This important collection of essays will be compulsory reading for all those who wish to have a better understanding of the dynamic processes of change which Mexico and its indigenous peoples have undergone at the end of the millennium.

The book relates different experiences and makes various proposals relative to the issue of indigenous autonomy.

Contributions to the process of constructing a national proposal for autonomy are related. International and constitutional aspects of autonomy are analysed. A feminine view is provided as well. Significant cases of local autonomy and the struggle of indigenous peoples for their resources and environment in the face of a mistaken and badly planned government policy for infra-structural development are presented.

Finally, the situation in Chiapas is dealt with before Aracely Burguete closes the book with an analytical chapter on the new ethnic conformation of the highlands of Chiapas and of San Cristóbal de las Casas, as a contextual framework for the autonomous tendencies and indigenous empowerment of the region.

The book makes a worthy contribution to the Mexican debate on indigenous autonomy.

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INDIGENOUS AUTONOMY IN MEXICO

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(editor)

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INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS THE RIGHT TO AUTONOMY IN MEXICO

Rodolfo Stavenhagen

Indigenous autonomy is the flavour of the month. People are talking about it all around the world and there are new and instructive experiences in many countries, despite the issue being an old and persistent one. In international legal documents on the rights of indigenous peoples - both those already in force, such as ILO's Convention No. 169, and those in the process of being drawn up, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its equivalent in the Inter-American system - the issue of autonomy now forms part of the new body of regulations concerning human rights.

But just why do issues of autonomy cause such controversy? It must be recalled that, throughout history, nearly all of the world's countries have experienced tensions of some kind or another between the central government and the different units which make up the territory of the State, regardless of their political system. Tensions are also common between the political elite and those social and ethnic communities and groups which do not conform to the dominant cultural model emanating from these sources of power. As a result of the vicissitudes of history, cultural dynamics, the heterogeneity of the population, dominant ideologies, the concentration and/or arbitrariness of political power, the capacity for mobilisation and resistance on the part of subordinate groups, social and economic inequalities, the discrimination and marginalisation of some, the degree of individual freedoms and enforcement of human rights, the real possibility of resolving conflicts and tensions peacefully and endless other topical factors and elements which arise, relations between the central power and its social, cultural and territorial components can be multifaceted and complex.

One only has to recall the long and conflictive history between the Spanish State and what, for barely twenty years, have been known as the autonomous communities of that country; the recent (but long-smouldering) tragedy of the ex-Yugoslav Federation; the centuries-long patient construction of a multi-cantonal and multi-lingual democracy in the Swiss Confederation; the politico-linguistic conflicts between both parts of the kingdom of Belgium; the shaky and ever-threatened balance between the central government and the specific identity of Canada's provinces, particularly with regard to the coexistence of an Anglophone majority and a Francophone minority concentrated around Quebec, where it, in turn, forms the majority (not to speak of the indigenous peoples in that recognisably multicultural country). The ethnic, religious and cultural problems which have characterised the recent development of countries as diverse as India, Fiji, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and dozens of other countries could equally be mentioned.

There exists a simplifying and simplistic vision of this complex problem which reduces the reason for conflicts to heterogeneity and cultural diversity and which concludes that when this latter disappears they will all be resolved. Nothing could be further from the truth or, for that matter, more dangerous. Cultural diversity is a part of humanity's inheritance and is a reality which thousands of millions of human beings throughout the whole planet experience on a daily basis. Conflicts between culturally diverse groups may arise for many different reasons, but they frequently intensify or erupt into violence when a State wishes to impose its own vision and attempts to eliminate or minimise the differences amongst the population through authoritarian or arbitrary measures. These may range from genocide (the elimination of millions of indigenous people during the conquest and colonization of America, the Holocaust, "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia etc.) to forced assimilation, including segregation, expulsion and other different forms of ethnocide. Ethnic diversity is neither naturally nor necessarily conflictive per se. Conflicts arise when ethnic diversity becomes an element in the exercise of power, in political struggle, economic exploitation or the handling of interpersonal relations. When a monoethnic, and thus partial and limited, vision on the part of the State dominates the power relations of a multi-ethnic society, then the potential for conflict gradually increases.

The issue of autonomy can only be understood within this wider frame work. The struggle for autonomy does not occur in a vacuum, nor is it merely the result of the imagination of a number of activists or of the theories of some political expert or jurist. Today, as always, it is debated within the framework of the struggle for human rights and individual and social freedoms. Those who invoke ephemeral reasons of State as arguments against the concept of autonomy are denying history and ignoring social dynamics; what is more, they are failing to consider the principles of human rights.

Recent studies on the most varied experiences of autonomy support the idea that this is one more formula with which to guarantee the political, social and cultural pluralism of those human groupings which share the term nation and society. Autonomies occur inside the sovereignty of a State, although it sometimes seems that they are challenging it. In the era of the nation-state or national State (as it is generally called), which is a very recent phenomenon in the history of humankind - dating back at most to the 18th century and being itself an undoubtedly transient form of organisation of political life - the different ways of understanding and organising autonomy correspond to different forms of State territorial organisation and to as many ways of conceiving the exercise of human rights.

Autonomy, as we know, may be individual or collective. In the first case it is identified with the fundamental freedoms of the individual person, that is, his/her human rights. Great philosophers (not only from the West) have expounded on the subject and they are agreed that this individual autonomy cannot be absolute but has limitations insofar as human beings live alongside each other in given communities. Thus for every right there is a corresponding duty, and for every exercise of autonomy there is a corresponding respect for the autonomy of others. The second case, that of collective autonomies, is more complex given that this is exercised equally but differently both internally(in relation to the people who make up the group) and externally(in relation to entities outside the group's own sphere of autonomy). In other words, all collective autonomies will be conditioned by limitations imposed through the autonomy of its own members - in essence their universal human rights - and by the collective rights of other groups (communities, municipalities, states, nations) which claim their own legal, political or historical - but not necessarily human - rights and which may be in competition or conflict with the entity in question.

The exercise of collective autonomy within the group may come into conflict with the exercise of individual autonomy. How can this tension be resolved? What criteria need to be used to decide which of the two spheres - collective or individual - will take precedence? The legitimacy of collective autonomy is founded morally on the respect it shows for the fundamental human rights - that is, the autonomy - of the members of the autonomous community, the only limitation being that they must not put in danger the survival of the community itself. A complex problem, undoubtedly, but not an impossible one. What is more, in a world composed of multiple and varied groups, the collective autonomy of each must fit in with regard to other autonomous groups. This is not so much a question of human rights but of democracy and

governability. In this area, too, the legitimacy of collective autonomy is founded morally on respect towards other equally legitimate autonomies.

From a comparative and historical perspective, demands for some form of autonomy generally come from subordinate groups involved in asymmetrical power structures and who, for some reason or other, have been excluded or marginalised from decision-making processes and from full participation in the political and economic activity of society (or of the nation, as appropriate), inside state and dominant structures where they occupy subaltern positions. Such is the case of numerous religious, linguistic and national minorities and also that of indigenous, native or aboriginal peoples, as they are indiscriminately called in different parts of the world. Here the concept of "minority" does not necessarily refer to numerical inferiority but to political, cultural and economic subordination. This subordination is characteristic of indigenous peoples even when they do not form a demographic minority.

Legal and philosophical debates on this issue have been extensive, in our country as in others, but there is no consensus regarding to this matter. The dominant concept of nation-state, identified with the centralist and republican tradition which emanated from western Europe from the nineteenth century onwards, was adopted uncritically by the Latin American states. This was despite the fact that their demographic and cultural composition was totally different from the European models which were their inspiration and it caused tensions and disagreements between government policies and the social realities of the countries from the start. The contradiction between the "formal" and the "real" country or the "imaginary" and the "deep" country was often, and remains, much talked about. Although this polarisation may seem exaggerated and more rhetorical than analytical, there is no doubt that demands for autonomy come from those communities which have been historically excluded and which are marginalised from the "formal" country. Demands for the right to autonomy can only be fully understood in relation to a long history of oppression, exclusion and exploitation. Such has been the case of indigenous peoples.

Official history distorts reality when it attributes the supposed "backwardness" of indigenous people's to their "pre-modern culture", to their geographic isolation, to their lack of education and the things which only "modernity" is capable of providing. If this is how history is understood, then "progress" must be taken as the "integration" of Indians into the nation, their "assimilation" into the dominant mould,

their "acculturation" into the hegemonic vision of "imaginary" countries. In other words, the victims are to be blamed for their own suffering. The demand for autonomy, on the other hand, is not ignorant of the dynamics and contradictions engendered by unequal power structures and by the persistence of domestic colonialism, which is why it proposes decolonization as a goal and the liberation of peoples subordinated to regimes which keep them oppressed. Autonomy is a part of this struggle as, too, are the other struggles for human rights, including the right of peoples to their self-determination. This is established in the United Nations' international legal instruments, which have been ratified by the Mexican government.

