses ground coffee or corn or

made *tortillas* while speaking of new developments such as curing an illness or recent community occurrences. By the third day, after having visited more houses, I began to recognise some faces. Also, I now saw more movement in the community; the men were returning from fulfilling their *cargos* in the *Caracol*, where I had met some of them, though we had spoken little. Of course, they hadn't told me where they lived. They had been working on the vigilance commission, in the collective store, the kitchen, in construction, etc. Now in *La Humanidad*, we were helping to grind coffee in a house when Don Alberto, returning from his *cargo*, recognised and greeted us: "How nice that you visit us, *compañera*. Have some coffee". His son in law was with him, also returning from his *cargo*. They set their backpacks on the ground, took off their boots, and sat around the small table. Don Alberto's five year old granddaughter sat on his lap and, while his wife served beans and avocado with *tortilla*, we began to converse. The women who had been on the kitchen commission in the *Caracol* also returned that day. We went to visit them and I asked: "Who made your tortillas these past few days? Did you leave the children by themselves?" Estela responded, "No, I took my youngest. I can't leave him alone, but I bring this one (another son) to take care of him there. But my husband knows how to make tortillas. The *compañeros* have learned. Now other families, when they have a lot of little ones, there's a list by which the *compañeras* grind the corn for their children. Others, the oldest girl, the oldest boy, make the tortillas, but if there are many family members, a *compañera* from the list makes half, another makes the other half" (Estela, age 25). The Women's Revolutionary Law, articles 4 and 10, establishes that women have the right to have *cargos*. The effects of this particular political dynamic are restructuring gender relations and roles within the family⁶⁵. Interestingly, in the process of women taking on roles outside of their home, they mutually take advantage of, and expand upon, relations of interdependence within the community.

The entire population - women and men - are organised by commissions which are designated in assemblies. However, separate men's and women's assemblies also take place, "because they have different needs" (Don Francisco, age 63). However, in collective matters, all participate equally. For example, when the community was founded, the *ejido* commissaries, a man and a woman, were designated⁶⁶. Although the law says women should participate, "Our *compañeros* tell us to participate. They encourage us, but not all of

⁶⁵ During 2008 and 2009, in several meetings, I observed that at least 35% of participants were women. They brought their small children, and men attending these events participated in food preparation and cleaning along with the women.

⁶⁶ In the case of *La Humanidad*, there are 2 *ejido* commissaries – a man and a woman. This is not common in other non-Zapatista communities, where only men are elected.

us participate” (Blanca, age 27). Jonas, 32, comments, “Right now the most important thing is for the community to advance... we are beginning, but the women are already organizing in commissions and they participate.” These changes in terms of female participation, though slow, greatly contrast with the almost non-existent participation of women in terms of community or local politics in many non-Zapatista communities of Chiapas (CIEPAC 2007; Millan 2006) and, for example, in rural areas in the neighbouring State of Oaxaca⁶⁷ (Carlsen 1999).

Although they dedicate much time to fulfilling their commissions in the *Caracol*, they also have many communitarian duties. For example, those in charge of the church organise the Sunday Bible reading. Occasionally, half of the community members are fulfilling some *cargo* outside the community and therefore the church meeting may be postponed until the following Sunday. As previously mentioned, no church building exists. However, religious life is very important for the people of *La Humanidad*. Here we may appreciate the efforts in the 1970s by members of the Catholic Liberation Theology-oriented “pastoral team” (Estrada Saavedra 2007). The pastoral members trained indigenous catechists, some of whom were instrumental in the formation of the EZLN. It should be mentioned that in Chiapas, belonging to a church, whether Catholic or evangelical, generally reflects a determined political stance. Not all Catholics are left-wing; however, most rural supporters of radical political organisations such as the EZLN are Catholic. Evangelicals are typically aligned with rightist political parties. On the more extreme end of the political-religious spectrum, in another municipality, the evangelical group “*El Ejercito de Dios*” (Army of God) has a military structure and uniforms (Mandujano 2007). They say they defend the word of God, but since 2009, they have been identified with paramilitary type attacks on other communities which sympathise with the Zapatistas (CMI 2009).

Other important commissions are health and education. Those in charge of these commissions are called “promoters”. When we arrived in the community, there was no education promoter because those community members who had worked as education promoters in their previous communities had been occupied with other urgent community duties such as building their homes and other community structures and keeping watch on vigilance commissions. For quite some time, an Irish couple had been in charge of education. However, in March, 2009, the Council asked them to leave the community and

⁶⁷ We must consider that the indigenous female population of Mexico confronts more situations of discrimination, due to three concrete causes: being women, indigenous, and poor, in all aspects of life: social, political, sexual, etc.

remain in the *Caracol* due to a warning of a possible land eviction in another area. By October of that year, they still had not been able to return. They had been so committed to the community that the commissary had granted them land with a house (previously built for other purposes) and a small plot to grow their own food, as they received no payment. After the alert, they only occasionally returned to continue to work the land and visit the community. While waiting to return to *La Humanidad* on a more permanent basis, they worked communal land in the *Caracol*, involving themselves in as many activities as possible, such as construction, agriculture, and repairs in the *campamento* for visitors.

Therefore, the children of *La Humanidad* had no classes. I asked them, “What do you do then? How do you study?” They said that the oldest children, or those who knew more math, reading, and writing, taught the rest. “The teachers gave us the books for Spanish and for numbers, so I teach Doña Josefina’s children. The children of Don Pascual teach those of the house next door, and so on... that’s our homework...” (Monica, age 10) Given this situation, the village council decided to train a 27 year old promoter. However, as we will see later on, due to personal problems, she did not continue with her cargo.

Lorenzo, the community health promoter, is also a regional health promoter. Each month he attends workshops in the *Caracol*, health meetings for the zone and other municipalities, and trains other promoters. He was invited to study medicine in Cuba, however, after much contemplation, he decided to forego the opportunity as the scholarship would not cover his wife and three small children, and thus he would have been separated from them during the six year training. Before leaving for his *cargo*, he tries to get ahead as much as possible in his cornfield and garden and gather firewood and corn. His young wife makes all the *tostadas* he will need while on commission, and takes care of the children while he is away. When I visited her, I asked if she had a lot of work. “Yes, but it’s the same as what my husband has to do when I have a commission, except I take the little one (her son). My husband takes care of the rest. He also makes his own *tortillas*” (Norma, age 25).

The training sessions Lorenzo attends are part of a programme offered by non-governmental organisations in the *Caracol*. The programmes were discussed in large meetings among health promoters of all the MAREZ, such as the meeting which I observed of more than 100 promoters in the *Caracol* of La Garrucha in January, 2009. Later, they hold discussions in each *Caracol* and seek more concrete agreements. When Lorenzo returns to the community he calls a meeting to explain the agreements and resulting tasks for the community. For example, a photocopy of the preventive healthcare measures with which they must comply is pasted in the doorway of each home, “to prevent a wave of sickness.” At the top of the page is the name of the *Caracol* and the Good Government Council, followed by a list of measures which they must follow. These include, “boil water, wash hands after going to the

bathroom, put ash in the latrine after using”, etc. Lorenzo, along with two young women promoters who recently joined the commission, is responsible for verifying that the community complies with these measures. An endless number of duties make up the social structure of *La Humanidad*, and all are involved in one way or another in these tasks. From the “responsible” of the *campamento*, the “responsible” for controlling the list of those who provide food for the *campamentistas*, to the young member of the Good Government Council who lives in the community – all are involved in the functioning of the community and the *Caracol*.

When Bety, a member of the Council, returns to her house after her 15 day cargo, she sets about working the land. She is single, age 20, and has studied primary school. For several years, she attended periodic educational courses offered by a Catholic Church group in a training centre built for that purpose very close to her former community. While the centre was not specifically Zapatista, the construction and activities of this centre were to a large extent controlled by the local autonomous communities. Bety lives with her parents and is constantly helping them weed the cornfield, garden, and sugar patch; carry water; make the tortillas; wash the entire family’s clothes; clean out the corn storage building, etc. At night, she reads any document she can get her hands on, anything from novels to history books to pamphlets, often sent by - and written about - social movements in other countries, and occasionally even writings on the Zapatista movement written by outside movements. She says that some day she would like to continue to study, perhaps attend university. For the time being, she says she has no interest in getting married. My contact with her was very limited, as another community member told us that in order to avoid gossip, it would be best to not speak with her too much so as not to cause problems. In this context, gossip refers to the fact that it is not fitting that a Council member to receive special treatment from anyone, in order to avoid acts of corruption or situations which could be misunderstood. The community keeps a close watch on Council members. Positions of authority and leadership are subject to constant public scrutiny.

The community and her family support her so that she is able to actively participate in the organisation’s politics. This is true for other women with cargos as well. As has been said, women support each other making tortillas for other families when they leave their homes for a week or two. The men also receive support in working their land when they go to fulfil a cargo, although sometimes they seem impatient to return home. On one occasion, I found Miguel in the *Caracol* and he told me, “I have a “*chingo*” (shitload!) to do... and the person who is supposed to take over from me hasn’t arrived... and I’m just stuck here”. “What are you going to do?” I asked. He responded, “Well, what can I do... just wait.” (Miguel, age 20)

Other commissions require other types of work. For example, the *cargo* of taking care of the community store lasts two weeks. The store has to be open several hours in the morning and in the afternoon. No more than 20 products are offered in the store. These are purchased with a community fund. The money is reinvested, and profits are used to cover community needs. Other commissions are generated according to needs as they arise, such as cleaning the well, weeding communal lands, or clearing paths. Another series of *cargos* and commissions serves to plan and coordinate with the zone, the region, and the autonomous municipality. It is common for one person to have two or three duties. Nico, aged 34, is married with three children. He is “the responsible” for the autonomous municipality, he fulfils a duty in the organisation (EZLN) and besides working long days in the fields, he helps build houses for his *compañeros* and now forms part of a team to open a new collective store outside the community. His wife is on at least two commissions, makes and sells cornbread, works in the fields, and makes clothing for her children and nieces and nephews and to sell in other communities.

This intensive work scheme is common among those of *La Humanidad*. Once in the *Caracol*, we went to eat in the collective Zapatista store. While the meal was being prepared, we spoke with the person in charge of the store. He carried a little five year old girl. I jokingly asked, “What’s going on with the cook? We’re hungry.” He said, “Just a minute, *compañera*, my wife is out washing back there.” “Your wife?” I asked. “Yes”. “That’s your little girl?” I asked. “No, *compañera*, it’s my granddaughter, the daughter of my son who’s there in the other store.” I asked, “You brought the whole family?” He answered, “It’s better that way. We close up the house there and we all come, whether it be two weeks, a month, it depends” (Don Santos, age 60). This family is from “Oxney” and on this occasion, almost all the people fulfilling their cargo were from this community. He told me that in order to “fulfil the *cargos*,” all the Zapatista communities were put on a list. They rotate community by community, and when the list is finished, they start over. Each village assembly internally decides who, how, and when each person will go to fill the *cargos* in the *Caracol*. He says that each person has to go at least two or three times a year. The Good Government Council supervises attendance and change of shifts, and coordinates and watches over the work of the permanent commissions.

Extraordinary commissions also exist, for example, to organise the celebration of an EZLN anniversary, indigenous gathering, and large festive conventions with civil society, solidarity sit-ins, defence of other communities, protests, etc. In this case, the Councils of the different *Caracoles* meet and determine which *Caracol* will sponsor the event and what commissions and how many individuals are needed. Each event or task requires organisation, negotiation, and the participation of members of Zapatista communities. Later,

each community decides who will attend. Some commemorations are on fixed dates, such as the anniversary of the founding of the EZLN (November 17), the Zapatista uprising (January 1), or the assassination of Emiliano Zapata (April 10). In these cases, typically formal commemorative ceremonies, sports activities, and a dance are carried out in each *Caracol*. Large internationally publicised celebrations are periodically carried out in the *Caracol* of Oventic, or sometimes in other *Caracoles*. On these occasions, community members know of the events beforehand, so they try to get ahead in their agricultural labours. On other occasions, events are specifically organised for dates which do not interfere with the agricultural calendar. It is not easy to carry out events continuously, as they require a great deal of energy, time, and money. Some young men of *La Humanidad* said that they like to go, because they have dances, and they can meet girls from other communities. Others said, “It’s a shitload of work (*“chinga”*)”. For example, Don Santos told me that when they have recently sold their coffee harvest, he and his family pay the fare to go by truck, and other times “to hell with it! (*“a la chingada!”*) We walk - 11 hours”. He adds, “So we leave very early, to not be right under the sun”. “How much do they pay you for taking care of the store?” Laughing, he tells me, “No, *compañera*, here one gives from his own pocket, from his volunteer work. That’s how we resist.” For a certain fiesta, he was to attend to the collective store in the *Caracol*, although on another occasion he may be given another cargo. At the end of his shift, he has to write in a notebook how much merchandise was sold, how much money was taken in, and if there was any extra expense. He has to leave the store clean, with sufficient firewood for the kitchen, and with the water tanks full for the shift that will relieve him. Most of the profits are reinvested in the store, and a small part is designated for expenses of the *Caracol*. The community store in *La Humanidad* functions similarly, except the village assembly decides how to use the profits. Sometimes 100 to 150 pesos is given to a community member to cover travel fare, by bus or truck, when they have to go to the *Caracol* or another community to fulfil their cargo.

Each community is organised differently. In *La Humanidad*, immediate priorities are potable water, obtaining funds for electrification, having education promoters, and continuing to defend the community. Their participation in all *Caracol* duties reveals a sophisticated social network in which many other communities also participate. The supreme internal authority is the village assembly, in which all community members participate. All men and women who carry out community work have voice and vote in community decisions. In reality, almost all the adults - considered to be those 15 and over – do community work. In the case that someone is unable to work, they send a family member in their stead, and for voting purposes are still considered to be working

community members. Thus, very few are unable to vote, but even if such a case does exist, they may give their opinion.

In the assembly, all community problems are discussed, such as natural resource management and use, the water situation, maintenance of common areas, creation and administration of collective businesses, election of commissions, evaluation or dismissal of representatives, domestic problems, planning of civil, political, and religious celebrations⁶⁸, organisation of the soccer team, approval of workshops proposed by NGOs or other volunteers, etc. When they occupied the land, the assembly also determined land distribution, location of communal lands, and every aspect of their new life.

4.4. The Zapatista community and their neighbours:

Since 2006, communities in the municipality of Las Margaritas which have registered for government programmes such as PROCAMPO and *Oportunidades* have obtained certain material advances. Main roads are rapidly being paved. For example, from November, 2008 to May, 2009, almost 10km of roads were built, primarily in the section connecting Comitán, Las Margaritas, and the San Quintín military base. This is very rapid considering that the terrain is very mountainous. The road passes through important Zapatista areas, including the *Caracol* La Realidad. Many conclude that the government's interest in building the roads is primarily to be able to exercise control of the rebel population, as well as have greater access to natural resources. Many communities openly opposed to the Zapatista movement, principally the "*PRI-istas*", are those that have benefited most from government programmes. Neighbouring communities of *La Humanidad* are included in these programmes. For example, some have received plastic water tanks. Using heavy machinery, roads have been built in order to connect their villages with the highway. A single family may receive up to 2500 pesos per month in scholarships for children attending primary or secondary school, family food assistance, and assistance for senior citizens (Gonzalez de la Rocha 2007).

Those of *La Humanidad* argue that by not participating in government programmes, they openly demonstrate their knowledge of the intent of the Mexican government, through its neoliberal programmes, to exercise control over indigenous communities. Berenice (age 29) says, "Yes, the government wants to get rid of our organisation. That's why they give things,

⁶⁸Principal religious celebrations are Holy week, the Day of the Holy Cross on May 3, All Saints Day, Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 12, and Christmas.

so we leave our organisation. Or what else do they want, for us to die of hunger?” Don Beto (age 45) expresses that the Zapatistas want a change in the country, “not just during elections. Then they come to see us. We tell them our demands of January 1, 1994, what we want – justice, democracy, liberty, health. But not just for us.” In Chiapas and other states of Mexico implementation of social programmes is an ever-growing policy orientation. This also includes legal recognition of traditional “*usos y costumbres*” – ways and customs (Medina 1995: 8). However, these policies have been drawn up in neoliberal terms, and often programmes appear to be designed to demobilise the people. Furthermore, it may be argued that indigenous rights are recognised in a deceitful manner by neoliberal governments, in that they are often designed to draw a line between tolerated cultural practices and “acceptable” indigenous demands for recognition, on the one hand, and other demands that government disqualifies as “too radical”, such as those for deeper agrarian reform or that profits from oil and minerals found on indigenous territories go to the indigenous people (Hale 2002). In any case, differential application of government social development programmes has deepened the economic gap between the PRI communities and the ever more precarious Zapatista communities.