Since there exist different forms of autonomy, it is advisable to determine, for each case, its sphere of application. By comparing different international instances of autonomous systems, it can be observed that the fields in which they are most relevant are the following:

Foremost in autonomous systems is the right of a community to use its own language, where this is different from the so-called national or official language. In the 200 or so independent states into which the world is divided, there are literally thousands of different languages. Only a few of them have official recognition. In the majority of cases they are oral and not written languages, not taught at school or used in administrative or legal proceedings and which, furthermore, have little scope for general dissemination in the mass media. But they are often languages which ethnic groups have been using since time immemorial and which form an inseparable part of their cultural identity. Ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples have fought for the use and conservation of their vernacular languages, although in many cases these have been lost forever. There is no lack of examples of ethnic groups consciously dispensing with their own language in order to adopt the language of the majority or the official language of the State.

But there are also examples of the opposite: of peoples who have made efforts to save and recover their language through intentional linguistic policies. Thus, for example, in Israel the use of Hebrew - a virtually dead language used principally in a religious context - was made official whilst Yiddish, which millions of Jews from central Europe previously spoke, has virtually disappeared. In Ireland, not particularly successful efforts have been made to revive the old Gaelic language but the majority of the population prefer to speak English, the colonizing language. In Turkey, it is considered subversive to use the Kurdish language in public yet it is spoken by more than a third of the population. In Algeria, the Berber population has been "Arabized" and

in France, the French language has been imposed on populations as diverse as the Bretons, Occitanians, Basques and Corsicans. One of the factors leading to the creation of Bangladesh was that the government of Pakistan wanted to impose Urdu - only spoken in the western part of the country - on its eastern province, where Bengali was spoken and which was separated by a thousand kilometres of Indian territory.

The demand for linguistic autonomy is one of the toughest issues in the contemporary debate. The problem becomes more complicated in some countries, in Western Europe for example, where numerous immigrants from different linguistic backgrounds wish to continue using their language, particularly if they plan to return to their country of origin. In the United States, a strong reaction against the use of immigrants' languages has become apparent amongst certain sectors of the population, who argue that people coming to live on North American soil should speak "English only". The thousands of "Latinos" in that country do not look very kindly upon an eventual loss of their cultural roots. The issue of linguistic autonomy, however, more usually refers to ethnic groups which have been living in a given geographical area for a long time. How many indigenous languages would not have disappeared on the American continent and how many more will disappear if linguistic policies for their rescue and rebirth were not enforced? Linguistic autonomy is one aspect of the current struggle for indigenous human rights.

Closely linked to the linguistic issue is the problem of education, perhaps the main vehicle through which a culture is transmitted from one generation to the next - and also that through which one culture is replaced by another. Education has been the favoured State instrument with which to promote national unity, to diffuse and consolidate the so-called "national culture", to wipe out cultural differences between the population within the territorial boundaries of the State and to carry out, when all is said and done, a policy of ethnocide, that is, the destruction of the cultural identity of minority and subordinate groups. In today's multicultural societies, educational institutions are increasingly being considered not as instruments of cultural homogenisation but rather as spaces in which to respect and promote pluralism and intercultural tolerance.

Many linguistic, religious and national minorities wish to maintain control over the educational institutions in which their children and youth are educated. Although schools must serve to stimulate social mobility and to enable the pupil to perform well in the "big, wide world", it must also function to maintain the cultural continuity and

identity of the group. The school represents, at the same time, both the conservative and transformational forces of a society. How to accommodate this tension and apparent contradiction is one of the most difficult tasks of any education policy and one which has led, on several occasions, to strong political and ideological conflict, to veritable "cultural wars" within society.

Control and management of educational policy and institutions is a prerogative which many ethnic groups demand in the fight for their autonomous rights. Due to the particular circumstances of their insertion into the national whole, indigenous peoples of the American continent - as distinct from ethnic groups in other parts of the world - have not had to defend their own educational institutions (destroyed, when they had them, during the time of colonisation) and so they have been proposing, as part of their right to autonomy, the establishment of educational policies and institutions which are new and different from those in existence, in which they can freely exercise a bilingual and intercultural education (that is, in which indigenous languages and cultures have equal status with the official language and national culture). In various countries of the continent, positive experiences are already taking place in this respect, but it is essential to recognise that the technical and pedagogical difficulties along the path to success are numerous.

Although autonomy (from the Greek autos = for oneself, and nomos = law) can have a given territory or population group as its scope, in general the autonomy of any community cannot be conceived without territorial support. In effect, the different experiences of autonomy around the world involve, above all, recognition of the group's own demarcated territory within which different forms of autonomy can be practised. These territories generally have geographic, demographic and historical characteristics which distinguish them from other territorial units and which support the particular identity of their inhabitants. It is an historical constant that the specificity of an ethnic community, its continuity in time, its cultural dynamic and subjective feelings of membership and of differentiation of its inhabitants link them to a territorial habitat which has real, symbolic and mythical significance. The "territorial imperative" has been a source of loyalties, of struggles and of conflict. Territorial autonomy is, at all times, one of the principal motors of any demand for autonomy. Indigenous peoples demand their right to territorial autonomy: to the recognition, respect and demarcation of their territories, within the wider polity. But as territories and their borders change with the constant ebb and flow of history, administrative modifications as well as economic, demographic and political changes, reaching the necessary agreements with which to

determine the characteristics and territorial boundaries of an autonomous system becomes a complicated and delicate task.

Any autonomous system also involves a certain degree of control over the natural resources of the autonomous territory. This is a particularly urgent issue with regard to indigenous peoples as, in general, these peoples occupy territories which have been devastated, exploited and plundered by external economic and political agents. In order to promote their economic and social well-being, indigenous peoples need to have at their disposal the natural resources which will enable them to satisfy basic individual and collective needs, increase their standards of living and generate income-producing employment. If they are deprived of access to, and control over, the soil and subsoil resources in the regions in which they are largely concentrated then their basic human rights are being denied. Hence autonomous systems generally include autonomos control over such resources.

None of the above is possible without a degree of political autonomy. This may manifest itself in the most diverse ways, depending on the historic and cultural characteristics of the social group exercising the autonomy. The Swiss cantons, for example, are highly autonomous with regard to political and legal responsibilities, the autonomous communities of Spain and the Canadian provinces equally so. Indigenous people generally have native forms of government and within their own sphere exercise a traditional unwritten law (known as "customary law"). These have to be included in any autonomous arrangement which is to be formally recognised. This is so mainly for two reasons: firstly, because they form part of the cultural identity of the community and, secondly, because they constitute the expression of a fundamental human right, that of the self-determination of all peoples. If, furthermore, the objective of any good government is to ensure individual rights and the well-being of the community (as was affirmed by theories on the subject from the 18th century onwards), then democracy can but consist of respect for the real and existing pluralism of human groups and tolerance of differences. Denial of the identity of indigenous peoples has involved the non-recognition of their native and autonomous forms of local government, judicial administration and legal practices (common law). The struggle for the right to autonomy thus includes the rescue and adaptation to modern conditions of traditional forms of government and political participation as well as the exercise of justice within the corresponding ethnic and cultural spheres.

In Mexico, the issue of indigenous autonomy has once again become an issue of national concern due to the uprising of the EZLN in 1994

and the signing of the San Andrés Accords between the EZLN and the federal government, still not implemented three years on. The issue has generated a great deal of controversy, but little enlightenment. There are those who wave the banner of indigenous autonomy without noting the complexities of the issue. There are also those who reject, out of principle, any discussion of autonomy, without making the least effort to understand what it is all about. Unhappily, such polemics between the deaf even occur within the framework of legislative initiatives to modify the Constitution with regard to indigenous rights, now being debated within the national Congress. If things continue in this manner, there will be no visible progress on the issue.

The subject of autonomy for indigenous peoples has to tackle at least four fundamental issues: firstly, the identity of the subjects of autonomy; secondly, the scope and limits of autonomy; thirdly, the responsibilities which will be devolved to the autonomous entity and fourthly, the legal framework which will govern relations between the State and the autonomous units.

It is clear that the object of autonomy will be a group, but which one? If it relates to indigenous peoples, who are they, who defines them and how: in what way is membership determined? If they are not indigenous peoples then perhaps they are all the inhabitants of a particular territorial unit, regardless of their ethnic characteristics. The criteria would then be the degree of demographic concentration of the indigenous population in a particular autonomous unit. But would the areas where the proportion of indigenous peoples was below a certain threshold not then be autonomous? And what would happen when, with time, the ethno-demographic characteristics of the population change? Or is it simply a question of redesigning the politico-administrative map of the country in order to replace the existing communities, villages, municipalities and states with new autonomous entities? Who would benefit from these changes?

In current discussions - such as those which are reflected in this volume - four "levels" of possible autonomy are generally considered: the community (that is, the township or village with its lands and fields); the municipality (which already constitutionally forms the very basis of the politico-administrative division of the country and which, moreover, is formally "free"); the "indigenous people", understood as a concentrated or dispersed group of the population which is identified in linguistic, cultural or historic terms, and which is distinguished from other "peoples" formed in a similar manner, whether they are indigenous or not; the indigenous or pluriethnic region whose geographic

magnitude and demography would have to be defined according to criteria agreed by the interested parties. Those who favour this type of regional autonomy look upon it as a "third level" of political administration in the territorial division of the country, alongside the municipality and the federated states.

The aforementioned options are not, of course, mutually exclusive. In fact, the communities generally have a certain degree of autonomy, although in most cases they lack legal status (except in the case of agrarian law). The municipalities, of course, form the very base of the national territorial division, although their autonomy is more fictitious than real. The indigenous peoples defined in paragraph c) above do not exist legally at national level, although in the new indigenous law of the State of Oaxaca, adopted in 1998, they are included as subjects of law and of rights. The autonomous regions, on the other hand, form a new approach in our country which, to date, has more political aspects than juridico-administrative ones and which is generating animated debate and controversy.

Any autonomous system signifies a legal and normative relationship between the autonomous unit and the central State. Sooner or later, the current debates on the issue must result in political negotiations, legislative modifications, new legal regulations and institutional changes as well as procedures with regard to a long list of specific areas in which autonomy has to function. The issue has hardly begun to be sketched out and neither the San Andrés Accords between the EZLN and the federal government nor the legislative initiative prepared by COCOPA (the Commission of Harmony and Pacification, made up of federal deputies and senators of various political parties), which was based on these Accords (and which has been rejected by the government), specify the characteristics of such autonomous regulations.

It will be essential to define the mandates of the autonomous entities: territorial administration, control over resources, local government, administration of justice, tax collection, public security, social policy, etc. etc. Here there may be a range of possibilities which require study and assessment.

There can be no real autonomy in Mexico until there is a prior political pact between the interested players, that is, the indigenous and other organisations of civil society, the political parties, the municipal, state and federal governments. In May 1996, following the signing of the San Andrés Accords, the federal government carried out a wide

national consultation and concluded that autonomy was possible and viable and that the majority of those consulted were in favour of it. However, the very same federal government took a step backwards in December of the same year by rejecting the legislative proposal prepared by COCOPA in consultation with the government and the EZLN, arguing that the autonomy of indigenous peoples would be contrary to "national sovereignty". Future historians will try to explain this open contradiction in the attitude of the federal government but the fact is that the indecisive and unclear attitude of the executive power has contributed to prolonging the conflict in Chiapas and has left an endless number of problems unsolved which could by now have been resolved.

Meanwhile, the organisational efforts of organisations to move experiences of indigenous autonomy forward in the country have been consolidating and are far ahead of what the federal government is doing in its executive and legislative branches. The indigenous congresses and organisations have taken autonomy as the symbol of their struggle. In different municipalities, a de facto autonomy is taking place which has sympathisers and detractors of all kinds. In some regional conflicts, indigenous peoples have organised in order to take a stand on collective autonomy. In other areas, previously divided communities have joined together to create a new unity for action and struggle. Recent years have been rich in experiences and lessons, some of which precede the impact which the uprising of the EZLN in Chiapas has had. However, there is no doubt that the Zapatista movement, which raises the banner of indigenous peoples' autonomy, constitutes a considerable boost to this demand.

This book relates different experiences and makes different proposals on the issue of indigenous autonomy. Scholars and academics collaborate alongside leaders and spokespeople of peasant and indigenous organisations, as well as political experts who have participated in the different stages of the struggle for democracy and autonomy. This collective effort, coordinated by the sociologist Aracely Burguete, makes a worthy contribution to the national debate on the issue. In the first part, the important proposals which the Plural Indigenous National Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) has been making over the past years in order to contribute to the process of construction of a national proposal on autonomy are related by Margarito Ruiz Hernández. A gender analysis on the proposals for autonomy is essential, and we here present a "woman's perspective" by Margarita Gutiérrez and Nellys Palomo. The international and constitutional aspects of autonomy are analysed by Héctor Díaz-Polanco and Consuelo Sánchez.

The second part presents interesting cases of local autonomy which have been ignored or already almost forgotten by public opinion are related, such as the government of the Yaqui people in Sonora (Hilario Molina); the struggle of the indigenous peoples of the Alto Balsas area in Guerrero for their resources and their environment in the face of a mistaken and badly planned government policy for infrastructural development (Marcelino Díaz de Jesús and Pedro de Jesús Alejandro); and the now legendary fight of COCEI for municipal autonomy in Juchitán, Oaxaca, retold by its main protagonist (Leopoldo de Gyves).

The third part of the book deals specifically with the situation in Chiapas. Here the genesis of Tojolabal autonomy is related (Antonio Hernández Cruz), the conformation of the Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions (the RAP) (Marcelino Gómez Nuñez), the autonomous municipal government in the North Region (Miguel González Hernández and Elvia Quintanar Q.), the experience of the Plural Enlarged Municipal Council in Ocosingo (Ricardo Hernández Arellano) and the regeneration of indigenous peoples under the protection of the Zapatista rebellion (Arturo Lomelí González). The book closes with an analytical chapter on the new ethnic conformation of the Altos de Chiapas and of San Cristóbal de las Casas as a contextual framework for the autonomous tendencies and indigenous empowerment, by the editor of the volume, Aracely Burguete.

This important collection will be compulsory reading for all those who wish to have a better understanding of the dynamic processes of change which Mexico and its indigenous peoples are experiencing as we approach the end of the millennium.

NATIONAL PROCESSES

THE PLURAL NATIONAL INDIGENOUS ASSEMBLY FOR AUTONOMY (ANIPA)

THE PROCESS OF CREATING A NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL FOR AUTONOMY

Margarito Ruiz Hernández

The depth of maturity achieved by the Mexican indigenous movement was overwhelmingly demonstrated in the process of reflection and unity triggered by the construction of a proposal for constitutional reform to establish a system of regional autonomy in the country, organised by the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA). The aim of this brief essay is to review and reflect upon the different stages in the creation of this initiative.

The elaboration of a national legislative proposal for autonomy, formulated by the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) was never - neither in its emergence nor in its development - the result of individual action, but of convergence and consensus between the intellects and experiences of different subjects and players. Its first version was certainly drawn up by a team at the express request of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)[1]; however this first version was not aimed at the national Congress but at an assembly of indigenous peoples who would study, amend, adopt and build on it through a process of six national assemblies.

The first version of the ANIPA proposal took up the thread of an initiative to establish Pluriethnic Regions via constitutional reforms which had already been presented several years previously to the national Congress. On 10th December 1990, in my role as a PRD federal deputy, I presented a proposal for reform to Congress which aimed at amending articles 53, 73 and 115 of the Constitution[2]. These reforms proposed the establishment of Pluriethnic Regions and the creation of a sixth plurinominal constituency for deputies of the said regions[3]. In summary, the reforms proposed:

a. Reforming article 115 in order to create "Pluriethnic Regions" as politico-administrative forms of organisation, which would be invested with legal status and their own resources. The inhabitants of the said regions would have the right to organise their social, economic and political life on the basis of their own forms of organisation and their cultural heritage. Similarly, each pluriethnic region would have a "Council of Representatives" as its highest body of authority for affairs within its sphere of responsibility. All ethnic groups (both Indian and non-Indian) would be represented equally within this body, regardless of the demographic weight of each. The Council representatives would be elected by "direct and secret universal vote, every three years, according to the principle of a relative majority vote". It also stated that, *"Within the scope of their respective responsibilities, the federation, the states and the municipalities will consider and make decisions regarding the income and expenditure budgets of the pluriethnic regions, in accordance with the bill approved by the respective Council of Representatives"*. This reform also envisaged that the regulations of constitution of the pluriethnic regions would be established by law, this latter also determining the economic, socio-cultural and political areas which the "Councils of Representatives" would have responsibility for, as well as the rules governing their organisation and functioning.
b. Reforming article 53 to modify the composition of the members of the national Congress- creating a sixth plurinominal constituency - so that the participation of representatives from the Pluriethnic Regions in the Chamber of Deputies would be guaranteed.
c. Reforming article 73 to grant the national Congress the power to issue laws establishing the concurrence of the federation, the states and the municipalities, within the scope of their relevant responsibilities, with regard to the Pluriethnic Regions, with the aim of achieving the purposes envisaged by reform of article 115[4].

In retrospect, and given the degree of maturity achieved over the last four years, this proposal can only be seen as one of the first notions of something which was to develop into clearer and more consistent formulations. I think I can safely say that all those who participated in the process of elaborating this initiative felt we had learnt something from it and were fuelled by the massive incorporation into the struggle for autonomy of many other voices, many other visions and many other demands for other forms of autonomy. The plurality of perspectives on autonomy from the different organisations and leaders - with whom we have debated these issues since 1994 - has formed a substantial foundation on which to base the formulation of a proposal for autonomy, and which has enabled the advancement and enrichment of this proposal.