However, during the three years of existence of *La Humanidad*, experience shows that they try to maintain family and community relations even with non-Zapatistas, and this allows for connection among groups with different political affiliations. Many people left the organisation because they found it difficult to maintain their resistance, given military persecution, being pointed out by non-Zapatistas, confronting physical and psychological aggression, losing once and for all the few material possessions they had before the 1994 war, and later being enticed to leave the EZLN with a multitude of government programmes offering what those still faithful to the movement consider to be “crumbs”. On the other hand, “entering” the organisation is a family question, at least with respect to the nuclear family. Some of the causes for “leaving” are family members having violated one or another of the revolutionary laws, whether drinking alcohol, beating women, or accepting government programmes. In these cases, the individual is expelled, and generally the entire family leaves the organisation. Many of these families become “PRI-istas” and accept or “enter” government programmes. A large number of families have maintained relations with ex-Zapatistas. Some members of *La Humanidad* even receive support from non-Zapatista family members. Some help because they are “family” or others because they sympathise with the ideology, though they have decided not to take on the responsibility of being Zapatistas. For example, Lorenzo’s wife says that she goes to the community of Manzanilla to visit her parents. She comes back with a bit of powdered milk and other food items which they give her, most of which had been handouts from the government program

“Oportunidades”. Also, they attend certain family events, such as weddings, baptisms, wakes, and thus the family relation continues.

Although those of *La Humanidad* have open conflicts with some communities, they maintain a positive relationship with other communities. Nico’s wife prepared cornbread for us, but she prepared what appeared to me to be too many. I told her, “I just wanted two”. She says, “Yes, I’m going to sell the rest there below,” that is, in other communities. Julia, my German friend, had sometimes brought them cloth at cheaper prices than those they could otherwise obtain, with which they make aprons or women’s dresses to sell in other communities. They also sell bananas or avocados, or exchange such products for something they do not have. Julia says that if the people in the other communities do not have the money to pay at that moment, they leave the products and go back another time for the payment. I comment that it is not good business, but she responds that it’s a way for them to maintain the relationships.

On another occasion, in Dos Rios, in the zone of Oventic, I had the chance to observe the relationships of the members of an ex-Zapatista family with one of the sons-in-law who is still in the organisation. I met the youngest son in San Cristobal, and he invited me to his mother’s birthday during Holy Week. Previously, everyone in this community was Zapatista, but during the past few years, many have left the organisation. However, they still share some spaces, such as the church, the autonomous transportation system, the autonomous clinics, and the Zapatista stores. This is only so in some communities of the Highlands and Jungle-Border zones. In the case of the *Caracol* Roberto Barrios in Palenque, the relationship in most communities is extremely conflictive. Meanwhile, in Dos Rios, relations depend on the political situation. When there is political tension, relations are poor. When tension diminishes, a space is opened for people to share what they do feel they have in common - their identity as Mayan, *Tzotzil*, or Catholic people, for example.

However, with respect to political trust, the situation is completely different. Some families try to separate family life from political affiliation, as was evident in the party I attended. Upon arrival, I was introduced to the family. My friend commented to me that his siblings were Zapatistas, but not his parents. Before the meal, his mother went to Mass. This church was built by the Zapatistas, and even the priest is Zapatista. When she returned, I asked her how she felt going to Mass with the Zapatistas, and she responded, “I like the church. We are the same community, and anyway I like how that Father gives the Mass. How could I not go? It’s important, they are God’s days, and if they – the Zapatistas – don’t mess with me, I don’t mess with them” (Valentina, age 57). Later on, my friend’s father arrived from the cornfield, washed his face and hands, changed his shirt, and went to church.

When he returned, I asked him the same question, and he responded, “I don’t care what they do. Besides, it’s the house of God. But if they start talking politics, that’s another story, that can’t be. Everyone does what they think is right. I’m PRI’ista, so don’t talk to me about politics, because there we do have problems” (Julio, age 62). They also told me that the Zapatista children go to the government school, except they do not accept the scholarships which the PRI children receive.

Bit by bit, the children arrive with their spouses. At mealtime, a table is set up on the *patio* and they begin to serve the meal. My friend introduces me to his youngest sister, the only one who, along with her spouse, is still Zapatista. When they arrive, both greet those present. After this, the husband does not speak with anyone. He sits in a chair at the end of the table, eats in silence, and keeps to himself at the margin of the conversation. After finishing his meal, he remains in silence, sitting on a small stool, playing with his young daughter. Sometimes he says something very general, but not much. The wife speaks with her parents, and after awhile, they say goodbye and leave. My friend told me it’s always that way. When they reunite, they try not to mix “politics” with family matters.

Those of *La Humanidad* are conscious of their differences with their neighbours. They express this differences when they explain their situation, placing moral value on their decisions and actions in phrases such as, “We survive as men and women,” “We support ourselves,” “We don’t owe anything to anyone,” “Those who now receive money no longer need to organise”. This is also expressed in small actions of daily life. For example, the following times I went to *La Humanidad*, I was advised not to bring candy, cookies, or other things to give to the children; gifts such as school supplies or clothes should be handed to a representative of the community so as not to play favourites, thus inciting possible conflicts. In the *campamento*, Julia said it is best not to offer food or other things to the children if they come by. “Besides, their parents prohibit them from asking.” In the *Caracol* of La Realidad, the reason for this quickly becomes evident. A group of about six children followed us constantly, saying, “Give me your cookies, give me your fruit, give me your flashlight, buy this necklace, buy this embroidered napkin...” Finally, I asked Angela, a Mexican history student, what we should do - they even followed us to the latrines! Julia said, “Those children are that way. They’re the PRI kids who always come by. They can’t forbid them, but they are always asking for things.” With time, we learned to recognise them. During our time there, I did not see a single Zapatista child asking. In the *Caracoles* of La Garrucha and Morelia, the PRI children also go to the *Caracol* and ask for any little thing – food, candy, money, or even, claiming that they are Zapatistas, demanding that you buy coffee, fruit, or eggs from them.

A very particular moral charge accompanies the arguments, commentaries, and analyses of those of *La Humanidad* when speaking of past experiences and making current decisions based on these. For example, a whole series of stories exists regarding the disadvantages of receiving government programmes. For example, “Those who receive things from the bad government are asked to show their land titles, birth certificates, voter registration cards... They ask them to sign papers. The banks are aligned with the bad government; they give the PRI’istas money but in exchange for land. One day there is a problem, and they will take away their land. They’ll say, ‘What about the money you received’⁶⁹?” (Don Beto, age 45). As a result, the Zapatistas always refer to the state and its institutions as the “Bad Government”. Yet, arguments such as the following show that they have analyzed the situation. “Before, we were even poorer, not like now that they offer housing credits, PROCAMPO, animals, business financing, Oportunidades, a thousand pesos – two thousand pesos for the old people... Now they want to give us things, but not because it’s the right thing to do, or because the government has changed, but because they want our organisation – the Zapatistas – to disappear. They give things we don’t need, but what we want is a change in the entire country” (Don Beto, age 45).

With the introduction of government programmes, great changes have taken place in the daily life of the communities. With respect to consumption patterns, previously little money circulated. Now that families receiving government programmes may have an income of close to 2000 Mexican pesos a month, consumption of soda, candy, and alcohol has increased. Furthermore, on a grand scale, from one generation to the next, people are also losing their knowledge and ability to make or otherwise provide the things which formerly sustained them. This includes certain abilities in construction (particularly with local materials), sewing, cultivation and food preparation techniques, and making ceramic pots, net bags, and other artisan goods. On the days economic aid is handed out, cases of violence increase in the communities. As the wife is the only one who can receive the money or “assistance”, as they call it, sometimes husbands beat their wives in order to obtain the money. On the days the money is given out, it is also common to see many drunks on paths or roads or on public transportation when they return from Las Margaritas. Those of *La Humanidad* have their own arguments for understanding what happens. They say, “As a *campesino*, one doesn’t know how to administer money – we didn’t have it

⁶⁹Some inhabitants of a rural municipality of Chiapas who are domestic workers in San Cristobal commented that in some communities, regional PRI representatives even marked the arms of those who entered government programmes with a hot iron. It is important to mention that this could not be corroborated.

before. So it easily disappears, and you go and ask for more. The bank gives it to you, but through the bank, the government is going to take your land away one day” (Don Beto, age 45).

According to a five year research project directed by Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha (2007), by 2007, five million households, approximately 25 million Mexicans, were receiving the Opportunities programme, which progressively covered rural, semi-urban, and urban areas. Without a doubt, a programme which reaches 25 million people has to have some positive impact on the lives of the children to which it attends. However, it must be remembered that this community sprang up in the midst of a regional armed conflict, and residents have collectively and individually experienced enough to think of possible negative implications if they accept government programmes. Past experiences with the ex-landowner of the *hacienda* have taught them to be suspicious of handouts. However, despite their rejection of government programs, they do maintain as much as possible family relationships and affective relations with people of other communities who do not take the same attitude as them concerning their relationship to the government.

4.5. Differences within the community:

So far we have explored some cohesive aspects of social life – the things which unite those of *La Humanidad*, demonstrating a certain level of homogeneity. However, it is precisely in daily life where certain aspects of social differentiation stand out. The truth of David’s comment that, “It’s very difficult to move forward together in community” is observed in complex situations such as achieving coordination in work tasks on which everyone depends for their own as well the community’s survival. Such tasks include keeping watch of those of UES and the military, obtaining potable water, and caring for the little water they do have. As explained in the previous chapter, those of *La Humanidad* were divided into at least three groups in 1995 and reunited when this community was founded. They went through 11 years of a variety of experiences, receiving training courses and interacting with other groups. Thus, different community members learned different things about working and living with others. This is expressed in personal or family initiatives. For example, as previously stated, they have two collective stores – one in the community and another on the highway. However, during the last few months of 2009, two small stores were also opened in houses. They offer a very limited selection of products, but are essentially “private” businesses. One is on the upper edge community. The owners are Don Esteban and his family. As we went there to buy matches or cigarettes, we occasionally spoke with their 11 year old daughter. She showed us many family photos, including when they assisted her cousin’s wedding in a non-Zapatista community. What was surprising about

these photos was that all the women attending the wedding used the same type of dress, of the same cloth and design. This should not cause us to imagine an ostentatious wedding; not at all. However, this is surprising in a context where the average family income is one dollar per week. This girl also showed us a stuffed musical bear and a poster on the wall. She said that her aunts had given it to her. Perhaps extended family members had lent them money to invest in their business.

Another store which had recently opened belonged to David's in-laws. They had cleared out a small wooden room, bought salt, candles, and two sacks of sugar. This family always looks for ways to increase their income. In previous years, I have been told, they went to La Mesilla, the border between Mexico and Guatemala, to buy plastic utensils and other items, despite the difficulty involved in travelling, carrying the merchandise, and selling it in the community. In such cases, the greatest difficulties confronted are comments by neighbours. It seems that the most effective manner of regulating people's behaviour is through community gossip. Upon arrival in *La Humanidad*, we received the recommendation to make sure to visit all the houses, greet everyone, not stay late at Bety's house, and not give anything to anyone in particular. The community keeps close and continuous watch on the actions of each and every one of its members. In the following section, we will see how the diversity of their experiences in their years of exile become apparent in their aspirations, political practices, and forms of working when they jointly establish the community La Humanidad.

4.6. Differences in origin:

In 1995, when then-president Ernesto Zedillo ordered the capture of all Zapatistas and a massive military incursion in those areas of the municipality of Las Margaritas in which there was a Zapatista presence, the inhabitants of *La Humanidad* lived in Nuevo Momon. This community had been founded on land which their former land owner ceded to them when the Agrarian Reform laws finally yielded fruit in this region in the mid-1970s, as explained in the previous chapter. In 1995, when the Federal Army arrived in Nuevo Momon, those who were Zapatistas fled to hide in the mountains. Some "Momoneros", as those of *La Humanidad* refer to inhabitants of Momon who did not join the EZLN, helped the soldiers pursue the Zapatistas, guiding them along the paths. At that point, those who currently live in *La Humanidad* divided into three principal groups and went to live in different communities with supportive families. However, they maintained communication, and reunited in 2006 when the Good Government Council authorised them to re-occupy the land they had previously lived on as indentured servants. To illustrate how diverse political and educational experiences impact the capability of individuals to resolve problems or

develop projects to transform their circumstances, I will present three families which particularly drew my attention. However, I do not mean to imply that these families represent the archetypical “Zapatista family”.

David’s family was first taken in by family members of the non-Zapatista community Morelos. Later, with one other extended family, they formed their own all-Zapatista community, Santa Cecilia, on nearby borrowed land. David is married, with five daughters. Also living in *La Humanidad* are his parents, a single sister, a single brother, and another sister who is married to Nico and has three children. They all participate very actively in matters of community organisation. They had also participated in the training sessions which the Marist Mission provided in Morelos. The women of his family make bread to sell, sew clothing for use or sale, and are always inquiring how to make this or that. They work from 4:30 in the morning until 7 or 8 at night; they are always doing something. Although there is no electricity in the community, the single brother has a small battery powered TV on which he watches the news. He is aware of international politics and reads what has been published about his movement, as well as about other Latin American revolutionary movements. Through their training by the Marists, David learned how to make a stove which replaced the traditional smoke-generating open cooking fire. This stove uses less firewood and has a chimney, and therefore does not contaminate the air and damage the cook’s lungs. With a car battery, a cable, and a small light bulb, he illuminates his kitchen so his daughters have light during suppertime. He has built a composting latrine, which separates the faeces from the urine, so that both products may be used as fertilizer. He is also learning horticulture and is experimenting with fruit crops such as pineapple and strawberries. As his girls say, “We’ll see what will come of it.”

Don Alberto’s family lived in Monte Sagrado. This family also works non-stop. They are in charge of the church commission. The wife spends the day grinding coffee or corn, and very attentively taking care of her grandchildren when her daughter leaves for commission. They participate very actively in the *cargos* of the *Caracol*. Their house is clean and organised, though they have not implemented any out of the ordinary innovation. When she invited us to eat, she commented that they were waiting for the avocados to fall from the trees, that sometimes they pulled them down with long poles, but if there were no more, we would have to wait till next season. On one occasion, when we had a problem in the *campamento*, she and her husband told us we had to pray, pray a lot and with much faith, and that we shouldn’t be afraid, that God would protect us, or perhaps we were losing our faith and that’s why we were having those problems. She once told us, “God our father confronted great problems, but he also taught us how to resolve them.” (Doña Ester, age 59).

Finally, I will mention three brothers, grown adults, whose mother abandoned them as children. They basically grew up as orphans, and returned to live in Nuevo Momon when the military persecution ended. Their wives range from 15 to 24 in age, and the two youngest are illiterate. They had not had the benefit of training courses, and most likely, as is the case of many youth who were in primary school at the time of the uprising, their education was abruptly interrupted. By the time the autonomous schools were set up, these children had been incorporated into family labours and, due to need for workers, were no longer of the age seen as acceptable for studying. I never had a chance to speak with the brothers, but I did get to know their wives a bit. The times we went to visit them, their houses had been left alone, doors open, clothing on the floor along with open sacks of corn, and chicken and dogs going in and out of the house, eating the spilled corn. Their gardens and land appeared to be untended. A couple of times while waiting on the highway for a truck which would take us to Las Margaritas, we saw two of the wives returning from nearby communities where they stay for a few days when their husbands are on commission. They were carrying food in a plastic bag, which their family members quite likely gave them. Their attitude- their lack of initiative - strongly contrasts with most of the rest of the families of *La Humanidad*, and in general comes into conflict with the health projects and community agreements which try to “get the community ahead”. Other community members commented that they were the only ones who had not worked the lands well and had to buy corn halfway through the year.