This construction process was never straightforward: as in all processes there were ups and downs. However, from 1990 to 1993 it was

characterised by the proliferation of indigenous organisations which, like mushrooms after the rain, were springing up all over the country. Slowly, many of these new organisations were becoming convinced of the importance of the strategic indigenous struggle and of the relevance of modifying legal instruments at both national and international level which, although this would not immediately resolve the daily problems of our peoples, was seen as an essential pre-condition to commencing any process by which to change our situation.

The most significant aspect at that time was the emergence of organisations which actually were indigenous, thus initiating the creation of an indigenous path to autonomy[5]. Indigenous struggles had previously been concealed within the peasant movement's programme for agrarian reform[6]. Between 1990 and 1992, these new organisations began to form an incipient national indigenous movement around the Mexican 500 Years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance Council, linked to the international indigenous movement of the same name. Organisations from different States of the Mexican Republic[7] were forming a stratum which was to feed this trend within the indigenous movement. The majority of these organisations continue to coordinate their work to this very day.

The indigenous movement of 1992 was a catalyst which helped to revive the conscience of not only indigenous peoples but also non-indigenous society. A significant number of Mexicans sympathised with the struggle and began to join this heroic act of liberation. It was a fundamental step which moved the spirits and hearts of Indian people to recall our history and to imagine a different future. This was a time for remembering what we had been in the past and for imagining how a new society, a new State, could be; for remembering, above all, the five centuries of obscurity, marginalisation and discrimination. These were years of reflection, of recovery of the memories of our peoples, our ancestors. We remembered the forms of government, of organisation and administration of daily life which we had in the communities and regions. In this process, we were slowly reflecting and debating on a number of proposals for reform of Mexican law, as the necessary path for protection of our specific rights as Indian peoples[8]. Between 1990 and 1992, the number of indigenous organisations grew, encouraged by the expectations caused by the eruption of the word 'indigenous' onto the national and international scene[9].

The mobilisations and marches of October 1992 managed to unite thousands of indigenous people from all over the country, and several thousand non-indigenous Mexicans also joined the protest against the

painful commemoration of the Vth Centenary. Following the 1992 mobilisation, there were many who left the movement but there were also many more who stayed. This last group included both those whose main demands were immediate and those whose main objective was the strategic fight in the long term.

After the 1992 mobilisation, this latter group of organisations continued working on a proposal for regulating article 4 of the Constitution which, although we were aware that its scope was limited and insufficient, was nevertheless essential to protect and guarantee the constitutionality of ILO Convention No. 169 . In the last months of 1993, the organisations of the Mexican 500 Years Council held a number of meetings regarding this proposal. In Yalalag, Oaxaca, under the auspices of the traditional authorities, we met to draw up a proposal which was submitted to the different parties which made up the national Congress.

It was at this time that the thunder of January 1st 1994 was heard, thunder which announced the rains which were to feed new maize, new sun, new life. The majority of indigenous organisations came onto the streets to join the call of the Zapatista rebels, together with thousands of other Mexicans. The EZLN called upon all people to make the cause their own and to demand fulfilment of their eleven point programme as issued in the First Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle[11].

Two issues were notable from the beginning: a) that although they were an army of indigenous people, demands for Indian rights, for self-determination and for autonomy were not considered within their programme of struggle, and b) that despite being an indigenous army, it did not expressly call upon the indigenous movement as the preferred interlocutor of the rebels but only as one of several hundred other movements, personalities and civil and people's organisations which became the privileged interlocutors of the EZLN. It was not until 1995 that the indigenous movement began to gain a presence on the Zapatista agenda, and this was not for free. The national indigenous movement had to win its place on the basis of its proposals and its organisation.

From 1994 onwards, the indigenous movement made enormous efforts to try to attract the attention of the EZLN and to get them to take an interest in the demand for the indigenous right to self-determination and autonomy in order to get these issues introduced onto the negotiating table. There was clear sympathy towards the EZLN on the part of the organisations which had previously made up the Mexican 500 Years Council. For example, on 18th May 1994, these organisations

were honoured with the *"1994 Roque Dalton Medal"* in recognition of their struggle[12]. In the public award ceremony for this medal, we rejected the prize and presented it to the EZLN Command in recognition of their being *"..the smallest star, chosen to be at the front.."* of the universe of indigenous resistance.

In response, the EZLN sent a public communique in recognition of this gesture. This letter was the first of several which publicly supported the organisations of the national indigenous movement - such as the case of the Guerrero 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Council[13] - and also ANIPA, as we will see further on. Unfortunately, this good beginning for bilateral relations became strained when direct communication with the EZLN was discontinued following the entry onto the scene of the concept of "advisors", some of whom robbed the indigenous struggle of its right to express its own thoughts, feelings, proposals and projects for a desirable society.

The challenge of achieving a space in which to place indigenous rights as a significant issue on the agenda of democracy was long and difficult although it was a fact that, after 1994, the results were better than before. For example, not long previously, the Mexican 500 Years of Resistance Council had sent a request - signed by numerous indigenous organisations - to the popular struggles for democracy, in which we requested the incorporation of the demand for "recognition of the right to self-determination and autonomy" as point number twenty one on the list of *"20 Points for Democracy"* which, on the eve of the 1994 elections, this movement of civil society had managed to gain a consensus around. In spite of the organisational weight behind this request, it was nevertheless ignored and we received not even a letter in response.

The same happened months later when, in an effort to get the EZLN to incorporate the demand for self-determination and autonomy onto its political agenda, ANIPA[14] requested that the EZLN and the organisation Civic Alliance incorporate a "point number 6" into the National Consultation which both organisations were preparing. On this occasion, too, the indigenous request was ignored and it seemed that the rights of youth were, at that time, more important to the EZLN than the rights of Indian peoples[15].

In spite of these difficulties, the indigenous organisations' efforts to convince society of the importance of their rights continued at different levels, both regional and national. At this time, declarations and political actions of a clearly autonomous nature were profuse[16]. The unprecedented and timely holding of the First National Electoral Convention

of Indigenous Peoples (CNE) in March 1994 was significant. Different indigenous organisations were invited, many of whom attended. All the opposition candidates competing for the Presidency of the Republic were invited, the only one to decline being the PRI government candidate, who refused to attend. All the opposition candidates accepted a commitment to incorporate indigenous deputies within their groups and demonstrated a surprisingly open attitude towards indigenous rights, as well as a commitment to campaign for incorporation of the rights of our people into the Constitution, should they win the election[17].

This meeting coincided with the date on which the first Commissioner for Dialogue in Chiapas, Manuel Camacho Solís, made known his "proposal" for a solution to the conflict in Chiapas. The Assembly of the National Electoral Convention rejected the federal government's offer to the EZLN to negotiate peace[18]. The Assembly was indignant that the government should propose more of the same to the EZLN: merely regulating article 4 of the Constitution and creating indigenist offices. Proposals which, furthermore, coincided with the actions of the Salinas government which, days after the armed uprising, had created a new indigenist office functioning as an authority of political control with which to contain the national indigenous insurgency and which promoted a "consultation" in order to establish regulations for article 419.

It is important to note that the composition of the National Electoral Convention was of a plural nature with regard to both its organisers and participants, which gave a different nuance and overtone to this event. For many of the participants, it was the first time that indigenous supporters of the PRI had worked alongside, and agreed on common proposals with, indigenous sympathisers from the opposition parties. The lesson was an important one. Many learnt that indigenous PRI supporters were not our enemies but simply brothers who thought differently to ourselves; who had opinions which it was our duty to respect and tolerate. We also learnt that it was possible to come to an agreement between ourselves when there were no outside interests involved in our dialogue. From now on, we were convinced that a common proposal based on the word and unity of indigenous people, beyond political affiliation and ideological positions, had to be built. This realisation motivated the organisers of the first ANIPA assembly to ensure that, from the very start, it would be organised and constituted in a plural manner.

The EZLN's rejection of Commissioner Manuel Camacho Solís' proposal for a resolution of the conflict in Chiapas was officially an-

nounced on 10th June 1994, giving rise to a new process of debate on the indigenous issue within Mexican society which contributed to greater awareness on the subject. On this same date, the EZLN called for a *"National Dialogue for Democracy, Freedom and Justice"* through a *"National Democratic, Sovereign and Revolutionary Convention"* (CND) and called on "all Mexicans" to participate in it. Thus, in August 1994, thousands of indigenous people from all over the country arrived at the National Democratic Convention. Of the seven work groups established, one was devoted to indigenous issues. In this work group, the self-determination and autonomy of indigenous peoples was demanded in indigenous representatives' speeches from within the heart of Zapatista territory[20].