Difference in origin is not something which is seen as a motive of conflict in the community. However, it does mark a difference in matters such as attitude toward work and responsibility for respecting communitarian agreements. David’s family is a good example; they are hard workers and have initiative and an attitude of leadership. This strongly contrasts with the apathy or lack of participation of the wives just mentioned, who do not respect agreements which the health and hygiene commission has presented before the community. The fact that they leave the community when their husbands are fulfilling a duty elsewhere contrasts with the attitude of the women of Don Alberto’s house who also, having only the basic necessities, organise to care for the children, prepare the food, keep their homes clean, and produce a variety of items to exchange or sell. Through daily life and actions, most the people of *La Humanidad* are preparing a strategy of resistance. The political intention behind the actions is what differentiates them from millions of other poor communities in Mexico.

4.7. The emergence of complex actors:

Former Archbishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia has remarked that one of the achievements of the Zapatista movement is that it allowed outsiders to begin to understand the complexity of the life of the communities of Chiapas (Samuel Ruiz Garcia 2003). Studies published during the past decade have made an attempt to convey this (Washbrook 2007). However, such studies have also generally presented the Zapatista movement as monolithic or homogenous, without specifying which group of Zapatistas or which area of Chiapas they are talking about. We cannot even say that the Zapatistas of the Highland Region are all alike. Those of Oventic are different from those of the municipality of San Andres, even though they live in the same area and both are Tzotzil.

From my point of view, despite these differences, upon trying to create a joint project, they try to unite themselves in a common discourse, called “Zapatismo”. For example, when Julia commented to young community member that two neighbours have personal problems, he commented, “That’s what the church is for, so they can resolve it” (Rodrigo, age 26). However, on another occasion, when an older catechist was using scare tactics to convince church members to attend the weekly Sunday meetings, Rodrigo argued to the congregation, “Some would say that we have to go to church because if we don’t, God will punish us. But, if we are going to go, it’s because, as Che Guevara said, ‘We do it out of love’”. This type of thought synthesizes, on the one hand, the influence of Liberation Theology present in the region since the early 1960s through the Marists and the Violeta Sisters (Estrada Saavedra 2007), and on the other, the Zapatista analysis of class struggle. This represents a significant historical change in Mexico from the times when other “radical” leftist political and social movements tended to be strongly anti-clerical and militantly secular in their orientation and often alienated the very people that they were trying to mobilise (see Becker 1996). Liberation Theology’s great achievement is the more recent convergence between Catholicism and radical social movements. This movement likely took hold because it recognized their earthly suffering of the indigenous people, while not rejecting their deeply religious ways. However, much of the Church hierarchy still opposes this type of pastoral action, making it necessary to distinguish between the Church as an Institution, which tends to be fairly right wing, and leftist-oriented Catholics. In practice, many lay activists, nuns, and priests simply disobey or ignore instructions from more conservative bishops as they carry out their pastoral work.

Some members of these new generations are also exposed to research and other writings on their own armed movement. For example, when Rodrigo has the opportunity, he seeks out borrowed books or photocopies, and has read works by French historian and sociologist

Andres Aubry and Belgian historian Jan de Vos. Although this is not a general attitude, other members of his community are also absorbing new types of knowledge. We cannot foresee the long-term impact of these external influences on the behaviour of social actors such as Rodrigo and their implications on the social movement as a whole. This is what makes this social movement an innovation. The Zapatista process of political and ideological formation strongly contrasts with that which other youth are receiving – for example, those who have united with evangelical groups such as the previously cited Army of God, which has a military structure and whose members see themselves as defenders of the country's institutions and of the President of the Mexican Republic (MILAMEX March 2010). They have appropriated the phrase “If I advance, follow me. If I am detained, push me. If I turn back, kill me,” (Lopez Arevalo 2008)⁷⁰. The ideological upbringing of Zapatista youth also strongly contrasts with that of Catholic traditionalists of San Juan Chamula who, having kicked evangelicals out of their village on several occasions, continue to be known for providing a strong electoral base for the PRI.

Another occurrence demonstrates the range of interpretations and reactions within the community, allowing us to discern elements influencing the young population and changes in vision which the community is undergoing. One night before going to sleep, Angela and I were talking in our tent until after midnight. The dogs barked much more than usual and we could hear them running in all directions. The community is located among mountains and far from any road, so during a moonless, starless night, it is difficult to see anything. That night was particularly dark. When we tried to sleep, we saw a large light shining on the tent, but there was no noise. The first thing we thought was that the military had entered the community. We opened the flap of the tent but saw no one. However, a light was suspended above the *campamento*. A while later, the light turned red and began to shine directly on the tent door. We could not call anyone as the closest house was more than 100m away. Julia slept in a tent facing ours, but the following day said she had not seen anything. However, she said there is “something” they call the “*cajchoj*” – a being in the form of a dog which has horns with lights shining out of them. Supposedly, it comes out at night to play in the woods. One of the young men later told me it has a tail so long it drags it on the ground and from one horn shines a white light, and from the other a red light. Later on, we asked David's mother, and she said, “Yes (it exists), but it only appears in the most organised communities. It appears in order to frighten us, so that we leave. But we don't

⁷⁰While Lopez Arevalo attributed this phrase to the brutal Kaibil special forces of Guatemala, this quote has also been attributed to Che Guevara, Julio Antonio Mella – founder of the Cuban Communist Party, and even a counterrevolutionary leader from 18th Century France.

have to be afraid of it. We have to defend our community” (Doña Blanca). With these arguments, I remembered a book of Tojolabal stories which had been donated to the community. Angela and I had been reading it one of those afternoons when there was not much to do. There was a legend which told of a *hacienda* owner who forces a fearful *campesino* to go to the woods during the night. The *patron* turns himself into a tiger and waits for the *campesino* in order to eat him. During the night, the *campesino* is afraid, but the wood of a tree speaks to him and tells him to make a circle of fire and sit in the middle. He does not want to, but the wood convinces him. The tiger-*patron* stalks the fearful *campesino*, but the fire speaks to him, telling him, “When the tiger jumps to eat you, jump outside the circle, and leave the tiger to me”. When this occurs, the fire burns the tiger. The next morning, the *campesino* returns to the *hacienda* and the *patron*’s wife tells him that her husband has died.

This book says these are traditional Tojolabal stories. It is quite interesting that in Doña Blanca’s interpretation of our experience, two aspects are similar to the story of the *campesino* and the *patron*, and a third is adapted to their new reality. First, we have the continuity of traditional thought that the *cajchoj* or supernatural beings exist. Second is the idea of an incarnated power in the image of a supernatural being which wishes to harm the *campesino*. Third is the argument that this – *cajchoj*, tiger, *patron* – only appears in the communities which are organised, or in this immediate context, those who are the Zapatistas. The synthesis of these elements allows Doña Blanca to rapidly interpret surrounding events. I do not mean to say that she had read the book of legends to which I refer. However, this shows the type of “*popular*” knowledge which is now mixed with ideas regarding class struggle, political parties, and other concepts which nourish the Zapatista movement in general and her community in particular.

We also found other interpretations more closely related to a traditional Catholic point of view. When we spoke with Don Alberto’s wife about the *cajchoj*, she said, “The Word of God speaks of this, but the church has taught us not to be afraid of such things. If we have faith in God, nothing can happen to us. It’s a matter of going out and confronting it. If you believe in God, pray each night and it won’t appear to you again” (Doña Luz, age 54). After we had spoken about the incident with different community members, the men later addressed the issue in their assembly. That night, a group of six teenage boys came by our *campamento*, asked how we were doing, and said, “Don’t be afraid, *muchachas*, that thing that appears doesn’t do anything, it just wants to play... you should have gone out with your flashlights to see what it was... that way it sees that you’re not afraid of it,” (Rambo, age 13). So I asked, “And you all, what would you have done?” They laughed and began to push each other. “This one would have gone out [to tackle it],” he pointed to his friend.

“Because he’s called Terminator he would have gone out to give it to him good (*“en la madre”*). We know how to fight, well, because we know how to go out in the woods at night, we go out keeping watch. We know how to fight.” (Rambo and Terminator, age 13 and 17).

Rambo and Terminator are names that they themselves have chosen. In this environment, militia members have the habit of choosing their battle name, as did the commanders *Bruce Lee* or *Mister*, who in 2003 were members of the General Committee of the Indigenous Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee (CCRI-CG) of the EZLN. The religious interpretation was absent in the comments of these youth, but they continued to believe in animal-like beings linked to nature. Such traits are present in the popular cosmovision throughout Chiapas, but, according to Cruz Coutiño, “The municipality of Las Margaritas is among the municipalities with a higher narrative density and prolific oral tradition” (Cruz Coutiño 2006: 178).

These new generations – Rambo, Terminator, and friends – were probably born close to the time of the armed Zapatista uprising. They find that the world in which their parents were born has not changed much. Nevertheless, in the political context in which they have grown up, they find new elements which they incorporate into their world. Coutiño, after reviewing Chiapan legends, finds a constant thread – “The theme of the diminished, orphans, and abandoned ones - those who later endure unalterable suffering. Due to divine will they turn into beings which transform and liberate their peoples - whether they be servants of the *kaxlans* (non-indigenous), the priest, or their bosses” (2006: 181). Perhaps in the minds of this youngest generation, exposed to Hollywood, it is no longer necessary to wait for *divine will* to liberate their peoples. Liberation theology and new knowledge available are used to reinforce their ideas of struggle and resistance. What is certain is that *La Humanidad* is the result of many organisational experiences accumulated during its inhabitants’ eleven years of exile, but they also show many signs of conserving traits which they consider to be Tojolabal, and yet others from their former *hacienda* life.

4.8. Conflict resolution:

In solving daily conflicts, the church plays an important role; as Rodrigo said, “That’s what the church is for”. As previously pointed out, “the church” is only an altar in the hallway of the school. They have no priest, but the church commission takes charge of organising and inviting the people to the Sunday Bible reading. They try to hold a church service each week, but sometimes almost all community members are fulfilling *cargos* outside the community, and the service is postponed. They celebrate important dates such as Holy Week in March or April, Day of the Holy Cross on May 3, All Saints at the end of October

and beginning of November, Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe on December 12, and Christmas on December 2. Most families have a small altar in their home. Their relationship with the Catholic Church dates back a long time. As noted earlier, the Tojolabales had contact with the Marists since the early 1960s (Estrada Saavedra 2007), from whom they received training courses in many practical skills and crafts in a community in the municipality of Las Margaritas. Other Catholic religious denominations are present in other municipalities, with a variety of visions and missions.

Due to this variety of religious and political influences, it is hard to define the relationship of the Zapatista community as a whole with the Catholic religion as an institution. What is certain is that in the communities I visited throughout my research, I came across Catholic priests who definitely sympathised with the Zapatista posture. The presence of Bishop Emeritus Samuel Ruiz in the commemoration of the Acteal massacre on December 22, 2008 in the community of Acteal shows that links are maintained among Zapatista communities, Zapatista supporters, and Church leaders. However, we cannot state that the Church as an institution has such a relationship with the movement. Those of *La Humanidad* are Catholic, and while most are true believers, religious life and Biblical studies are also tools for understanding social life and resolving practical problems in this life. In their religious meetings, the weekly Bible passage is most often related to some problem affecting the community in order to promote reflection and seek creative solutions to the conflict. The passage is read, and then the catechist asks if those present understood the reading and what opinions they have. Any community member may respond, and those present typically relate the reading to current problems, express their disagreements, and declare their feelings on these issues.

Other actors associated with the Zapatista movement also rework Catholic practices as a way of inducing what they call “analysis of reality”. For example, Sister Socorro is an active sympathiser with the Zapatista movement. Previously, she was a member of a congregation in the Mexican state of Toluca. She says that when she heard of the movement in 1994, she asked for permission to leave the congregation. She continues to live the life of a nun, but in Chiapas. Now, without belonging to any religious order, she lives, works, and participates in all the events she can, but she still maintains that she is a nun. For example, she and a group of neighbourhood associations along with leftist groups of San Cristobal on May 3 organised a celebration of the Day of the Holy Cross in San Cristobal. With friends and neighbours, I attended the ceremony, which was held at the source of the water which the Municipality provides for a large portion of the town. At that moment, Mexico was at the peak of the H1N1 (swine flu) outbreak. None of those present used mouth covers or masks as the Mexican health department advised by television and

other media. During this celebration, an altar was set up with flowers and candles and a Catholic procession took place. Those who remained to the end reflected upon the biblical passage “The Weddings of Canaan”, which speaks of how Jesus transformed water to wine and his actions toward his brothers and sisters. We were invited to participate, expressing our understanding of the reading. The people began to speak of water, its importance, the day which was being celebrated. Then they began to speak of water taxes and the privatisation of water and electricity, but in a way that was to some extent related to the life of Jesus. People spoke of those who govern in Mexico, and questioned whether the H1N1 virus was real. Finally, Sister Socorro said that it was good that the youth didn’t use mouth covers, because we had nothing to be ashamed of. Those who should be covering their faces are the politicians. Although San Cristobal is considered to be an urban area and its inhabitants are largely *Mestizo*, practices transmitted by the Liberation Theology wing of the Catholic Church also have significant pockets of influence in this context.

4.9. Other conflicts, other alternatives:

The following incident illustrates the types of contradictions faced in making the transition from a community in which conduct and social relations are tightly regulated by age and gender hierarchies to living in a community in which people freely make their own decisions. A young married couple of *La Humanidad* had three children. The husband, Javier, began an extramarital affair with a married woman named Zenaida, also of the community. Javier’s sister in law found them together in bed. A village assembly was called, and the problem was explained. Some gave the opinion that the revolutionary laws had been violated. After much discussion, it was agreed that as punishment, they would have to do community labour. Thus they were put to work for a month, principally gathering firewood in the centre of the community, in plain sight of all. The following month, they were again found together. On this occasion, the family of Javier’s wife asked that they be punished in the traditional manner, which consisted of placing them in separate houses and tying them, standing up, to a pole all night long. In the end, community opinion was divided. Those who asked for traditional punishment were the members of the wife’s family, with support from the church commission and two other families. On the other hand, Javier’s family said that due to the fact that it was a repeated offense, a superior authority should intervene. Nico and family supported this proposal.

David and the father of Bety then argued that “They (the village) were no longer savages”, that for such cases the law existed and that although Javier and Zenaida had offended the community, their rights should be respected and it was not necessary to inflict physical punishment. No member of David’s family was directly involved in this problem, but it

seems to me that their arguments had to do with their strong desire to “get the community moving ahead”. Perhaps they perceived this problem as a grave risk which could divide people, and an issue which could damage the reputation of the whole community for some time to come. Bety, as noted earlier, is a member of the Good Government Council. Her father is a man who is distinguished and respected for his active duty in the organisation and the community struggle. In the end, the majority supported their initiative of bringing the offenders before the Council.

They brought them to the *Caracol*, where the complaint was presented. The Council decided that they would punish them there by making them do through physical labour while under observation by the vigilance commission. After a few months, Javier and Zenaida had separated from their respective spouses, and together abandoned the community. Zenaida’s husband rapidly married another woman. Offended from the start, he had flatly refused to accept his wife back again. Javier’s wife did not know what to do, for she had three small children. In the face of this new problem, the village assembly decided the community would take care of her. The proposed solution was the following: the community would support her training as an education promoter. They would use part of the profits from the community store to pay for her travel fare to the training courses, and the men would take turns working her land to provide the family’s food.

For several months she attended the courses, with some absences due to the fact that the community had difficulty in finding another young woman who would accompany her, as a woman cannot be allowed to travel alone. Then suddenly, Javier returned and convinced her to leave the community with him. She left her home, her plantings, and the training, took her children, and went with him. Some time later, when we visited the house of her uncle, Julia asked what had happened to her. He commented that now she could never return, that she could not mock the community, because they had supported her using the money of all its members. He said that none of the three could ever live there again, and that her family did not oppose this stance. We know that her parents have seen her and keep in contact. But in the end, she lost her rights in the community and left the organisation.

To my understanding, the outcome of this event is influenced by the following situations. First, there is a Council member living in the community, which represents a great responsibility for its residents and to some extent, obliges them to be an example for other communities, and they are aware of this. Second, constantly observation by opposing organisations such as the UES, and even the presence of a military base 300 meters away, also has strong implications for the community. Therefore, if people physically punished someone from their community, they could, at the least, be accused of human rights violation. Being Zapatistas is a weighty responsibility in such circumstances, since the

police and other organisations could use the situation as a pretext for invading their land. Third, and of no less importance in their decisions, is the fact that they belong to a military organisation, that their inhabitants are Zapatista members, and that they are aware they must respect higher levels of the organisation. Another important aspect is that, as a group, they have been exposed for the past fifteen years to intercultural exchanges with people from many other countries. This has affected their values and their way of perceiving themselves and those who surround them. The novelty of this case is the manner in which they resolve the conflict and the strategies they develop in order to provide a measure of “social security” to their members in times of difficulty.

4.10. Building a life together:

In a context in which people must confront an endless number of obstacles in order to reach their immediate and long-term objectives, it is important to recognise the progress achieved since the community’s foundation three years ago. This includes the health situation. Thus far, there has been no death in the community, and illnesses which were previously common such as diarrhoea, fever, and skin infections have diminished. With respect to education, there has been progress among the children and adolescents, although formal classes have not been carried out the entire time. With respect to their economy, community members are constantly seeking ways to resolve economic deficiencies and obtain what they need. They know their only resource is their collective work and individual efforts. Only three families purchased corn in 2009, when many of the people in neighbouring villages, or because of government support, purchased corn throughout the year. Also, with the help of friends who sell them seeds at a low cost, they are diversifying their gardens and familiarising themselves with new fruits and vegetables to supplement the variety of wild and semi-wild products they are accustomed to gathering. Since 1995, many have also participated in agro ecology workshops through the church. These training courses introduced techniques for improving their crops. These agroecological techniques are alternatives to Green Revolution technologies, which had largely replaced traditional cultivation practices with agrochemicals. However, in addition to agroecology techniques such as double digging, composting, and planting seed beds which are practiced among organic gardeners from the United States to Australia, these workshops placed a high value on local traditional knowledge. Thus, those of *La Humanidad* still consume many wild foods, grow sugarcane to sweeten their coffee while most families in the region purchase and consume several kilograms of sugar per week, and maintain a higher level of diversity in their cornfields than many other communities in the region and in Chiapas. Traditional foods are now supplemented with vegetables, “from outside”, as they say, such as lettuce,

carrots, chard, radishes, and cabbage. However, as these are relatively new to their diet, they still inquire, “How do you plant it? How do you prepare it?” Thus, they are in the process of diversifying their diet from the currently typical corn, beans, coffee, and sugar, and thus are working toward food self-sufficiency.

In addition, though workshops, they also learned other so-called “alternative technologies” such as composting latrines, wood-saving “loreña” stoves, and building with local materials. So far, very few families have built composting latrines, but almost all boil their drinking water. They also re-use water from washing dishes, for example, to wet down the earthen kitchen floor to keep it firm and uniform and prevent dust where food is being prepared. In general, the families place ash in the latrines to prevent disease transmission through flies and other insects. They reuse cloth from shirts, dresses, or pants to make or patch other clothing or, more commonly, as cloth diapers. In general they lack many things, but consider that what is really important is that they have their own land without patrons. All this work is worth it, and, as they often state, “They’ll only take us out of here dead.”

By their third year of community life, after the government had made an offer to the UES which convinced them to leave the people of *La Humanidad* in peace, things had changed. According to Julia, who has known many of the community members for almost seven years, until recently conversations in *La Humanidad* often dealt with “Whether the Momoneros threatened them, the army, the lands, the *planton*. The people lived frightened. They slept little. All the time they were on vigilance commissions.” Now the topics have changed. They speak of their children’s health, new couples, the celebration of the community’s anniversary, how to make tamales, whether there will be music. Now they have grand plans – for example, how to install electricity for the entire community, which will cost 30,000 Mexican pesos, and bit by bit they have purchased or otherwise obtained some of the necessary parts. They also meet to discuss how to install an efficient potable water system. Each day they remind the children of the history of the uprising. They tell them of the history of the *hacienda* and why they are doing what they are doing. The children know of the Basque movement, and the revolutionary history of Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Vietnam. This type of learning is in part a result of getting to know foreigners who have visited. Although no structured program of political education exists within the community, such talk is always in the air.

This is common in other societies which have undergone intense social movements, as demonstrated by Rosendhal’s work on daily life in Cuba, in which she states that “the idea of the revolution is referred to by everyone, in all kind of situations, and is defined in many different ways” (1997: 111). That is, the idea of “the movement” and “the organisation” is brought into daily life, and is present not only in “large events” where mass media may be

present⁷¹. The people of *La Humanidad* have an obvious interest in comparing their own situation with other realities. Don Enrique (49) told me, “You see, we know that there are people in the city who have no house, who live all on top of each other, who have nowhere to plant. And if there is no work? What are they going to eat? That’s tough! (“*Cabron!*”) We know there’s poverty all over. What? They don’t exploit you as students? Do you have the assurance of a job tomorrow?” This kind of talk is common in daily interaction. They often asked me, “You who live in England, what’s it like there. How do you live?” Their situation provides opportunities for relations which are changing their perspective on all aspects of life.

4.11. The community and the Good Government Council:

La Humanidad reveals a different sense of community, which strongly contrasts with state discourse in which “the Indian [has been seen] as an ethnic category based on malleable cultural signs such clothing, language, and place of residence” (Harrison 2002: 67). As we have seen, the members of this community are more than this. They are more than the sum of the inhabitants and, having examined their past, project themselves toward the future. Above all, they are conscious of the fact that they depend on each other in order to achieve the life they struggle for. However, their desire and efforts to build and maintain their community will not yield effective results if they do not maintain close relations with the centre of their organisation, their autonomous government.

In many ways, as seen in the previous chapter, this community is the product of the initiative of the people and the Good Government Council – from the petition for land, to the planning of actions necessary for occupying the land, to coordinating their defence. The council is also involved in planning health and education programmes, natural resource administration, and, as we have just seen, arbitrating community problems and conflicts. All these measures apply to daily life, demonstrating a constant, mutual relationship between the Council and the community. Not only does the Council influence community life and vice versa, but the borders between the two are often unclear.

For the fourth time, we went to have coffee in Don Esteban’s house. His wife and daughters are always doing something. So we told them, “O.K., we’ll have coffee, but let

⁷¹Nevertheless, this practice has been transmitted from the *Caracoles*. For example, during large Zapatista festivities such as the anniversary of their organisation or of the armed uprising, in the collective cafeteria-store in Oventic, it is common to project films on the Cuban revolution, the Sandinista movement, the life of Che Guevara, El Salvador, Peru, etc. Thus they promote knowledge of a variety of social movements. During such projections, men, women, and children attentively watch the films.

us help ‘*desgranar*’ the corn” (remove the kernels from the cob). Don Esteban says, “Go for it – *andale*.” So Angela, Don Esteban, his wife, and I sat around a plastic tub “de-graining” the corn. Don Esteban was one of the 1,111 delegates on the so called March of the Colour of the Earth in 2001, which travelled from Chiapas to Mexico City. He did not travel just to be able to tell of his experiences. He says that he did not like Mexico City – a lot of light and he was not able to sleep because he was not used to it, but he did like Xochimilco and this or that other thing. We spoke, going from one topic to another, until I said, “I understand what you’re telling me, but what is this about command by obeying? That’s odd, no?” He answered, “Look, *compañera*, it’s not that difficult. For example, we want to eat and we have to de-grain this corn to make the tortilla. So we are going to choose who will organise the activity. So we choose this *compañera*.” He points to Angela “The *compañera* has to tell us how, how many corncobs each person will de-grain and all that. But if the *compañera* doesn’t work, she just wants to order, well no, right? That’s no good. So we take her out (of her position) and look for another *compañera* or *compañero* who does what we want. That’s how our government is, *compañera*. It has to do what’s right for us, because we put it there – not what is convenient for its own interests, because if we chose it, we take it away.”

This was not the first time I had heard such arguments. From the beginning of my fieldwork in the *Caracol* of Oventic, the Political Information Commission explained to me, “Look, *compañera*, before the Spanish arrived, we were capable of governing ourselves, directing ourselves. Why don’t we do that now? We can do it ourselves.” In this community, as in many other spaces, they reflect, speak, and make proposals for the future based on their recuperated and collectively reconstructed historic memory. Jelin says that this process “strengthens the sense of belonging and often helps build greater self-confidence” (Jelin 2001: 98).

Displaying humility to avoid envy and conflict is common in indigenous communities in Chiapas, but this cultural norm does seem to be the only reason why Zapatistas do not often speak of achievements, but rather of what remains to be done. It is important to point out that when they speak of accomplishments, they refer to them always in terms of levels of autonomy. “To build our autonomy, we don’t need people from the government to come help us. We train our doctors and health promoters” (Political Information Commission). As I previously mentioned, in the *Caracol* of Oventic I was told, “No, *compañera*. Yes, yes, we are very happy that you all visit us. But look - right now for education projects, we are already being our own teachers. Yes, I would like you to be there. But if you come and do it, then what do we do, if we have to occupy our teachers who we train, no? Isn’t that what autonomy is about?” (Pedrito Fernandez, age 56). This process of autonomy, guided and

organised by the Good Government Council, is expressed in two ways. First is the need to possess or appropriate a base from which to create their project – in this case, the land. Second, they must train their own human resources to be capable of realising their goals. As a consequence, the close relationship between the Good Government Council and *La Humanidad* is constraining as well as facilitating, in the sense that any project or programme one wishes to develop in a community must be presented first to the Council. Since the foundation of the *Caracoles* and Good Government Councils in 2003, it was declared that the only task of these new institutions was to approve, channel, monitor, and regulate the development of the Zapatista communities. For example, the relationship between *La Humanidad* and the Council is coordinated in the following manner: In the community, the people state their needs, give opinions, and jointly propose solutions. When they have a plan or idea, they meet with the Council and explain what they wish to do and what assistance they require. The Council then seeks a way to assist them. Recently, the men of *La Humanidad* sought permission to work in Cancun, Playa del Carmen, and The Yucatan. The Council gave permission, but coordinated this activity in terms of how many could leave at a time and for how long (3 months), and they dictated the family and community responsibilities with which they would have to comply. All were given permission to leave, in a rotating manner. However, some community members swapped their turns with others, or some older men sent their younger family members on a second round in their stead. Another permanent link between the community and the Council is provided by the promoters, commissions, and sub-commissions. The relationship between them and the Council is complementary and reciprocal, and while the existence of one would not be possible without the others, it is also true that the communities recognise the Council as an authority and their government, and they treat it as an entity which serves to coordinates their efforts.

4.12. Final thoughts:

My ethnographic study shows how the community prioritises certain aspects of collective life such as health, education, and religious life in order to consciously work together on improving these areas in a planned manner. In conjunction with their Good Government Council, they build their autonomy. In order to achieve their goals and objectives, they use resources, strategies, and knowledge gained in previous experiences. In this way, they seek political autonomy, and reject state intervention and financing and relations with government institutions. As a consequence, they have designed a series of strategies which they jointly apply in order to live in what they call resistance. By taking control of the land and building their community, they are generating a space for political participation. In the

past, such self-government was not possible, and it remains a challenge today. The people of *La Humanidad* know that as indigenous *campesinos*, they face government pressure to do away with peasant subsistence agriculture to make way for more commercially oriented forms of production and transform the rural economy in ways which will benefit the export economy. For example, one recent government programme is the development of “Rural Cities” in order to concentrate *campesinos* in “poles of development” where they will work as wage labour in industries and have greater access to schools and hospitals, but at lesser cost to the government than when scattered in rural villages. Another programme, termed “agricultural reconversion”, aims to transform *campesino* agriculture from growing for self-provisioning to producing export crops. Facing this panorama, they have two options: incorporate themselves into these government-backed programs, or generate their needed material and cultural capital with their own resources. Their autonomous project clearly has weaknesses. For example, thus far in order to carry out many projects, they have required the participation of national or international civil society. Nevertheless, even under these circumstances, we may appreciate the emergence of an alternative “solidarity” economy. This economic and social self-development initiative revives local customs of reciprocal exchange of goods and services, customs which are disappearing in other neighbouring communities as they are incorporated into the culture of government programmes. Due to the fact that these practices have existed in all indigenous communities no matter what their political affiliation, we may say that the Zapatista self-government project is based on the culture of the indigenous *campesino* community. However, so as to improve upon traditional customs, the Zapatista community encourages political participation by every community member in every single decision which will affect their lives and community.

In the case of the Mexican State of Oaxaca, the practice of “ways and customs” has been recognised (Bartolome 1996; Medina 1995) as a legal mechanism for electing local municipal authorities. However, those elected often remained loyal to the PRI party. Thus, the official electoral system and conventional party politics remained unchallenged. Unlike the case of Oaxaca, *La Humanidad* and the Good Government Council seek to distance themselves from the state in order to generate spaces for direct political participation, which includes management of their own resources as well as creation of their own health and education systems. Furthermore, they have created their autonomous Zapatista government, which is a complex network of internal coordination that extends outward in order to sustain the Good Government Council, which in turn again sustains the communities.

As a consequence of this separation from the state, the network of communities which conform the Zapatista grassroots movement is also transforming local dynamics such as inter-community exchanges, marriages among Zapatista members, and collective work. All

this takes place in a multi-ethnic environment. Transformation of gender relations and domestic division of labour is reflected by greater participation of women in the political life of their organisation, as is seen in the case of Bety, member of the Good Government Council, as well as in the fact that women are included in the *ejido* commissary. This situation contrasts with their former life on the *haciendas* and their condition as internal war refugees from 1995 to 2006. In a context of profound material deficiency, they have opted for strengthening community organisational structures and religious life - ways of organising which contribute to generating a sense of collectiveness and belonging. Without state intervention, they are obliged not only to cover their basic needs, but also creatively generate their own health and educational systems, as well as spaces for political participation. As Rodrigo stated, “Now there are people who know how to do more things, like just eating two tortillas a day.” This phrase synthesises their expectations for their future lives and personal development which they have developed through the difficult practice of their autonomy project. They aspire to more than just a few government handouts and a life free of dietary deficiencies. The process of resistance, as they call it, is also generating political actors with aspirations or values which contrast with those of their neighbours and with the traditional way the state “does” politics. We see a transformation in the way they see themselves when they speak of “surviving as men and women.”

The new community generates cohesion among its members in the sense of belonging to a territorial community and, above all, to a political community previously absent in their history and daily life. The intense mutual relationship between *La Humanidad* and the Council is creating something similar to the concept of citizenship. As Jelin (1997) puts it, “one thing is to possess a sense of belonging to a political community, and another is to obtain recognition from the community to which they belong”. This is citizenship. The Good Government Council is generating these actors with political rights and obligations, comparable to citizenship as experienced in so called “first world” countries, and is opening up spaces for participation in society which are sorely lacking throughout Mexico. In the history of this community, gaps exist in political representation or “the processes by which members of society are included in the democratic system” (Grey 2007: 223). In response to this situation, through popular organisation, the community has generated structures parallel to the state in order to administer community life. This is expressed in the transformation of their expectations regarding how to resolve their conflicts, which is now based on their trust in their self-government, given that they individually and collectively participate in these structures in which they feel represented. Finally, despite their past political experiences, profound deficiencies, conflicts, and different ways of interpreting the same event, they have collectively decided to leave behind the period of “*baldio*” and make

themselves visible in the political scene of Las Margaritas, Mexico, and - through the EZLN's international influence on grassroots politics - the world.