The indigenous movement within the CND was acquiring strength by building basic agreements. The CND meeting was held from 3rd to 5th February 1995 in the city of Querétaro. The proposal received by this meeting and which the indigenous movement wished to propose to society was therefore far more complete. This proposal, known as *"A Manifesto to the Nation. The Proposal of 13 Indian Organisations"*, was proof of the progress being made around a consensus. The points proposed in this proposal were: 1) deep changes to, and a new pact in, the relationship between indigenous peoples and the nation, including the State and society in general, and 2) the establishment of a national system of autonomy not limited to the community level but to be established **simultaneously at the three levels of autonomous government: community, municipality and region**[21].

In the end, the politico-ideological tower of Babel and the protagonists in dispute within the CND made construction of a consensus around a people's programme and, above all, the concretisation of actions difficult. In the face of such diversity, "factions" of the CND were soon formed. Indigenous peoples were named as just one more "sector" of society, which gave rise to the "National Indigenous Congress" (CNI), the first Assembly of which was held in Tlapa Guerrero from 16th to 18th December 1994[22]. This Congress was very encouraging as the number of indigenous organisations participating in the fight for autonomy had increased significantly and the previously 'unheard of presence of women was beginning to be noted.

At the same time, Chiapas civil society, grouped around the State Assembly of the People of Chiapas (AEDPCH) and the "Rebel Government" headed by Amado Avendaño, were working on the elaboration of a new Constitution which was to promote a new pluriethnic and

pluricultural State. The indigenous organisations of Chiapas participated and we felt encouraged by these efforts as there was consensus within the national indigenous movement that it was time for a new relationship between the State and indigenous peoples, which was to be established within the new Constitution.

Unfortunately, the military action against the EZLN on 9th February 1995 was to significantly change this dynamic. The civil defence of the EZLN called on the indigenous and peasant organisations of Chiapas to march on Mexico City in March 1995, where it was demanded that the State should halt its military actions in Chiapas and respond to the demands put forward by its organisations. It was in this context that the second CNI congress was held in Juchitán, Oaxaca. The processes and efforts which the CNI represented were, however, inevitably destroyed with the dissolution of the CND.

The people's response for an end to the government's militarism managed to drag the Law for dialogue, conciliation and dignified peace in Chiapas out of the government, giving the national Congress the role of protagonist. The new plan for dialogue had as its fundamental aim the establishment of commitments to legal and institutional reforms which would respond to the Zapatista demands. In the face of this new situation, the national indigenous movement adapted its strategies. It considered it necessary to move construction of an internal consensus amongst the indigenous peoples of Mexico around legislative proposals forward in order to make the demands for autonomy more concrete. Thus the First Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy was organised, whose acronym was to become the name of this rapprochement of indigenous organisations: ANIPA.

Organised by indigenous deputies and senators from the PRD[23], by the PRD's Committee on Human Rights and Indian Peoples[24] and indigenous and non-governmental organisations[25], ANIPA's first assembly was held from 8th to 10th April in Mexico City, in one of the assembly rooms of the national Congress. It was an extraordinary meeting as it broke with at least 4 taboos: a) that more than 300 indigenous delegates from all over the country met with the sole aim of reflecting and systematising a legislative proposal; b) that it was the indigenous people themselves who carried out the legislative action concerning their rights; c) that such activity took place in one of the assembly rooms of the national Congress, and d) that the organisation's leadership which was appointed during this event was of a cross-party nature[26].

ANIPA: dialogue between Indian peoples

From April 1995 to November 1997, ANIPA held six national assemblies and was preparing to hold its seventh national assembly in November 1998. As opposed to the dialogue between the EZLN and the federal government, held in San Andrés Larrainzar, where decisions were not taken by an indigenous majority, all the ANIPA assemblies were characteristic in that they were moulded by the hand of Indian peoples.

Once the first version of the legislative proposal was submitted, the organising committee was dissolved to be replaced by a Follow-Up Committee composed of indigenous people from the different regions of the country and with different political backgrounds. In each Assembly, this Follow-Up Committee grew in number of members and representativeness. Participation in ANIPA was not a requirement of membership. Any indigenous person who wanted to express their viewpoint on autonomy attended. The main characteristic of this Assembly was thus that it established a space for dialogue between Indian peoples which was to make the construction of consensus around a legislative proposal possible.

Among other relevant aspects of the Assembly was its huge size, the minimum average number of participants being four hundred. Its self-sufficiency was another relevant aspect: in most cases the delegates generally arrived under their own steam, external funding being the least significant form of funding[27] and, in all cases, the organisation of the event and the logistics were in the hands of the host organisations and/or indigenous peoples.

Finally, the most important part of this process was that the legislative proposal slowly became the result of a wider consensus. In each Assembly, the version to be debated was modified, incorporating the most sensitive points of the socio-ethnic nature of each host region into its reformulation. It was for this reason that the strategy of work was that the seat of the Assembly should be itinerant. The Assembly's plenary thus moved to the north, then to the south, the south-east and centre of the country, each region imprinting its own specific flavour on it. A Follow-Up Committee was put in charge of collating the modifications and proposing a new version of the legislative proposal.

The new version was disseminated prior to each Assembly and all participants had a copy of the proposed text for discussion. The mechanism worked; the advances and modifications made to the draft initiative by each Assembly were clearly taken into account. The process was carried out in the following way[28]:

Modifications introduced by the First Assembly:

The first Assembly of ANIPA was held in the national Congress, Mexico DF from 8th to 10th April 1995 and this gave birth to the first proposal for reform of articles 4, 73 and 115[29], presented by the Organising Committee. The proposal was modified and approved by the Assembly. A Follow-Up Committee was appointed, which would be responsible for producing the new version and for organising the next Assembly.

The main points of the proposal remained as follows:

1. The establishment of a System of Regional Autonomy as the constitutional framework for the creation and functioning of the autonomies in the country and as an integral part of the federal organisation. The autonomy would have a regional, pluriethnic, democratic and inclusive nature and would have a geographic base, for which reason it would be necessary to define the jurisdiction of the autonomy. The creation of a "fourth level" (autonomous region) of geographic structure in the country was proposed.
2. Reforms to article 4 of the Constitution which authorised the establishment of a new system of autonomy.
3. Reforms to article 115 of the Constitution . Here the establishment of a new level of geographic organisation of the country is demanded: the autonomous regions. The demand for indigenous representation in the national Congress and the State Congresses remains incorporated within this article.
4. The Autonomous System would function at three levels of government: the autonomous region, the autonomous municipality and the autonomous community. These articles of the constitution would establish: a) the principal components and elements of the Autonomous System; b) the geographic base and its jurisdiction; and c) the functions and spheres of influence of the autonomous regions, municipalities and communities.
5. General measures for the arrangement and organisation of the autonomous bodies.
6. Each one of these levels of administration would have its own government. The governments would be pluriethnic where the sociocultural composition was plural. Indians and non-Indians coexisting in the same region would be represented in this government.

7. The Autonomous System would benefit both the indigenous people and all the non-indigenous inhabitants of a pluriethnic region, having equality of rights and opportunities.
8. The proposal would incorporate gender rights which, in the initial version, were absent.
9. The basis for internal political and administrative organisation of a region would be the autonomous communities and municipalities, as well as the autonomous regional governments.

Principal modifications incorporated at the Second Assembly[30]

The second Assembly was held in Lomas de Bacum, in Yaqui territory in the state of Sonora from 27th to 28th May 1995. This meeting was chaired by the Yaqui governors and some Mayan and Raramuri governors. Representatives of indigenous peoples from the west, north and north-east of the country participated in significant numbers. The EZLN were invited to this Assembly and were asked to send a number of delegates. Unable to attend, Sub-Commander Marcos sent a public communique. In this he greeted the Assembly and apologised that, due to increasing militarisation and police persecution, Zapatista delegates were unable to attend. However, he was of the opinion that such a proposal seemed fine, in general, although he made suggestions with regard to the need to include some other considerations, which the resulting Follow-Up Committee for the new initiative took into consideration[31].

The main observations and additions to the proposal were:

1. To establish that autonomy is one way of exercising the right to self-determination. Consequently, the right which is being recognised is the right to self-determination.
2. The people could opt for any of the three levels of guaranteed autonomy - regional, municipal and communal - without the simultaneous coexistence of all three levels being compulsory. The basic argument was that for most peoples of the west, north and north-east, the municipalities were felt to be an imposition which had constituted a danger to the integrity of their indigenous territories. The Yaquis vehemently highlighted the dangers that a compulsory 'remunicipalisation' could entail for their territories and insisted on the importance of regional autonomy which, from their point of view, was the only autonomy that truly protected their territories. Similarly, the participation of municipal presidents within the regional governments was clarified, making it optional.