Chapter 5

Limits and challenges of autonomy

Throughout this study, we have discussed the context in which the Zapatista movement arose and developed. We have also presented the political actors involved and the historical events which gave rise to the Zapatista autonomy initiative. A brief survey of the different Zapatista *Caracoles* allowed us to outline what I consider to be the central elements of their project of autonomy. Later, through a case study, we explored the relationship between the Good Government Council and a community founded on recuperated land in the Jungle Zone in the early weeks of the Zapatista Uprising. All this took place in the hostile, environment confronted by the Zapatista communities and the country in general. Based on the ethnography contained in the three previous chapters, here I will outline broader conclusions on the following themes: memory as a political tool; the new Zapatista generations; the challenge of maintaining national and international solidarity while avoiding dependence; the increased desertion from the Zapatista movement; and disparity in development among Zapatista communities. By exploring the case study of a Zapatista community, we will see how they attribute the following concepts to actions of daily life: autonomy, resistance, “lead by obeying”, and “as we walk, we ask questions.” We will address the challenges of non-Zapatista organizations that have similar practices. With the evidence gathered in the field, we will explore what may be considered to be traditional. Finally, we will analyze the 1976 Church Congress in San Cristobal as the key moment in the creation of indigenous identity politics, as well as the introduction of Maoist thought and Union organisational strategies at that time.

5.1. Shared histories; Collective memories as a political tool:

For Jelin (2005: 91), in Latin America, “displacement of populations caused by situations of political violence or by disruptions linked to economic or political transformations provoke situations of up rootedness. Paradoxically, these processes also lead to a renewed search for roots.” For this author, subaltern groups create social spaces to manifest their discontent with the dominant discourse. In the exercise of recreating the past as a joint activity, a social space is created. Several examples exist in Latin America, such as the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, in which this memory has come to form a central part of political discourse. As we have seen in Chapter 3 with the case of the Tojolabal community

La Humanidad, collective recovery of memory and the elaboration of a common history has played a central role in their struggle for resistance. This has allowed them to reconstruct their past and politically reaffirm their right to occupy the land of the *finca* Momon. As may be appreciated in Chapter 4, the youngest members of the community have learned the history of their grandparents when they lived on the farm as peons. Currently, they are able to locate where the houses of their grandparents were, although these events happened over 40 years ago.

Similarly, they remember or recreate what they call their traditions, many of which are nothing more than a series of practices that the *patron* allowed them to maintain within the *finca*; they refer to this as their indigenous culture. Based on this culture, they claim to be an indigenous movement. This could lead to endless discussions, but I only wish to highlight the fact that their political movement is nourished by their memory and their capacity for remembering events which occurred over half a century ago. To this they add the experience of having lived eleven years in exile, as they refer to the period of military persecution. These powerful events increase their need to recreate a common past.

Gossen (1999) points out that groups which belong to the Mayan family make daily use of oral tradition to recreate and perpetuate a collective past. This is evident in the last two letters of Subcommander Marcos to Luis Villoro on Ethics and Politics (Zapatista Communiqués 2011), in which Marcos recreates the life of a young member of the Other Campaign and an old Zapatista militant. Both dead and considered to be exemplary militants, they could be examples of what the Zapatista struggle seeks; that is, through remembering and recreating exemplary lives, a new, more ethical meaning could be applied to political practice. With regard to memory, the projects of the Mexican state and Zapatista autonomy also confront each other. On the one hand, we have the official – governmental recreation of a national past which seeks to create an idea of cultural homogeneity (Rustch 2003). Official Mexican memory ignores the cultural diversity of the country. In the case of the Tojolabal Zapatista people, systematic use of memory and joint reflection is a product of a long process of learning, which dates to their period of contact and work with the Marist religious order in the early 1970s. In this period, they learned to practice collective reflection - the evaluation of the past to project themselves into the future (Estrada Saavedra 2007). Practices such as systematization of past experiences and analysis of the present context with the objective of developing a program of action were learned at a time in which those who are or have been Zapatistas were members of the ARIC⁷² (De Vos 2002).

⁷²This is according to Jan De Vos's telling of the Workshop of Deep Analysis and Reflection carried out by members of Independent ARIC in 1977 (2002: 275).

It is quite likely that they carried these practices with them when they joined the National Liberation Front (FLN), in which use of collective memory is more evident.

5.2. The new generation of Zapatistas and what this means for the community; changing of views of autonomy; limits to autonomy:

Many authors have written of the ideological processes and influences which converged in the creation of the Zapatista movement, including Mattiace (2001), Collier and Collier (2004), Harvey (1998), Rus (2003), Estrada Saavedra (2007), De Vos (2002), and Perez Ruiz (2005). These processes endow the generation which led the Zapatista movement in 1994 with certain qualities. In order to complement this knowledge, according to *Los colores de la tierra: nuevas generaciones zapatistas* (The Colours of the earth: new Zapatista generations) (Martinez Martinez 2007), the new generations have grown among autonomous projects of health, education, art, and culture. This is a different world from that in which their parents were raised.

During my fieldwork I was able to witness the growth of new generations, new marriage customs, transformations in gender relations, and exposure of children and adolescents to people of all continents. Given the growing presence of new influences, it is difficult to predict the impact all this will have on the community. Nonetheless, as shown in Chapter 2, we may appreciate the high level of initiative of the young students of the autonomous school of Roberto Barrios. The teenage boys in charge of the kitchen and food distribution, and the boys and girls in charge of the physical security of their *compañeros* in the face of attacks by the PRIistas are examples of this.

In chapter 4, in the case of the community *La Humanidad*, these changes may be even more greatly appreciated. For example, I witnessed great transformations in the role of the women of the community. For example, a young woman from this community was a member of the Good Government Council. In the context of rural Chiapas, this represents a great political change. Young women now decide who they want to marry. Women now fulfil cargoes, and for this reason, they are often absent from their home for days. This suggests that the process of attaining autonomy has led some of the members of this movement to pursue autonomy at other levels. For example, as they have transformed their role in politics, they also have transformed their concept of justice and gender relations. That is, their vision of autonomy differentiates them from other autonomic projects which preceded them. I believe this in itself transforms the concept of community.

These advances also have limits. As seen in Chapter 4, great differences exist among the members of *La Humanidad*, making joint work difficult. The dependence of their projects on international economic support is a significant limiting factor. Their economic problems increase upon rejecting government programs. This has led the men of *La Humanidad* to begin to migrate for short periods of time to Quintana Roo. The effects of total exposure of the youth to such societies of consumption are difficult to predict. In the Jungle Region, another great problem in the long run will be lack of land to leave to new generations, as these recuperated lands are not so large as to grant land to new Zapatista generations.

In a broader context, the rupture of the movement from other political groups in the country has led them to relative isolation. The coming elections on June 1, 2012 only make the already fragile Mexican political system stranger. For these reasons, the Other Campaign has become more important, as it represents a great effort to build bridges toward other groups which share their political vision. As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, the Other Campaign is a promising alternative for reconstructing the social fabric. Finally, the project of Zapatista autonomy confronts megaprojects built with national and foreign investment, Canadian open pit mines, the Mesoamerican Plan, and militarization and paramilitarization of Chiapas and Mexico. These problems compromise the development of the communities and of new generations.

5.3. The challenges of maintaining national and international solidarity while avoiding dependency:

As we have seen, the Zapatista movement confronts great obstacles. The current economic model and party system are perhaps the most evident. However, maintaining national and international solidarity networks is also a great challenge. It is difficult to avoid replacing one dependency – that on the state – for another – national or international economic solidarity assistance. The intervention of many Mexican organizations during the first two weeks of the uprising transformed the objectives of the EZLN. Later in 1994, with the First Democratic Convention, during which a dialogue was established between the EZLN and representatives of diverse sectors of organized civil society, Zapatismo was transformed into an international movement. These changes led the EZLN to be known around the world, attracting hundreds of solidarity organizations. Paradoxically, the vision of many of these organizations only reproduced the prior assistentialism. Nevertheless, the vision of the indigenous people of Chiapas was to seek profound change, especially to modify power relations and establish dialogue among equals.

In 2003, in “The Cinderella Syndrome,” after having thanked civil society for their help during the first nine years of the movement, Subcommander Marcos commented that the

vision of Mexican *Mestizos* regarding the indigenous people has not changed; they still are seen as poor people in need of help. This situation led to the need for the Zapatista communities to close in on themselves in order to, in their own terms, create their projects of autonomy. With this communiqué, the Zapatistas announced the creation of the *Caracoles* and their Good Government Councils. This led to confrontation among solidarity organizations, as the communities would evaluate the relevance of the assistance they proposed, thus deciding which projects were useful to the communities.

A second critical moment was the 2006 presidential election, when Subcommander Marcos openly called for civil society to not vote and criticized the Mexican left. This was supported by some groups and individuals in Mexico. Nevertheless, mainstream activists, academics, and leftist politicians broke off relations with the Zapatistas as they considered that this would only favour the parties of the right. With this, the movement was further isolated. I believe that these political actions only express the Zapatistas' constant battle to maintain their political and ideological autonomy. Nevertheless, this has led to an enormous transformation in the communities' relations with solidarity organizations. For example, they lost the support of many of organizations which felt that the Zapatistas were acting in an intransigent or authoritarian manner. For Khasnabish (2010), "The problem with understanding Zapatismo's transnational reach in these terms is that theses analyses tend to lend far too much weight to the material resources and interest supplied most often by activists and observers in the world's most overdeveloped nations, while undervaluing the actual work of movement-building on the ground in any vital struggle" (2010: 165). In this sense, the significance of solidarity work should be reconsidered, questioning whether solidarity organizations are capable of continuing their support while respecting Zapatista autonomy.

During my research, I was able to appreciate the progress of the autonomous projects. However, as commented in the introduction, they also clarified to me that it was not necessary that "we" from outside do everything for them- "that if not, how were they going to learn?" On another occasion, they expressed to me their desire that one day they would also be able to help others. As I explained in Chapter 2, in the *Caracol* Roberto Barrios, a confrontation took place between the Zapatistas fulfilling their cargo and members of an international organization which asked to remain nameless. The confrontation was due to the fact that the Zapatistas did not receive a clear fund management report for construction of the women's health clinic which was to be built in 2009, and consequently the Zapatistas asked this organization to no longer collaborate with them. The root of these

misunderstandings between the Zapatistas and other organizations is the relative lack of autonomy with which they treat the Zapatistas.

The EZLN expressed this type of confrontation with other solidarity organizations in a communiqué in January, 2011 - *el Tercer Viento: un digno y rabioso color de la tierra* (*The Third Wind: a dignified and rageful color of the earth*). By criticizing “specialists and specialties,” they return to this discussion. In this communiqué, the Zapatistas argue that knowledge has been transformed into a form of private property, from which the indigenous peoples are once again excluded. As a response to this situation, the Other Campaign, announced in 2005, is the most recent attempt to try to improve relations between Zapatismo and other organizations and develop a working relationship among equals. As mentioned in the introduction, during the Dignified Rage encounter of 2008-2009, an emphasis was placed on “the other” form of conceiving things. With this, they made known the work of the other health, the other economy, the other history, and the other social movements – initiatives which in part sought to re-signify the meaning of solidarity. Without a doubt, the scarcity of resources will be an important factor in the immediate future of Zapatismo. Paradoxically, the success of Zapatista autonomy does not depend exclusively on the Zapatista “talent” for negotiating, but on the creation of other similar autonomous systems outside the Zapatista communities.

5.4. The significance of the phenomena of recent Zapatista deserters, lost supporters, old allies, and new neighbours:

Growing violence toward the Zapatista communities, lack of resources for autonomous projects, and enormous government investment in social programs are some elements which have negatively affected Zapatismo. All this has led to an increase in desertions and loss of support for the movement. The rupture with local organizations such as ARIC (De Vos 2003; Estrada Saavedra 2007) in the Jungle Region is just one example. In 2008 and 2009 in the Highlands Region, in the communities belonging to Oventic, the number of desertions was on the rise. As commented to me, increasingly more families were becoming divided, some in favour and others against the movement. These problems originate in the fact that some family members had decided to leave the movement in order to receive government programs – for example, to build a kitchen, a bathroom, or a bedroom - while others remained firm in their resistance, refusing to accept what they see as mere handouts intended to win their political loyalty.

In 2008 and 2009, as mentioned in Chapter 1, while waiting in the municipal seat of San Andres to take another vehicle to San Cristobal de las Casas, a number of people commented to me that in 2009 in this municipality, only around 200 Zapatistas remained,

while in 2006 and 2007, there had been at least 2000. This number was confirmed by the Municipal President Santos, who had a broad range of information on the political alliances of the inhabitants of the communities in his charge. Oventic is the *Caracol* which has developed the most infrastructures and receives the most visits, but even so it is losing members. I believe that this may be an indicator of the general situation. San Andres, which is a very symbolic place due to the fact that there the accords of the same name were signed, is also losing followers. The same is true of communities such as Zinacantan, in which – in 2009 – only six Zapatista families remained. These families confronted many attacks by PRI members, upon refusing to contribute financially to public works projects at the community level and participate in government programs.

With respect to the Jungle Region, I was only able to learn the situation of the community *La Humanidad*, one of the few communities in which all the inhabitants are Zapatistas. The community is surrounded by non Zapatista communities and the Momon military base lies to one side. This community was founded in 2006, and toward the end of 2009 they had only lost four members. One couple had divorced, a young woman separated from her husband, and another man who had married a woman from another part of Mexico decided to leave with her when she had to attend to family problems in another country.

Nevertheless, the situation of *La Humanidad* is quite unique, and the community maintains a very close relationship with the Good Government Council. The ethnographic information included in Chapter 4 allows us to appreciate how the inhabitants of this community systematically seek to reinforce links within the community. They seek to maintain a unified community through conflict resolution and mutual support among all members. Toward the outside, they seek to create or maintain relations with their neighbours through the sale of their products. As we have seen, the inhabitants of *La Humanidad* also try to maintain their family relations. From their Zapatista and non-Zapatista family members, they receive some support, food, money loans, and childcare. Since this is not the first time that these families are in an adverse environment, they have developed some strategies to cope with their difficult situation.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the sale of bread and clothes are among the ways in which the most industrious families of *La Humanidad* have found to survive and be able to maintain themselves within the movement. They also jointly reflect on the negative effects of economic support that the neighbouring communities receive. For example, Don Enrique, in charge of the *campamento* commission in 2009, told us that for them, it was better not to receive financing for agriculture, because sooner or later the government would ask for their land title and leave the *campesinos* without their land. Also the young women of the community reflected on the problems of obesity that they saw in the children of the PRI

communities, who now suffer malnutrition along with obesity, since, with government financing, they have drastically increased their consumption of soda and candy. They had also reflected on the increase in alcoholism and domestic violence in PRI families. Desertion of Zapatista members is a grave problem, resulting from the severe impoverishment to which the Zapatista communities have been submitted. The impacts of this issue, as well as many others, remain to be seen.

5.5. Disparity among communities:

Travelling through Chiapas, it is clear which communities are predominantly Zapatista and which are not. In the intense green landscape, sheet metal rooves of the PRI and PRD communities shine in the sun. Along some highways, one sees piles of materials, sacks of cement, sewage pipes, bricks, metal bars, or water storage tanks awaiting their new owners. One also sees halfway constructed roads, resting machinery, general stores with brilliant signs of coca-cola, and bars. This is the landscape of a community affiliated with a political party.

Currently, the most modern indigenous communities are the new rural cities, such as that inaugurated in March, 2012 in Santiago del Pinar. This town has poor quality houses with partially functioning basic services. Elsewhere, one sees even more impoverished communities and homes - those of the Zapatistas. These may be distinguished by colourful signs announcing "You are entering Zapatista territory" or "Autonomous Zapatista store." When I visited the Jungle Region, in the community La Realidad, where the *Caracol* of that name is located, the situation was similar; the PRI stores were on one side, and on the other were the Zapatista stores. The disparity among communities is becoming increasingly evident.

In such a climate of war as exists in Chiapas, it is to be expected that differences exist between Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities. Nonetheless, the situation is more even complex, as seen in Chapter 2; even the Zapatista communities have not all reached the same levels of infrastructural development among the five *Caracoles*, despite the fact that the job of the Good Government Councils and the *Caracoles* is to seek equitable distribution of resources, income, and donations. The geographic location of the *Caracoles* has been an important factor in the unequal development among Zapatista communities, since national and international visitors do not travel to the farthest areas. Thus, the most well-known, and well-supplied, *Caracoles* are those which are better connected to the city of San Cristobal de las Casas.

5.6. The need for and cost of a standing army (EZLN) in a hostile environment:

According to Haugaard and Isacson (2011), militarization and paramilitarization of the Zapatista territories, which contain vast natural resources, is part of a global plan for privatization and exploitation of these resources. In the case of Chiapas, in order to carry out the Mesoamerican Project, the Chiapas State government has established a long-standing low intensity war to push the communities off their land and be able to exploit the resources found there. This violence has reached Zapatista and non-Zapatista communities. In this context, impoverishment of the population may be understood as a war strategy. Nonetheless, despite the different types of violence to which the indigenous population has been submitted, the EZLN has not responded militarily. However, the sensitive nature of the topic aside, my original research project was not intended to consider the military aspect of Zapatismo, but rather the construction of the Zapatista political project.

5.7. The meaning of the Zapatista concepts “autonomy”, “resistance”, “mandar obedeciendo” (lead by obeying) and “caminando preguntamos” (as we walk, we ask questions):

I have emphasized that this ethnographic work constitutes only one case study which does not allow us to establish general conclusions or present strong affirmations of a movement as complex as Zapatismo. Nevertheless, it does allow us to explore in great detail the processes, negotiations, tensions, and logic underlying Zapatista actions. The ethnographic information presented here allows us to identify the processes which, in the Zapatista context, are referred to as autonomy, resistance, “lead by obeying”, and “as we walk, we ask questions”.

As mentioned, in Chiapas different *campesino* organizations have created diverse autonomous territories (Burguete 1996). However, with the exception of the Tojolabal Government founded in 1988 (Mattiace 2002) and the Zapatistas, the goals of the other organizations almost exclusively revolve around obtaining land. Nevertheless, neither land invasions which took place before the Zapatista uprising (Van Der Haar 1005), nor land repartition posterior to the Zapatista uprising have promoted the communities’ autonomy. This has been the case because the *campesino* organizations which occupied or were granted land were co-opted by political parties and the state and federal governments, thus limiting the communities’ political participation.

The Tojolabal government was the only organization which sought to become involved in political-administrative matters which affected its members; nevertheless, this organization

was not long-lived. The official government response has been to channel the demand for political participation through acceptable channels by creating the constitutional indigenous governments. With the case of Santos in Chapter 1, we saw the limits and contradictions of these governments. By contrast, the ethnographic data presented here suggests that Zapatista autonomy persists. One aspect of such autonomy is self-government – that is, exercising the right to govern themselves. The manner in which they seek to exercise this self-government is by using communitarian practices such as collective assemblies, election of representatives, dialogue, joint problem solving, and communitarian work. In this self-government, all Zapatista members have the right and obligation to attend to community matters. With this objective, and in order to organize the task of government, they have created Good Government Councils, in which all Zapatista members had, have, or will have the opportunity to fulfil the cargo of governing in a rotating fashion.

Self-determination is another objective of Zapatista autonomy. Based on this principle, the communities decide for themselves matters such as education, health, agricultural projects, and natural resource management, as illustrated by descriptions of the dynamics which took place in the health promoter workshop, commented in Chapter 2. This logic of self-determination implies that through diverse exercises of collective reflection, the communities have analyzed which of the problems that affect them are the most serious. Later, they collectively seek possible solutions to their problems, including the resources they have to resolve these problems. The importance of this exercise of reflection is that the communities have realized that historically they have not been free to make decisions regarding their most fundamental rights. Rather, they have been subject to decisions which others have made for them. The EZLN's consultation of its members carried out during the San Andres dialogues was another manner of exercising this self-determination.

During my fieldwork, I also witnessed this process of reflection when discussing themes such as the nature of liberty and autonomy. For example, participants responded that autonomy was not just being free, nor was it the freedom to do nothing, but that autonomy was being free to do things, to know, to learn, and to decide to learn. These reflections are a product of very long meetings, in which they make collective decisions and from there develop numerous projects.

The case of *La Humanidad* is good example of this process, since their experience as peons on the hacienda taught them that only collectively could they achieve autonomy. Paradoxically, through 18 years of resistance, they have learned that such collective autonomy is only possible if they maximize individual responsibility. One clear example is the situation in the community when Xavier decided to separate from his wife and form a new couple with Zenaida. The resulting tensions and process of conflict resolution

demonstrate that the community's equilibrium was at risk in the face of individual decisions made by these two people. Nevertheless, the ex-wife of Xavier, with the support of the community, was offered the possibility to build an independent life, which in a rural context is rarely possible for a woman who has been "left" with children. In the face of this situation, the community offered her all the means possible to achieve her individual autonomy.

The case of Xavier's ex-wife is not unique; many other young Zapatista women have found in their communities and in their Good Government councils the support they needed to achieve their individual goals. However, the creation of this support network is only possible with collective work projects and by partially renouncing individual desires. The data presented here allow us to suggest that for the Zapatistas, "autonomy" is a matter of doing things for themselves, regardless of the time which this takes or the difficulties it involves. With such autonomy, they seek to end relations of dependence on the state, on non governmental organizations, and in the future even on the organizations which are in solidarity with the movement.

The Good Government Councils are key to this process, as they coordinate the activities necessary to maintain the objectives, goals, and projects of the Zapatista communities. Nevertheless, it is to be expected that, in the construction of autonomy, the Zapatistas openly and watchfully confront the institutions from which they wish to become independent. Through collective practices and small tasks of daily life, the Zapatista live what they call resistance. Primarily, this means assigning political value to tasks and spaces which do not belong to the sphere of official politics, such as the home, neighbour relations, memory, re-signification of dignity, rage, and collective organization.

This daily resistance transforms the idea of political-social change proposed by leftist Latin American movements in the 1970s and 80s. These classic movements proposed that social change would occur through a great armed movement or revolution. However, ironically many of these leftist movements have since harmoniously united with the party system and the electoral process. By contrast, in the Zapatista type of resistance, practices which gradually empower the people are prioritized. The Zapatistas have focused on certain aspects of social life that they consider to be critical to achieving a full communitarian life, such as: education, health, religious life, land tenancy, an economic model which is as self-sufficient as possible, spaces for political discussion, and cultural activities. This life that they constantly imagine and illustrate in their communiqués is constructed through their resistance. This type of resistance perhaps arose from constant confrontation with the hacienda owners, public servants, military, and paramilitary, as those experiences as a whole have contributed to developing very elaborate forms of organization.

Another practice central to Zapatismo is “lead by obeying.” This political concept is directly confronted by the Mexican political system. Until 2000, when the PRI was in power, this system rested on a strong presidential figure that was the centre of the electoral system (Hernandez 1994). All powers were controlled by the President in conjunction with business and political elites. Through a system of apparent representative democracy, the President legitimated his position. In this model, the President made decisions which should have been made by the members of society, and which in the majority of cases lacked public consensus. By contrast, the Zapatista model is truly a participatory democracy, based on participation of all members in electing their representatives, executing the tasks of government, and making decisions. In this type of democracy, fulfilling cargoes is voluntary, without salary, rotatory, and closely watched by the community in order to avoid actions of corruption.

During my stay in *La Humanidad*, I had the opportunity to ask a very active community member what the Zapatistas meant when they spoke of “lead by obeying.” Based on a very simple example, Don Esteban, explained to me that lead by obeying means being selected in a collective manner to coordinate the activities that the community asks of this leader. These activities are determined by the community. Thus, the person who functions as a representative should really only help carry out the goals of the community in the best possible manner. This practice varies significantly from Western models. The person chosen is not the boss; rather, he or she is only a representative. Furthermore, this representative works for the common good. Finally, the tasks and functions of this representative are established by the collective. This simple example illustrates the manner in which they conceive of a government which works for the benefit of all those it represents. Lead by obeying implies rethinking politics and the manner in which the indigenous communities relate to other sectors of society. For example, the Zapatistas asked certain organizations to not continue their solidarity work in the *Caracol* Roberto Barrio because they felt that they did not understand that premises behind their manner of working.

During my first visit to Zapatista territories, it seemed to me that the concept of lead by obeying contradicted the existence of an “autonomous authority” or an “autonomous Good Government.” However, in order to understand the logic of this concept, it would be necessary to analyze the Zapatista idea of “as we walk we ask questions”. This practice implies continually consulting with the community as to its desires and needs. The example of the health workshop mentioned in previous chapter illustrates this exercise. Prior to making any decision or developing any project, the communities consult their members as to “what is it that we need”? Then they develop the plan and advance slowly, regardless of

the type of project. This philosophy has also been put into practice in the various consultations that the Zapatistas have carried out over the course of their 18 years of resistance. In the Democratic National Convention, in August, 1994, the Zapatistas held an encounter with different sectors of Mexican society and asked those present what they hoped for from the movement. As a consequence, they set aside their arms, even though this involved completely reformulating the Zapatista uprising. Following the mandate of civil society, the Zapatistas began to slowly transform themselves into a political movement. The same process was followed in the Cathedral Dialogues and later in negotiations of the San Andres Accords, where, after each round of negotiation, the Zapatistas returned to their communities to consult the members as to whether or not they accepted the government proposals. The Zapatista consultations followed this, and finally the Other Campaign – both following similar processes; however, these two processes also involved travelling throughout the country to consult diverse non-party affiliated organizations with regard to what type of national project they desire and how they might obtain this. This process has its origins in the indigenous communitarian assemblies. Later, this practice was re-adopted in their years of formation with the indigenous pastoral movement, and under the philosophy of liberation theology the consultation came to be considered to be a political tool, as is evident in the First Indigenous Congress of 1974 (Fazio 1994) and later in the work dynamics of organizations such as the ARIC, which gave rise to Zapatista support groups (Jan de Vos 2003).

“As we walk we ask questions” is the Zapatistas’ traditional manner of achieving consensus. As a result of these long processes of discussion and accords, the autonomous projects of education, health, and agricultural and other economic projects have been developed. This manner of “doing politics” does not rest in a rigid political program (Pellarolo 2006), but rather leaves in the hands of the communities a large margin for correcting or improving on their political decisions and processes. Jointly, these practices -“as we walk we ask questions” and “lead by obeying” - allow the Zapatistas to remain in resistance and in the long run achieve the autonomy they desire.

5.8. Challenges of other organisations with similar practices as the Zapatistas:

Throughout the world, many organizations seek to emulate the Zapatistas’ political practices such as collective decision making, the assembly as a space for discussing political matters, and creation of alternative models which displace the state as a source of power and organization. Such organizations include the Sindicato Nacional Revolucionario de Trabajadores de la Compania Hulera Euzkadi, (Union of Rubber Company Workers Euzkadi), the piquetero movement, barter and occupied factories in Argentina, Los

Indignados de España (The movement of the Indignant in Spain), occupy movements in England, and several migrant organizations in New York.

Within Mexico, many such organizations exist which have practices similar to those of the Zapatista movement, including The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), the communitarian police of Guerrero, the self-governing community Cheran in Michoacan, and the movement of Atenco in the State of Mexico, to name a few. Other examples of organizations in Chiapas which share many practices with the EZLN are the organization Committee for the Defence of Indigenous Freedom (CDLI-Xi'nich') and the well-known Civil Society Las Abejas, who sympathize with the principles and objectives of the EZLN, but who wish to follow pacifist alternatives.

One of the most evident challenges for these organizations is confronting an economic model which does not allow for any form of social reproduction (i.e. health, education, and economics) outside the conventional spaces of consumption. This makes it difficult for autonomous projects to mature, not only in Zapatista territories but around the world. In Mexico, groups with many commonalities with Zapatismo such as independent *campesino* organizations and groups inspired by indigenous theology face many challenges, such as remaining autonomous from the state institutions and even from conservative currents of the church. The organization Las Abejas is a good example of one such organization.

On December 22, 2008, upon attending the memorial ceremony of the martyrs of Acteal in the municipality of Chenalho, I perceived tension among immediate family members of the victims. They commented to me that one group of family members wanted to continue the independent struggle to imprison those responsible for the massacre, while another small group of family members wished to accept a state government indemnification for the assassination of their relatives. For many reasons, Las Abejas is a very particular case, as this organization tries to resist and maintain autonomy from government institutions. The fact that this organization is influenced by Indigenous Theology⁷³ has much to do with their political stance. It is important to mention that this is not the only organization, nor the only area of the country, where this ideology is present. Nevertheless, Las Abejas have behaved in a different manner than other organizations influenced by the same theology.

By contrast, in the State of Oaxaca, where 18.3% of the population is indigenous, Indigenous Theology is the basis for indigenous pastoral action of the Catholic Church (Norget 2007). Paradoxically, Oaxaca and its *campesino* and indigenous organizations,

⁷³ According to Norget (2007), the philosophy of Indigenous Theology is a practice which advocates the syncretism of Roman Catholicism and indigenous religions.

with the exception of the APPO movement,⁷⁴ have been recognized as the electoral bastion of the PRI and its corporatist institutions. In the case of the APPO, the organization became divided when its members had to decide between joining the party system or continuing as an independent organization. The challenges faced by organizations with practices similar to those of the Zapatistas are many, but are exacerbated when they lack external solidarity support, media coverage, and the academic interest that Zapatismo awakened. As a consequence the struggle of these organizations becomes isolated and more vulnerable in the face of government attacks. For this reason, the Other Campaign becomes so important, as it seeks to unify all these struggles in a common front.

Another significant example is the movement called Pueblo Creyente (Believing People), which is a product of a long history of struggle in Chiapas. The movement encompasses diverse sectors of civil society in Chiapas, including indigenous communities, women, agricultural workers, some segments of other *campesino* organizations, members of the Other Campaign, and more urban organizations of San Cristobal. It is coordinated by several of the Catholic parishes of San Cristobal. This movement is also the result of work of the indigenous pastoral movement and the Autochthonous Church. Indigenous catechists and deacons elected by the communities and ratified by the bishop of San Cristobal became links between communitarian social organizations and the Church. These indigenous leaders found their greatest inspiration in the 1974 Indigenous Congress (Paoli 2012). Through this, they defined an ethnic political identity which served as a basis for demanding land.

This movement has similar origins as organizations such as Las Abejas and the Zapatistas. This is clear in their practice known as Analysis of Reality, in which biblical passages are used to understand current issues and identify the causes of problems which affect the community. For example, “In allusion to a biblical passage on the prophet Daniel which was read during a mass, Bishop Felipe Arizmendi said that in these times, “The lions are the mining companies, the projects which try to take over *campesino* land, the corrupt authorities who sell themselves out and do not defend the well-being of the communities and those who dedicate themselves to immoderate cutting of forests. Furthermore, they are the large beer companies and makers of alcohol; the bars; the authorities who due to corruption do not duly apply health laws (...); sellers and distributors of drugs, small and large; chiefs of cartels and their lieutenants; those who extort and kidnap to obtain money;

⁷⁴In 2006, the APPO in Oaxaca also used this decision making method. This assembly of 350 organisations was created when state police tried to evict a teachers’ sit-in in the state capital and bombarded the city with tear gas from helicopters (Hernandez 2006).

those who execute those who do not follow their criminal indications; those who trap and claw migrants who pass among us.” (SIPAZ 2011).

It is important to point out that in Chiapas, a large variety of religious denominations exist – Protestant, Evangelical, Catholic, and even a small mosque in which Islam is professed. Nevertheless, principally the branch of the Catholic Church which accompanies the Pueblo Creyente movement is characterized by this politicized use of language. This analysis of reality and this use of language are comparable or similar to that used by the Zapatista movement, which was also inspired by Indigenous Theology. The demands of these movements have transformed over the years; originally they focused on land possession, and currently they also speak out against large multi-national companies such as Monsanto and their genetically modified products, and against Canadian open pit mining projects in Chiapas. This transformation in their demands responds to the dynamic reality of the Mexican rural population. Nevertheless, while the Pueblo Creyente movement shares the demands of the Zapatista movement because they believe them to be just, they have made clear that – as a movement - they do not share, nor support, the armed movement proposed by the EZLN.

5. 9. What counts as traditional?