Another aspect highlighted by the peoples of the north which questioned ANIPA's initial proposal was the compulsory pluriethnic nature of these regions. The northern, north-eastern and western peoples emphasised the advisability of keeping this question open and that in this proposal for autonomy it should only be defined as "regional autonomy", deleting the condition of "pluriethnicity" - as proposed in the initial version - and more firmly establishing the notion of "autonomy of the people". At the appropriate time, and depending on the specificities of the region, its monoethnic or pluriethnic nature could be defined.
4. The issue of bi-national peoples - such as the O'dham and the Kikapoos, amongst others - was emphasised, an issue which was taken into account in the proposal for reform.
5. It was requested that the responsibilities and functions of each level of government be clarified. There was a need to reiterate and clarify that one of the most basic responsibilities is the power to regulate the use, exploitation, control and defence of the territories, natural resources and environment.
6. The advisability of emphasising the fact that the mechanism for integration of the indigenous regions and municipalities should be the union of communities and/or municipalities, and also conglomerates of peoples such as that of the eight peoples which make up the Yaqui territory, was noted.
7. The incorporation of recognition for indigenous legal institutions and practices.
8. Punishment of all discrimination against indigenous persons and Indian peoples.
9. The "officialisation" of indigenous languages on indigenous territory. The incorporation of a State obligation to guarantee the integrity of peoples, indigenous identity and dignity.
10. That bilingual and bicultural identity should be respected at all academic levels.
11. The proposal for reform of article 53, which establishes the election of deputies from the autonomous regions to the national Congress , by relative majority and proportional representation, was included.
12. A paragraph was added on division II of article 116 in order to guarantee the election of deputies from the autonomous regions to local legislatures.

Principal modifications incorporated at the Third Assembly [32]

The third Assembly was held in the city of Oaxaca from 26th - 27th August 1995.

1. One significant aspect of this meeting was that it was an unprecedented opportunity for the organisations and indigenous peoples of Oaxaca to demand recognition of the traditional habits and customs of the indigenous municipalities on the part of the LV legislature and the government, without the intervention of political parties and without conditions, managing to pressure the government into approving an initiative.
2. This Assembly was also the scene of debates between the two main indigenous positions on autonomy. One trend within the Oaxaca indigenous movement was in disagreement with the proposal for regional autonomy and demanded greater emphasis on the community[33]. In the end, when the initiative was rewritten, the proposals were reconciled and the Assembly agreed that the powers of the community level would be strengthened in the legislative proposal. At the same time, the position established at Sonora was ratified, i.e.: that the system of autonomy should legally recognise *the simultaneous existence of three levels of government (regional, municipal and communal) exercised in accordance with the interests, conditions and requirements of each people, who will have - when exercising their right to self-determination - the ultimate power to decide the scale of the said autonomy, which could be communal, municipal, regional or all three simultaneously*[34].
3. This Assembly brought back to the national discussion table the need to review and modify article 27 of the Constitution and its governing laws. A committee was appointed to begin formulating a proposal regarding this article, which would include the main precepts of ILO Convention 169 in this regard.
4. The need to protect the rights of indigenous migrants was emphasised, both within national territory and cross-border.
5. The functions and powers of the community in relation to the municipality were clearly defined.
6. A committee was appointed to work on an "additional protocol", its role being to specify aspects relating to the government bodies, roles, responsibilities and powers of the autonomous community, municipality and region.
7 Issues relating to the imparting of indigenous justice were more clearly defined and use of the term "indigenous law" instead of "habits and customs" - which had initially been used - was agreed upon as the preferred term.
8. The assembly proposed modifications to article 3 of the Constitution, in which it should be established that indigenous education was to be in the hands of the people and would be of a regional nature, responding to the socio-cultural specificity of the region. These reforms were to include the State's responsibility for establishing new educational institutions appropriate to the reality of the peoples.
9. There should also be legislation regarding communication and indigenous languages as autonomous rights.
10. In the Assembly, political declarations were also made regarding the conflict in Chiapas. The request of the participants of the ANIPA Assembly to *"...be protagonists in the national dialogue in order to contribute our proposals and defend the social, economic, political and cultural rights of the indigenous peoples of Mexico..."* This request clearly alluded to the dialogue process between the EZLN and the government which was to take place shortly after this event and in which indigenous organisations were asking to participate. Up until then we had been on the margins of such negotiations.

Principal modifications incorporated in the Fourth Assembly[35]

The fourth Assembly was held in Jovel (San Cristóbal de las Casas), Chiapas from 7th to 9th December 1995.

1. This Assembly had a special element: the *"National Meeting of Women of ANIPA"*. Nearly 300 indigenous women from throughout the country met at this event to discuss the specific relationship between autonomous rights and gender rights[36]. This meeting was necessary, given that the previous Assemblies had lacked any precise formulations and no specific stage had been set to debate this important issue. The women demanded greater definition of ANIPA's legislative initiative as they considered that the proposal had not sufficiently included their demands. The aim of this Assembly was to strengthen discussion on the part of indigenous women concerning the issue of autonomy. In this respect, they said:

   "Autonomy for women means the right to be autonomous as women, to receive training, to seek spaces and mechanisms through which we will be listened to in community assemblies and to hold positions of responsibility. It also means facing up to our fears and daring to take decisions and participate, seeking financial independence, to have independence in the family and to continue gaining information, for knowledge leads to autonomy. To disseminate women's experiences in order to encourage others to participate, to give them the power to participate, in this type of meeting".[37]

2. This event was also characterised by the participation of international indigenous delegates who were supporting our work.

3. This Assembly was held in a special context. In the meeting in Oaxaca, the debate on constitutional reform was practically concluded and a new stage of political debate on the future strategies of the initiative began. At Oaxaca, the work groups had demanded that the proposal being constructed should be taken into account by the main protagonists in the dialogue for peace: the EZLN, the government and the Commission for Concorde and Pacification (COCOPA).
4. In October, the EZLN had begun to establish the agenda for dialogue on the issue of "Indigenous rights and culture". The EZLN had invited a large group of representatives from the country's indigenous organisations to this meeting, the majority of whom had participated in the ANIPA Assemblies. At the same time, in December 1995, the situation was tense in Chiapas as a result of an increase in military numbers, and aggression against the Zapatistas in the zone of conflict was feared.
5. It was for this reason that the main objective of this Assembly was political. The participants ratified the draft initiative, which had been approved in its most recent version in Oaxaca, and agreement was reached regarding its publication and dissemination. At the same time, the participants authorised the submission of this initiative to the dialogue which was commencing in San Andrés Larrainzar, as the national indigenous movement's contribution to peace in Chiapas, in full recognition of our rights.

At ANIPA's fourth Assembly the *"Declaration of Jovel, Chiapas"* was issued, which included these concerns. It stated,

> *"On this occasion, more than 500 delegates representing 149 organisations and 33 Indian peoples from 21 states of the country have come together, supported by our brothers from the Apache, Dineh, Seminole and Nahoa peoples of the United States of North America, Quiché, Kakchiquel and Queqchí peoples of Guatemala and other brothers invited from organisations in Canada and Denmark... We are very pleased that the initiative for establishment of regional autonomy proposed by ANIPA is beginning to be considered within the national dialogue, thanks to the space opened by our brothers in the EZLN, largely in the dialogue for peace in San Andrés... We delegates who meet here commit ourselves to strengthening the autonomy of our own communities, municipalities and regions and to promote actions aimed at the constitution of de facto autonomies, thus protecting the rights already constitutionally established within the laws of Mexico but which the government refuses to recognise. We call upon all Indian brothers of our country to declare themselves*

> *and to organise, immediately and autonomously: autonomy cannot be requested, it must be taken through action!...This IVth National Assembly of ANIPA calls upon the EZLN, upon the organisations which will attend the National Indigenous Forum and upon all the indigenous peoples of the country to endorse a national indigenous political pact of mutual support, collaboration and political unity for the recognition and defence of the rights of our peoples"*[38].

Principal modifications incorporated at the Fifth Assembly[39]

The fifth Assembly was held in Chilapa, Guerrero on 29th and 30th April and 1st May 1996.

1. The main aim of this Assembly was to review the significance of the San Andrés Accords. The main conclusion of the Assembly was that the said Accords had not included the proposal for establishment of a System of Autonomy, as had been agreed throughout the whole ANIPA process and which had been ratified as the main proposal of the national indigenous movement in the National Indigenous Forum held from 4th to 6th January 1996 and which had been called for by the EZLN[40].
2. The Assembly reviewed and approved a new proposal from ANIPA which incorporated the San Andrés Accords[41].
3. The organisations of ANIPA reiterated their commitment to the initial objective of the indigenous fight and to continue fighting until, some day, the establishment of a regional, municipal and communal system of autonomy had been achieved.

Principal modifications incorporated at the Sixth Assembly

The sixth Assembly was held from 10th to 12th September in Mexico City.

1. The aim of this Assembly was to review the proposals for constitutional reform presented by COCOPA, the Federal Government, the National Action Party (PAN) and the Green Party, which would presumably provide legislation regarding the commitments undertaken within the San Andrés Accords. It was noted that the Accords were not fully included in these legislative proposals - particularly the one presented by President Ernesto Zedillo - and were increasingly diluted in the different legislative formulations which the political parties were proposing.