As mentioned above, inclusion of the indigenous theme in Zapatista discourse was a product of the strong presence of indigenous organizations from 23 Mexican states in the Cathedral Dialogues in February, 1994 (Reygadas 2006). Since then, the indigenous peoples represented by these organizations have made clear their posture in selecting the EZLN to voice the demands of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. The pressure of these organizations contributed to the establishment of the round table on Indigenous Rights and Culture in the negotiations of the San Andres Accords. These negotiations spurred great academic and political debate with respect to what we refer to as indigenous cultures, traditions, and ways and customs (Viqueira 2001; Pitarch 1999; De la Peña 1995). As an example of the government’s good will to recognize indigenous rights, the case of Oaxaca is often cited; in 1992, indigenous peoples of the State of Oaxaca obtained legal recognition in their State Constitution of their system known as “ways and customs” for electing municipal authorities (Canedo 2008).

This unleashed great debate regarding what may be considered traditional. The Zapatista uprising has shed light on the fact that the history of the communities appears to be a history of constant change and confrontation over control of the political life of the municipality. However, the tensions as well as communities’ responses to these changes have varied. For example, the 1917 Constitution prohibited exploitation of indigenous workers on *haciendas*.

According to Rus (1994), with this, the communities - newly relatively free and tired of such abuse - closed in on themselves in an attempt to control political decisions. Rus (1994) suggests that that a "flourishing" of tradition took place. In Chamula, for example, for the first time in 1917, indigenous healers were permitted to officiate mass in the communities. Even the origin of the Lacandon people, the indigenous group which is typically portrayed as the "most indigenous" group of Chiapas (Trench 2005), is questioned by authors such as Juan Pedro Viqueira (1995), Tim Trench (2005), and Jan De Vos (2003); upon tracing the origin of this group, they point out that great inconsistency and imprecision exists in the reconstructed history of this people. Jan De Vos (2003) points out the government's interest in supporting this group in order to access the natural resources of the Lacandon Jungle⁷⁵. This is just one example of what Trench (2005: 63) calls "anthropological construction of that which is indigenous". This construction involves the definition of what we consider to be traditional or ancestral.

In the case of this thesis, the ethnographic data presented in Chapters 3 and 4 incite us to rethink which elements of the Tojolabal Zapatistas may and may not be considered traditional, and analyze the Zapatista discourse when it advocates for respect of traditional forms of government. As we have seen, the Tojolabales were "captive" on the haciendas until the early 1950s, when they were liberated by the Agrarian Reform. Until then, they were excluded from most regional processes of political participation (Rodriguez and Quintanar 2008). By contrast, the data presented here suggest that the forms of political organization which now are generally considered to be traditional have, in reality, been the product of relatively contemporary processes such as the colonization of the Lacandon Jungle (Estrada Saavedra 2007).

In the particular case of the Zapatista Good Government Councils, Assies and Gundermann (2007: 27) suggest that "the good government which is understood as an indigenous practice does not necessarily coincide with the governments of ways and customs." Nevertheless, these authors argue that "these governments may come to constitute an indigenous practice since this government is created and controlled by the population and, as a consequence; this legitimates its indigenous origin" (2007: 27). In this sense, the practice of good government is nourished, on the one hand, by the cultural elements that the communities feel should be rescued from their culture and from other more innovative

⁷⁵In 1972, the federal government granted 66 Lacandon families 614,321 hectares as part of Agrarian Reform. In 1974, a federal government presidential decree created the state company *Compañía Forestal de la Lacandona* to extract lumber in Lacandon land (De Vos 2003).

elements which they learned from external organizations which arrived in Chiapas during the second half of the 20th Century.

5.10. Creation of indigenous identity:

According to Fazio (1994), a politicized indigenous identity representing a new consciousness was first expressed in the First Indigenous Congress held in October, 1974 in San Cristobal de las Casas. Originally, this Congress was conceived as an official government ceremony to commemorate the 500 year anniversary of the birth of Fray Bartolome de las Casas which would be legitimated with the presence of an indigenous forum (Mestries 2001). As Bishop Samuel Ruiz was the only person from outside the communities with long-standing experience working with the communities in a grassroots manner, he was charged with organizing the event. According to De Vos (2003), the preparatory meetings lasted one year, during which, through community and regional assemblies, they reached the conclusion that this Congress was a good opportunity to be heard by the government for the first time. In the Congress, the 2000 delegates representing the Tzeltal, Chol, Tojolabal, and Tzotzil indigenous people presented the six demands which they considered to be central to improving their lives: land, natural resources, trade, education, health, and municipal democracy. During the Congress, the delegates continuously met to seek the best manner in which to present their demands in their languages. According to Fazio (1994) and Mestries (2001), this Congress gave birth to an ethnic consciousness. These authors hold that the Chiapas State government perceived this situation and tried to channel this political potential. Nonetheless, in 1975 and 1976, the independent National Indigenous Congresses and the Supreme Ethnic Councils were created, both of which contributed to the indigenous peoples politically establishing their demands and certain leaders accumulating political experience. Later, these experiences led to the formation of many of the indigenous *campesino* movements of the 1980s, and the Zapatista demands of autonomy in the 1990s (Mestries 2001). The following question by Congress delegates to state officials demonstrates the ethnic consciousness reached during this Congress, “Why to be Mexican do we have to take all the bad of being ladino and leave all the good of being Tzotzil, Tojolabal, or Chol?” (Fazio 1994: 104).

As mentioned, through initiatives in 1975 and 1976, the government attempted to channel this political organization that demanded re-vindication of a positive ethnic identity through institutional means. Nevertheless, from the Supreme Ethnic Councils in Las Margaritas, the first Tojolabal Government arose. Thus, the Congress served as an important antecedent for the future of independent organized struggles (Harvey 2000). Another example is the 1975 movement in Simojovel, whose leaders arose from the preparatory meetings of the 1973

Congress. For authors such as Fazio (1994) and Mestries (2001), this Congress was a good opportunity for indigenous peoples, principally from Chiapas, to recognize their common problems and become conscious of their potential to organize politically.

5.11. Introduction of Maoist thought and Union Organization:

During the process of colonization of the Jungle, government institutions were practically absent from the scene. This forced the new inhabitants to experiment with forms of organization which were previously unknown to them (Estrada Saavedra 2007). In the Highlands Region, the Instituto Nacional Indigena (National Indigenous Institute) INI, government agencies, and the PRI had displaced communitarian forms of political organization (Harvey 2000). According to De Vos (2003) and Harvey (2000), through its pastoral work, the presence of the Church greatly contributed to directing these first attempts at political organization. Nevertheless, other political currents also had a determining influence. Members of the Maoist Union of the People (UP) were invited to help organize the 1974 Congress. They had arrived to the Jungle in the early 1970s attracted by Bishop Ruiz's work (Harvey 2000). The members of this organization acted as technical and political organizers of the communities in the jungle. Also, the organization Popular Politics (PP), which had a Maoist tendency, was present in the zone; when the PP joined members of the UP, the organization Proletarian Line (LP) was created. Upon arriving in Chiapas, these groups introduced organizational strategies oriented toward building what they called "popular power" (Harvey 2000). With this, they sought that decisions be made in assembly, and they promoted grassroots work and exchange of information among the communities. That is, based on the organization already achieved in the Indigenous Congress, they created a non-hierarchical organization, transcending the need for even indigenous leaders. For this reason, in 1978 the old communitarian leaders who arose from the Indigenous Congress decided to no longer work with these "advisors", as they generally referred to them. Nevertheless, the forms of organization which they learned from these very advisors were later adopted to create the strongest *campesino* organization of the Jungle, the Union of Unions (De Vos 2003). Aspects of this experience greatly contributed to the struggle of the neo-Zapatista movement.

5.12. How to understand the difference?

The topics discussed until now offer new arguments for old discussions on the "indigenous" authenticity of the Zapatista movement, and above all on the capacity of this movement to form independent political arguments for autonomy. Pitarch (2004) was one of the first to question the authenticity of Zapatismo. For example, he referred to Subcommander

Marcos's communication as "ventriloquism". According to Pitarch, Marcos elaborated an entire Indian language with the utilitarian objective of influencing international public opinion and Mexican civil society.

The works of Fazio (1994), Harvey (2000), Mestries (2001), De Vos (2003), and many others generally indicate an intense process of political formation in the State of Chiapas, and particularly in the Tojolabal canyons – the area of greatest Zapatista military influence - since the second half of the 20th Century. During this period, the communities collectively and gradually accumulated political knowledge and a variety of political tendencies - from the most pro-governmental to the most radical. They learned efficient forms of organization and analysis, and were exposed to a theological redefinition of the Gospel which was later used with political ends. In such a scenario, it is difficult to believe that the communities themselves could not elaborate their own political posture which would be different from that which is qualified as "indigenous," as well as from purely occidental Maoist, Marxist, or leftist postures.

The ethnographic information presented here has allowed me to reconstruct the history of a community which demonstrates how its political experience initiated well before Zapatismo arrived to Chiapas. Mestries (1990) and Fazio (1994) show how, in 1973 and 1974, the communities collectively discussed the need to recover their languages and communitarian knowledge, and dignify them and use them to provide a unique identity to their demands. This is demonstrated by the following argument proposed in the First Indigenous Congress: "We want to know what the Ladinos know but without abandoning our culture"⁷⁶ (Mestries 2001: 16). In Chapter 4, I describe the episode in the community *La Humanidad*, when, in the middle of the night, a supernatural being called "*cajchoj*" appeared to us. Community members offered a variety of interpretations for the *cajchoj*, though no one denied the existence of such a being. What varied was the interpretation of this being's intentions ranging from the belief that the *cajchoj* appeared only to find someone with whom to play, to the belief that it only appeared in communities which were politically organized with the objective of frightening them so they might abandon their recovered land. According to old Tojolabal legends, the hacienda owners or patrons were represented as evil supernatural beings who wished to harm the indigenous *campesinos* (Cruz Coutiño 2006). This example

⁷⁶This term is used to refer to those persons who are not ethnically indigenous, such as descendents of Europeans or children with both non-indigenous and indigenous parents.

suggests one of the possible forms in which the indigenous world incorporates the concept of social exploitation into its thought.

I previously commented as to how the indigenous demands for autonomy which came to penetrate the Zapatista political project initiated with the Cathedral Dialogues in February, 1994 (Reygadas 2006). This event provided a new identity to Zapatismo, channelling the movement's force toward the search for the communities' social and political autonomy. As a consequence, Zapatismo transcended the objectives of Latin American revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 80s which sought to take over state power through electoral means or with the use of arms (Holloway 2001). As demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 4, the Zapatista political proposal is based on the construction of autonomy through daily actions, politicizing daily life, and recreating community ties.

One interesting aspect of Zapatista autonomy is that it may not be obtained through institutional channels such as political parties. It is a type of autonomy which even the state may not grant them, because this type of autonomy questions the state itself. That is, the Zapatistas do not grant any legitimacy to the state, because it does not represent or protect the interests of the indigenous communities. (Navarro 2006; Collier 2005). As seen in Chapter 4, Zapatista autonomy arises from social relations and from the manner of carrying out daily tasks (Holloway 2002). As we have seen, in the case of the community *La Humanidad*, the need to create autonomous projects is a product of a concrete historic experience which dates back to when community members lived as indentured servants on the Momon hacienda. Today, this manner of building autonomy is manifested in collective organization, in ethnic-cultural elements which they have revived, and in the manner in which they collectively envision a possible communitarian life.

Reflecting Zapatismo's refusal to work through state channels, Holloway states that, "The state is not a thing, it is not a neutral object: it is a form of social relations, a form of organization, a way of doing things which has been developed over several centuries" (Holloway 2005). Taking this into consideration, we may understand how and why the Zapatistas may opt to govern themselves collectively. Throughout this work, I have discussed the Zapatista practices which allow them to create autonomous communities. However, as we have seen, this is only possible by maximizing individual responsibility in benefit of the collective interest. This involves many challenges since, upon being exposed to so many external influences; the communities are full of contradictions. Nevertheless, such contradictions are common to all social systems. In the case of the indigenous communities, these contradictions appear to be more evident because their inhabitants live simultaneously in different realities; that is, they are *campesinos*; they are revolutionaries; for some social movements they are the world's political vanguard; they are indigenous; and

they are struggling to recover their culture. For example, their collective and communitarian practices increasingly confront new notions of I and of the individual. Contradictions arise when the new subject is the bearer of individual rights, but has to live in a system which is collective such as the indigenous communities.

The case of the promoter of the Zapatista autonomous health system mentioned in Chapter 4 illustrates such tensions. The promoter is a married man who became a technical expert in health by attending numerous autonomous health courses. He received a scholarship to study medicine in Cuba, but faced the dilemma between continuing in the Zapatista community with his family or going to Cuba to study medicine for five years. Finally, he decided to remain in the community, as the scholarship was not sufficient to support him and his family. While in this case it is somewhat a matter of interpretation as to which choice represents individual benefit and which choice responds to the community's needs, today, Zapatista autonomy confronts such tension between the individual good and the collective good. Such situations represent challenges to theoretical interpretation of Zapatista autonomy, as Zapatismo is not a unique, static, or pure model. What is more, it is continually reinvented, and challenges occidental theoretical categories (Holloway 2001) and indigenous anthropological constructions (Trench 2005).

5. 13. *Final thoughts:*

In this chapter, I have explained how collective and historic memory has come to constitute a political tool for the Zapatista movement. Through historic memory, they legitimize their struggle for land and the movement itself. Thus, they reconstruct a common past which allows for projecting the community and new generations toward the future. This learning is rooted in their previous organizational experiences, including their work with the indigenous pastoral movement promoted by Samuel Ruiz, the preparatory work for the First Indigenous Congress of 1974, the Supreme Ethnic councils of 1975-76, the influence of the Maoist organizations UP and PP, as well as the creation of the most significant *campesino* organizations of the Jungle, Union of Unions and the ARIC.

After the 1994 uprising, new Zapatista generations confronted a whole new set of external influences. Their contact with citizens from throughout the world who have visited Zapatista territory in the past 18 years without a doubt generates new scenarios. It is still difficult to predict the consequences of all these experiences. The generations born in times of the uprising are now just 15, 16, or 17 years old, and the world in which they were born has also changed. With the constant ruptures of Zapatismo and many of its solidarity organizations, the challenges to the new generations are greater than ever. The responsibility of continuing the autonomous projects with increasingly less external support

will require even greater effort in a context in which poverty is on the rise. This is reflected in continual desertion of members, as corroborated in the case of the Municipality of San Andres Larrainzar. The unequal development of the Zapatista communities and the rise in violence against these communities make it increasingly difficult to maintain the resistance. Based on the ethnographic information presented in the previous chapters, in this chapter we have explored the possible meanings of concepts such as “lead by obeying”, “as we walk we ask questions”, “autonomy,” and “resistance”. As seen, these practices result from prior learning. However, Zapatismo, unlike past movements, has been capable of articulating these practices with more coherent and elaborated discourse. The Zapatistas have been capable of proposing these practices and discourse to broader audiences such as national and international civil society. Throughout these 18 years of resistance, many organizations identify with Zapatismo’s discourse and practice. Nevertheless, the Zapatista movement has made clear its desire to refrain from being defined or categorized under any single political tendency. This constant transformation of Zapatismo presents a series of challenges for the social sciences, organizations with practices similar to the Zapatistas, and organizations which wish to emulate their practices but have undergone different historic processes.

Conclusions:

In the first part of this study, we have presented historical events relevant to the Zapatista uprising in 1994. With this review, we have seen how Neo Zapatismo recuperated forms of organization previously learned by the communities, and how they developed a new outlet for expressing the demands of the indigenous communities. Furthermore, the work of the indigenous pastoral movement of the autochthonous church promoted by Bishop Samuel Ruiz, a variety of currents within the Catholic Church, the Maoist and Marxist organizations, the Indigenous Congress of 1974, and a variety of campesino organizations vitally contributed to this process of learning which resulted in the creation of the EZLN.

Nevertheless, particular traits differentiate the Zapatista movement from other movements. One of these is the proposal of the armed struggle in order to put an end to the exploitation of the communities. This proposal represented a dilemma for social organizations of Chiapas which “two years before the war... reflected on whether or not it was convenient to accompany the armed movement” (Morquecho 2011). Some organizations followed this option, including some member organizations of the ARIC (Estrada Saavedra 2007, De Vos 2004), but others did not. “In this reflection of whether or not to accompany them, is how *Pueblo Creyente* (the Believing Peoples Movement) arose” (Morquecho 2011). Another characteristic that the EZLN rapidly developed after the uprising was its determination for autonomy. Despite the fact that this is an old demand (Burguete 2007), the Zapatista model of autonomy seeks to establish a new type of relation between the Mexican state and the indigenous peoples. The model of autonomy proposed by the Zapatistas seeks to redefine the meaning of politics, as well as reconstruct the social fabric and communitarian life.

With the Zapatista uprising, the legitimacy of the Mexican state, as well as the foundation of the nation state, was questioned. In the first few months after the Zapatista uprising, the EZLN met to negotiate with the Mexican government, acting as a representative of the indigenous peoples of the country. This theme was discussed during the negotiations in San Andres Larrainzar in 1994, during which the demand for autonomy gave rise to the talks on Indigenous Rights and Cultures (table 1). During these negotiations, the Zapatistas and the federal government signed the San Andres Accords. However, the Mexican government did not comply with these accords. Once the government rejected this process of negotiation, the Zapatista communities began to live a de facto political and communitarian autonomy in their rebel territories. The Zapatista *Caracoles* and the Good Government Councils are

proof of how they have constructed this autonomy through daily actions. In the following pages I will more closely address this process.

After the negotiations in San Andres, the federal government initiated a low intensity war against the Zapatista communities. Over the years, the government has changed strategies, and this war has taken on new forms. Currently, the project of Zapatista autonomy is undergoing one of its most crucial moments in its history, as it confronts a longstanding low intensity warfare, as well as loss of allies and support from solidarity groups. The generalized climate of unrestrained violence in the country also does not offer much hope to the Zapatista project, nor to any other form of organized social protest. Nevertheless, through diverse strategies such as daily actions, self-government, renovation of traditions, adaptation, and change, resistance is still taking place in the Zapatista autonomous and recuperated territories. In *The Indigenous of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion*, Estrada Saavedra (2010) concludes that the Zapatista movement is in decline. Nevertheless, the ethnographic information included in this thesis, which results from several visits to the Zapatista areas, allows me to show how a living project of autonomy is reproduced daily and - despite contradictions, faults, and challenges- struggles to survive. According to my interpretation, due to the fact that the Zapatistas live amidst a context of increasing mistrust and suspicion, the Zapatista communities have largely closed themselves off from the outside world, and thus, in recent years, researchers have found it more difficult to “study” Zapatista communities. This may lead researchers and other onlookers to conclude that Zapatismo no longer exists.

In my fieldwork from November, 2008 to November, 2009 in the municipality of Las Margaritas, I identified an active, growing, dynamic Tojolabal Zapatismo. In this thesis, I explain those aspects of the political and historical context of Chiapas which I consider to be relevant to the Zapatista movement as a whole, while also exploring regional variations, particularly with regard to the Good Government Councils. Beginning with ethnographic observation of the workings of this Zapatista regional government, I later focus my analysis on a detailed case study of the history and everyday life of the Tojolabal Zapatista community *La Humanidad*. While such a case study leaves little room for generalisations, I believe this ethnographic work makes a vital contribution to our understanding of how this population constructs autonomy, resistance, historic memory, and self-government through actions of everyday life, which has largely been ignored by recent research.

I argue that since the Mexican Revolution, those with a vested interest in controlling power within the post-revolutionary state have made an effort to legitimate and consolidate their presence throughout the nation. This is especially true in the State of Chiapas, whose landholding class was especially determined to defend its power and privileges within an

ethnically stratified non-egalitarian social order. However, the history of Chiapas is replete with examples of groups that have carried out sustained struggles for autonomy and self-government. At the same time, despite the enduring power of several elite families, the regional elites have had to make significant adaptations and innovated political strategies to adapt to changing times and political processes in order to maintain their hegemony. History shows that political actors and institutions use a variety of identities simultaneously in the process of political negotiation and restructuring. One example of this is the current tendency of the historically dominant Mexican political party to indigenise municipal governments in order to maintain a political hold over the poor, subordinated segments of the population.

In the case of the Zapatista movement of Chiapas, the basis of their process of self-government is the search for autonomy. However, among the five Zapatista *Caracoles*, specific challenges, progress, and failures of this search have varied according to the local political actors and particular historical processes. The most evident common trait in their conception of autonomy is their insistence on remaining beyond the margins of the state. This insistence on autonomy still largely remains to be explored by social scientists. I suggest that the Zapatistas' search for autonomy is more than a theory: it is a practice which may be empirically observed.

The micro-analysis perspective of the history of the community *La Humanidad* in its pre-Zapatista period reveals the nature of relations between the landholding class and their peons before the 1930 Agrarian Reform. The culmination of this period was marked by the historically significant *campesino* takeover of the *hacienda* of one of the wealthiest landholding family in the region. As publicised by the Zapatistas, the founding of a community on this "recuperated land" represented an act of historic justice more than an economic benefit. Furthermore, this taking of the land demonstrates the sophisticated relationship between the Zapatista autonomous government and the members of the Zapatista organisation. In this relationship, the limits between one and the other are not clearly defined; on the contrary, they are permeable, flexible, largely imperceptible, organic, and mutually interdependent.

Through politicisation of daily community life, members of the community *La Humanidad* put autonomy into practice, thus exemplifying the potential of a community to re-construct their intra- and inter-community relations based on consensus. The ethnography presented here reveals the logic and analysis behind their decision to continue to follow Zapatismo despite conditions of extreme poverty, while their neighbours accept federal and state government assistance. As in many Mexican indigenous-campesino communities, for the Zapatistas, migration also represents an attractive solution to their lack of income. With

respect to migration, men of *La Humanidad* have periodically left their region in search of work as wage labourers. Yet unlike their neighbours, they have received permission from their regional authorities to leave their community on a rotating basis, while those who remain behind co-ordinate their efforts in order to carry out community projects, thus allowing the community as a whole to continue its resistance.

Amidst a context which in the past has often been marked by violent hostility, the people of *La Humanidad* make an effort to maintain positive relations with their non-Zapatista neighbours, since many of their family members and neighbouring communities are not Zapatistas. Furthermore, while the political affiliations and practices of some of their neighbours represent a definitive rupture with Zapatismo, many others who have left the movement continue to sympathise with the general ideals and goals of Zapatismo, although they have long since abandoned the daily responsibilities of being a Zapatista. The Zapatista communities may have become more closed off from researchers and journalists, but they are not closed in terms of their efforts to build social and economic bridges within local *campesino* society. The Good Government Councils reinforce this networking by offering services to non-Zapatistas as well as movement loyalists.

The Zapatistas recognize the importance of maintaining communitarian relations, since the members of *La Humanidad* were divided into several groups for over a decade. Meanwhile, however, they developed extra-community political networks until they were finally able to re-group and continue with a project which began in 1946. Despite having been flooded with outside religious, political, and cultural influences, they demonstrated an iron will to attain their objective. In fact, these influences contributed to the development of the community members as complex social actors and to the emergence of the complex new political practices I describe in Chapter 4. Since the community has few financial resources and its inhabitants are in the midst of an uncertain stage of building the necessary infrastructure and social mechanisms of their new community, they have been largely dependent on solidarity support and on their relations with neighbours. Paradoxically, this dependence has strengthened their relations with the outside world, reinforcing the need to transcend, for example, barriers of ethnicity and language. The Zapatistas in general have been obliged to learn new ways of expressing themselves and their hopes and aspirations; in some cases they have even had to learn new languages. They have had to exchange more than just material goods. This has led them to transcend both established forms of indigenous community politics and the limits of neoliberal multiculturalism. In resolving their conflicts (for example, those I described in Morelia, Oventic, and *La Humanidad*), they have had to innovate upon political forms which were developed in contexts in which ethnic identity was not as salient as it is today, reinvigorating communitarian practices that

were common in the *finca-hacienda* times when the word “indigenous” was not part of the popular and academic lexicon.

Thus, change has been constant, and the Zapatista communities are far from being mere repetitions of traditional cultural patterns. The Zapatista movement has incorporated elements of diverse political and ideological influences in order to interpret the world in a different manner than that imposed by dominant local governing forces. Most significantly, the Zapatistas have reformulated the concept of political autonomy and political practice. In the process, they have developed alternative political practices along with the economic, education, and health projects that allow them to sustain the process of building and expanding their autonomy. With their incipient autonomous agricultural projects, they are trying to remove themselves from the capitalist agricultural model and the systems of exploitation to which they were historically subjected. With this, they strive to put an end to the capitalist predation of nature in favour of more sustainable systems of food production. This has led them to modify the image - and reality - of rural Mexican life.

As a historic process, Zapatismo is subject to the influence of a continually changing social life and the different social and political actors in Chiapas and Mexico. Current political debates regarding indigenous politics may be enriched by Zapatista political experiences and by the ethnographic information presented here, which demonstrates how the Zapatistas strongly challenge the indigenist, neoliberal, multi-culturalist (Hale 2006), and assistentialist politics which have been developed throughout the continent as a way of containing social demands and protest. As we saw in Chapter 2, some *Coletos - Mestizos* of the town of San Cristobal, who were historically the recipients of all benefits of state and federal governments, express inconformity with government assistance received by the indigenous communities since they themselves now receive relatively less attention. However, the irony is that in this competition for state resources, the Zapatistas receive nothing. The Zapatista stance, which actually involves rejecting material support in order to construct the necessary social conditions for generating their own resources, is beyond the comprehension of the *Coletos-Mestizo* population. However, according to Zapatista logic, they have initiated an alternative process through which they have benefited, and will benefit, in many ways – not only materially as with government projects, but as more capable, dignified, and empowered human beings.

With such actions, the Zapatistas transcend the demand for recognition of ethnic identity by the state or any other institutions, thus challenging the concept of ethnic citizenship (De la Peña 1999). Rather, they define themselves by their practices, such as not drinking alcohol, not beating their wives, and including girls in education and women in local politics. All those actions, for example, bring about a change in gender relations. The logic of

government politics operates under rules which are quite different from Zapatista politics. De la Cadena (2010) claims that reconfiguration of politics in Latin America represents a return to the left. Nevertheless, she adds that persistence of indigenous forms of government transcends conventional political practices. The case of Chiapas highlights these contradictions; repeated ruptures between Zapatismo and the left are based on profound disagreements. The Zapatistas refuse to be considered as simply passive beneficiaries of the new versions of indigenism. As a consequence, they create their own laws, such as the Revolutionary Women's Law and the Revolutionary Agrarian Law. This takes them beyond the limits of social movements that depend on the state to advance their demands. In this regard, they try to escape the "one step forward two steps back" effect that has been the fate of agrarian movements that relied on the state or progressive factions of the political class.

Understanding Zapatismo as a manner of restoring local community life and recuperating local political practices allows us to appreciate the ways in which the indigenous communities resolve their tensions in an autonomous manner and creatively resolve their conflicts. With the document "Not the Centre or the Periphery" (Subcommander Marcos 2007), the Zapatistas made explicit their interest in positioning themselves in a political sphere which transcends the common paradigms of centre and periphery according to the Western neoliberal political model which has geopolitically divided the world. Outside of the scheme of centre and periphery, the Zapatistas aim to experience their existence as autonomous communities and not merely as subjects of special rights.

Zapatismo has begun to develop as a political practice capable of creating alternative models of organisation in order to confront the dire problems afflicting Mexico today. The rural crisis is a good example of this; despite the fact that rural society underwent considerable agrarian reform, this reform never delivered what it promised, but rather preserved a bi-polar rural economy in which highly capitalised commercial farms co-existed with undercapitalised peasant farms (Rello 1986). Historically, Mexican *campesinos* were provided with material goods and social programs which made them dependent on the state. In this context, for decades emigration has represented one of the few alternatives for the survival of poor *campesino* families. However, migration can no longer contain the profound rural Mexican crisis. With the Zapatista uprising, the federal government greatly increased the Chiapas State budget. However, according to the First Human Development Report on Inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean (2010) by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), national government programmes have not proven to be effective in combating poverty (Taniguchi 2010).

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Chiapas State government has announced the Rural Cities project, which is a component of the former Plan Puebla-Panama, now the Mesoamerican Plan. This project involves the concentration of diverse indigenous communities in semi-urbanized settlements, thus displacing them from their communal lands. In June, 2011, the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations, Oliver De Shutter, visited Santiago del Pinar, a municipality in which the Rural Cities programme has been implemented. Upon observing the results of this project, De Shutter affirmed that, "It is clear that this programme attends to the consequences of population dispersion, but not the causes, such as pulverisation of land tenancy and unemployment" (Gomez 2011). Population dispersion was also heightened by displacement of many indigenous people during the 1994 armed conflict and the impact on Chiapas of transnational agribusiness, exemplified by Monsanto. Meanwhile, the Zapatista communities with their autonomous health and education projects represent a real alternative for detaining further expansion of the Rural Cities model by demonstrating to Mexican society and international donors that other, more humane and sustainable alternatives exist. However, the implementation of economic and political policies such as Rural Cities, the Mesoamerican Plan, and the war waged by the federal government against the Mexican drug cartels are some of the greatest challenges to Zapatista autonomy.

Paradoxically, the growing fragility of the Mexican political system constitutes one of the greatest difficulties for autonomous initiatives, since any sign of social organisation is perceived by groups in power as a threat to national security, thus generating repression and criminalisation of social protest. In July, 2012, presidential elections will take place in Mexico, and the political system as a whole will once again undergo great change. However, electoral democracy in Mexico is increasingly weakened by very high rates of violence, corruption, and voter abstention, and the implications of all these political changes for grassroots social movements are yet to be known. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the face of the state's loss of authority, as may be witnessed by newspaper articles on Mexico throughout the world, autonomous social organisation may prove to be the only real alternative for counteracting the social decomposition which the country has undergone since implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 90s. The Zapatista proposal implies profound reconstruction of the social fabric, and involves collective work and reconstruction of a sense of community

One of the lessons that Zapatismo offers is that popular participation throughout Mexican history has been crucial in the attempt to achieve democratisation of the Mexican political system. Since Zapatismo has organised from below and in an autonomous manner, the movement looks favourably upon other examples of popular political participation which have occurred outside official spaces of power such as political parties or unions. The

Caracoles and Zapatista communities created by the Good Government Councils indicate a diverse, heterogeneous population within autonomous territories that transcends linguistic limitations, ethnicity, and varied communitarian practices. Hence, a scholarly study of Zapatismo requires one to move beyond the nation state framework, as discussions throughout this work have demonstrated. Therefore, the emergence of new types of social relationships suggests the need for new kinds of studies of community. Curiously, with the exception of Estrada Saavedra (2007; 2010) who is very critical of Zapatismo, few authors consider an analysis of intra-community dynamics to be important for understanding Zapatismo. To date, very little is known about how the Zapatista community builds resistance and autonomy through daily life, and how they recuperate collective memory so that it may later be used as a political tool. The concept of Zapatista political community is not bound to time and recognisable political figures, and transcends territoriality, ethnicity, and language. Belonging to this political community is a learning process which involves endless work and, above all, requires community members to value apparently trivial actions of daily life which construct and give life to Zapatismo.

Currently, the Zapatista movement has much to offer to the world. Perhaps one of the most important contributions is its model of autonomy, which is directed toward developing alternatives for social life in a very crucial moment in Mexico. This could allow for a sustained peace process to begin throughout the country, not just in Chiapas. As a consequence, this would provide minimal conditions for dialogue between the state and organized struggles in Mexico. The majority of current conflicts and mobilizations have arisen from indigenous or campesino areas. These include the conflicts of Cheran and Ostula in Michoacan, San Juan Copala in Oaxaca, and the conflict between the Wixárika people and Canadian mining companies. All these movements demand of the government a margin of autonomy so that they may conserve their land and natural resources. Nevertheless, while this model may be viable, it confronts many challenges. Perhaps the most important is the lack of recognition of the San Andres Accords, signed in 1996.

Nevertheless, the current situation in the country suggests that peace is not one of the priorities of the current administration of President Felipe Calderon. Contrary to this, Neo Zapatismo, *El Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad* (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity), and *Pueblo Creyente* (Believing people) are some of the few organized groups which openly speak out against neoliberal economic projects and the disappearance of communitarian life. Meanwhile, the Zapatista communities strive to live the type of community that they desire, thus experiencing the achievements and limits of autonomy.

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