2. The Assembly ended with a *"Final Declaration"* which strengthened the commitment of the member organisations to the legislative proposal, which it was agreed would be taken on as the political programme of ANIPA
3. The Assembly was concerned at the collapse of indigenous presence and regretted the fact that the tremendous organisational capacity achieved by the national indigenous movement during 1995 had deteriorated to such a degree that there was no longer the strength to put pressure on the government to fulfil the agreements made with the EZLN.
4. With the aim of contributing new actions with which to strengthen the national indigenous movement and provide us with a more solid structure of wider scope, the Assembly authorised ANIPA's Follow-Up Committee to proceed with the legalisation of the organisation as a Civil Association. At the same time it also appointed a committee with responsibility for overseeing the necessary procedures and organisational processes necessary to achieve registration of ANIPA as a National Political Association (APN).

The Seventh National Assembly of ANIPA

1. During 1998, ANIPA proposed strengthening its geographic structure. Two important Regional Assemblies were thus held, one in the north of the country, organised by the Traditional Council of Indian Peoples of Sonora, in which more than a hundred authorities and representatives from that region participated.
2. A similar meeting was held in the south-east, in the Mayan peninsula of Yucatán. This Assembly led to the formation of "ANIPA-Quintana Roo", a structure whose aim was to disseminate and implement the proposal for regional autonomy in the Mayan peninsula.
3. ANIPA also proposed strengthening its organisational structure by obtaining registration as a Civil Association[42]. It has also been concerned with bringing about the affiliation as founder members of the National Political Association (APN)[43]. It is hoped that during the seventh Assembly, which will be held from 19th to 21st November 1998, ANIPA-APN will be able to proceed with its formal constitution*.

   Amongst other objectives, the following were proposed:
   - To achieve recognition of the right to self-determination on the part of indigenous peoples and the establishment of a System of Regional Autonomy.
   - To demand complete fulfilment of the San Andrés Accords.
   - To transform the indigenous movement into a great force enabling greater political visibility and thus a position of equality to be gained in order to establish alliances with other political and social forces in the country.
   - To fight for the construction of a plural, inclusive and participative democracy.
   - To contribute to raising awareness amongst Mexican men and women, indigenous and non-indigenous, around the construction of a new Mexico and a new pluricultural State.
   - To fight for a Constituent Assembly and a new Constitution which will carry out integral reforms in order to achieve full recognition of our people's rights.
   - To promote an intensive National Literacy Campaign on Indigenous Rights amongst all Mexican men and women, indigenous or non-indigenous.
   - To build a platform, on the basis of which all indigenous people of Mexico can debate and put forward proposals and projects to the rest of national society.
   - To contribute, on the basis of dialogue and debate, to creating a culture of reconciliation and ethno-national tolerance, with full respect for the different identities which coexist in the Mexican state, and to abolishing racial discrimination.

3. Of the activities which ANIPA members carried out during 1998, the mobilisations and lobbying work stand out. Given their genuine concern for the government's negative attitude regarding fulfilment of the peace accords agreed with the EZLN, a number of members of the leadership participated in the 16th Period of Session of the UN's Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva, Switzerland and lobbied to put pressure on the UN to assume a position regarding the validity of the human rights of indigenous peoples in our country. The presence of ANIPA's federal deputy, Marcelino Díaz de Jesús[44], at this event was very important for the lobbying work[45]. After great effort, a resolution of the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities was achieved, in which it was stated that, *"...the situation (of human rights in Mexico) is of increasing concern, particularly with regard to the native populations"* and for which reason the 24 experts of the Sub-Commission drew the attention of the Mexican government to this requesting that:

1) The Mexican government should guarantee full respect for the international instruments to which they were a party and, to this effect, give high priority to:
   a) fighting the impunity of the authors of serious human rights violations, particularly those who have caused numerous victims amongst the native populations, and

b) promoting the actions of those defending human rights and guaranteeing their security;

2) The signatories of the San Andrés Accords should reinitiate the process, giving priority to dialogue;
3) With prevention in mind, the Commission on Human Rights should examine the evolution of the situation of human rights in Mexico at its next period of session and decide, if the Commission were not in a position to do so, to continue to examine developments in relation to this problem at the 51st Period of Session.

Another important achievement of ANIPA's work are the activities which the Women's Committee has carried out over the last two years. Their efforts to build unity amongst the indigenous women's movement at national level have been substantial. They participate, presenting proposals and actions, in the National Coordinating Body of Indigenous Women of Mexico (CONAMIM), which in turn is linked to a continental network of indigenous women. In order to contribute to strengthening these efforts, the Women's Committee of ANIPA is preparing to hold a *"Continental Forum for Indigenous Women"* in Mexico in 1999. To be able to evaluate and plan these tasks, a strong presence of women delegates to the seventh Assembly is required, for which reason leadership at both regional and state level has been urged to stimulate and facilitate the presence of women at this Assembly and at the Constituent Assembly of the National Political Association**.

It is worth mentioning the actions which have been developed by both male and female members of ANIPA in the regions and federal bodies within the framework of the other area of work ANIPA has been promoting over the last two years: indigenous self-development. These are experiences which will be proposed and evaluated in order to constitute a framework for reflection and introduction to the *"Second International Workshop for Exchange on Indigenous Self-Development"* which will be held in March 1999 in Mexico City. This international event is being organised in coordination with COMG from Guatemala and the Abya Yala Foundation for Self-Development, whose offices are in Oakland, California. Similarly, ANIPA will be a counterpart to the *Continental Encounter of Indigenous Peoples* which will be held in Mexico in the year 2000 in an effort to strengthen the indigenous movement and its strategies for the next millennium.

Despite these advances on the part of ANIPA, the overall national context is not favourable to the recognition and consolidation of our rights as peoples. To date, the Mexican government has not fulfilled the

commitments undertaken in the San Andrés Accords. Similarly, in Chiapas, government actions have been contrary to those agreed. We thus consider it urgent for the national indigenous movement to take up the initiative once more.

The seventh Assembly similarly proposed considering and working on ways of contributing and adding to the political action which the EZLN called for in its last *Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle* so that a national consultation on the proposal for reform formulated by COCOPA could be held[46].

So ANIPA continues, made up of historic indigenous organisations. Together, we have built one of the strongest trends with which to feed the national indigenous movement and we have forged the path for others to follow in the new awakening.

ANIPA and the San Andrés Accords

The double standards which have characterised the Mexican government's attitude were demonstrated on 9th February 1995 when, treacherously, the government's armed forces infiltrated Zapatista territory to capture its leadership. Such was the indignation of the people and the civil response that the government had to put a halt to its belligerent actions and agree to a legal framework for the peace negotiation process. This mechanism - *the Law for dialogue, conciliation and dignified peace in Chiapas* - brought about the creation of a cross-party group from the legislative body - the Commission for Concord and Pacification, COCOPA - which became a contributory body to the peace process between the government and the rebels. A rapprochement between the parties in conflict enabled them to agree to the establishment of four broad areas for dialogue: 1) Indigenous Rights and Culture; 2) Democracy and Justice; 3) Well-Being and Development, and 4) The Rights of Women. The procedural mechanisms enabled the parties to designate a particular number of guests and advisors. On this basis, the first work group was established on 17th October 1995.

This stage of the dialogue was awaited with anxious expectation on the part of the indigenous organisations. The work previously carried out in the different assemblies by ANIPA - as well as other regional and State assemblies - had enabled a rapid internal consensus to be built at the negotiating table of San Andrés Larrainzar. There were differences in form but not in content. All the indigenous organisations which participated in this stage of the dialogue process were seeking to obtain legal recognition of the right to self-determination and the establishment of a system of regional autonomy. This consensus was unanimously ratified at the Na-

tional Indigenous Forum called by the EZLN and which was held from 3rd to 8th January 1996 in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the aim of which was to refine the points for negotiation with the government.

The majority of the organisations that had been involved in the formulation of the ANIPA proposal participated as advisors or guests of the EZLN in the negotiations between October 1995 and January 1996. We co-existed with a remarkable strength of unity which drew us together in a hitherto unknown way. Hundreds of indigenous people from all over the country, the best of national intelligence and representativeness, congregated in San Cristóbal de las Casas and in San Andrés Larrainzar and, putting aside differences and conflicts, we built a consensus. The crest of the wave, the climax of this united effort was the National Indigenous Forum. In the closing speech, the EZLN Command (which included the presence of Sub-Commander Marcos) listened to the Assembly's mandate, which clearly told the EZLN what our people's expectations were. The Command, who had said that they would act - in line with their slogan to *"to lead obeying"* - in accordance with the Assembly, agreed to negotiate in strict compliance with the Forum's agreements.

But after the Indigenous Forum, things began to change. The indigenous organisations were pushed out of the negotiation process and relegated to a secondary role of observers. Having given our opinion, it was no longer for Indians to make the decisions.

In fact, when the definitive stage of the final accords was reached, things were no longer as we had hoped they would be: the San Andrés Accords did not include the indigenous mandate which had been clearly established as a programme at the National Indigenous Forum. Once again, others had decided for us. At the decision-making table, we Indians were at an historic and numeric disadvantage in the negotiating team. Indians were not trusted to negotiate their own rights. Out of the total of twenty negotiators representing the EZLN at the negotiating table, only six were indigenous - five from Oaxaca and one from Michoacán - while the rest, 14 advisors, were mestizo. That is to say, of a total of 40 negotiators who were going to decide on the future of the rights of the Indian peoples of the country, only six were indigenous of which, clearly, none were from Chiapas.
The results of the negotiation are common knowledge: the right to self-determination and autonomy - presumably recognised - can only be exercised at community level[47].

Faced with such poor results, many indigenous and non-indigenous advisors and guests were dismayed, but we were not the only ones. The

EZLN command was also in disagreement with the results negotiated by its own negotiators. It issued a communique accepting the resolutions signed in the San Andrés Accords; accepting them whilst stating disapproval of them in a declaration which it called *"Full Stop"*, published in February 1996[48]. In this declaration - signed by the EZLN Command and some of its advisors - it states that the San Andrés Accords were *"minimal agreements"* because: *"The fundamental demands of indigenous people have in no way been satisfied in the current phase of negotiation. Thus, despite endorsing the accords and minimum commitments which we were able to arrive at with the Supreme Government in these First Negotiations on "Indigenous Rights and Culture..."* they, however, considered that these results did not truly represent their aspirations.

The Command expressed its concern that the Accords did not raise the central issue of land and nor were any of the proposals for regional autonomy proposed by the National Indigenous Forum achieved. On this point, the following was noted in the same document *"Full Stop"*: *"In the documents of agreements and minimal commitments between the EZLN and the Federal Government, neither regional nor municipal autonomies are recognised. It is not enough that indigenous communities have the right to associate in municipalities in order to coordinate their actions. They need autonomous structures which, without being exclusively indigenous, would form part of the State structure and make a break with centralism"*.

In summary, the EZLN Command regretted the fact that the San Andrés Accords had not achieved the establishment of a system of regional autonomy as had been repeatedly proposed and agreed by the indigenous movement in the National Indigenous Forum and called for a continuation of the indigenous struggle around this aim.

Thus, with this agreement, the Mexican indigenous movement continues its course. It is clear to us that the immediate struggle is to achieve fulfilment of the San Andrés Accords, to protect them and implement them. In the long term, the challenge of the EZLN, ANIPA and the rest of the national indigenous movement still remains: to continue working and struggling so that one day the establishment of a system of regional autonomy may be achieved.

This is the direction in which ANIPA is going, its hopeful eyes fixed on a new awakening, a new millennium, one which is already raising its anxious face.

Jovel Chiapas, 8th October 1998

Notes

1 The leaders of the Parliamentary Group of the PRD, deputies Jesús Ortega and Juan Guerra, requested anthropologist Héctor Díaz-Polanco to draw up a proposal for constitutional reform with regard to indigenous rights. This first proposal was formulated by the Support Group for Regional Pluriethnic Autonomy (GAARI). This group was made up of Héctor Díaz-Polanco, Gilberto López y Rivas, Consuelo Sánchez and Aracely Burguete.

2 As with ANIPA's proposals for reform, the proposal I presented was studied, added to and approved by the First National Meeting of Indian Peoples of the PRD, held in the municipality of Tampaxal, San Luis Potosí, on 28th and 29th July 1990. The full text of this proposal can be found in *Plenos derechos a los pueblos indios. Dossier Number 7*. Newsletter of the Parliamentary Group of the PRD. October 1990.

3 This pioneering proposal was drawn up with the support of the following colleagues: Héctor Díaz-Polanco, Gilberto López y Rivas, Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo, Pablo Gómez, Aracely Burguete and Mario Zepeda.

4 The full text of the proposal can be read in *Iniciativa de Reformas y Adiciones a los Artículos 53, 73 and 115 Constitucionales*. Deputy Margarito Ruiz Hernández. 10th December 1990. Stenographic version. Congress of the Union. LIV Legislature.

5 The Mexican Academy of Human Rights (AMDH) played an important role in the process of training indigenous leaders from a perspective of knowledge and defence of their rights. Since 1987, the AMDH, chaired by Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Mariclaire Acosta, implemented a training programme in international and indigenous law for indigenous leaders from Mexico and Central America, coordinated by the lawyer, María Teresa Jardí. It was here that I first had the opportunity of hearing discussions on defending our rights by means of legal instruments. It was here, too, that I came to know colleagues who are today close friends, members of indigenous organisations from Mexico and Central America. Different alliances even began to be woven from within this arena, which have today borne fruit.

6 A first assessment of the success of autonomy's challenge to reverse the peasant trend which we saw as dominating the rural struggles in 1989 can be read in Margarito Xib Ruiz and Aracely Burguete *"Hacia la autonomía de los pueblos indios"* initially published in the journal Cemos-Memoria (then edited by Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo and now by Héctor Díaz-Polanco), subsequently compiled in the collection *La Autonomía de los Pueblos Indios*. PRD-LVI Legislature, Mexico DF 1996.

7 Some examples of organisations which were formed between 1990 and 1991 and which were involved in the Mexican 500 Years of Resistance Council are: the Guerrero 500 Years of Resistance Council; the Mayan Peninsular Council - FIPI, coordinated by Carlos Chablé Mendoza; the Chinantec, Mazatec and Cuicatec Regional Council (CORECHIMAC-FIPI), coordinated by Juan Rojas Morales; the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organisations of the Zongolica Mountains (CROIZ), coordinated by Julio Atenco; the Council of the Otomí Nation, coordinated by Thairohiady Bemudez; the Council of Mazahua Descendants, coordinated by Mario de Jesús; the Chocholtec Council, coordinated by Juana López and Teófilo Soriano; the Coordinating Body of Mayan Organisations Fighting for Freedom (COLPUMALI-FIPI); the Raramuri Council, the Purhépecha Nation and the Traditional Council of Indigenous Peoples of the North, amongst others.

8 It is interesting to recall how the majority of participants in the *"First International Forum on the Human Rights of Indian Peoples"*, held in Matías Romero, Oaxaca in 1990 under the auspices of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI), coordinated by Juan Carlos Beas and within the framework of the constitution of the Mexican 500 Years of Resistance Council, rejected the proposal for constitutional reform instigated by the government's mouthpiece, INI. The behaviour of the Assembly was not, as one might expect, one of condemnation of the limitations of the proposal for reform of article 4 but of rejection of the amendment of laws as a mechanism for winning battles or gaining benefits in our struggle per se. This was because, at that time, the majority of organisations of the Mexican indigenous-peasant movement had not realised the importance of legal reforms in the recognition of our specific human rights. In reality, such understanding was progressively built up from 1992 onwards, when the existence of an indigenous movement in its own right could already be observed.

9 Following the debate which commenced around reform of article 4, the indigenous organisations which began to develop from 1991 onwards slowly began to move along a path which implied the gaining of specific rights. In the face of increased demand we constantly spread the news (from within FIPI and CADDIAC) regarding what had been achieved with ILO Convention No. 169 and we worked on the UN and OAS draft declarations on indigenous rights in different political spaces and workshops. See, for example, the reports of FIPI workshops and publications within the framework of the "National Campaign for Literacy in Indigenous Rights" which the Support Group for Defence of Indian Rights AC (CADDIAC), a member of the Independent Front of Indian Peoples (FIPI), organised.

10 From the moment the government of Salinas de Gortari and its mouthpiece INI issued its proposal for reform of article 4 of the Constitution, there had been complete consensus around the fact that its scope was limited and insufficient. However, when he was a deputy, the author considered approval of reforms to article 4 within the national Congress in July 1991 to be essential, and by virtue of which, three months later in the month of September, ILO Convention No. 169 entered into force. If reform of the article had not taken place, there was a danger that Convention No. 169 would have been unconstitutional, putting its application in danger. It was for this reason that, given this situation, approval of article 4 was essential. Despite the poor and limited text of the reform, it was nevertheless a great victory as it was achieved in spite of significant opposition within the national Congress, which rejected amending the Constitution to recognise indigenous rights. Rejection of the reform was virtually unanimous amongst all political parties, including a substantial number of PRD deputies. The incorporation of Gilberto López y Rivas into the LIV Legislature - in its final months - was very important. His arrival brought new spirit into the legislative lobbying which, along with deputies Pablo Gómez, Jesús Ortega and Juan Guerra, I had to carry out to make the PRI and the PAN accept the governments proposed reform of article 4, which had been sent to the national Congress on 7th December 1990 but had been "frozen" by the Committee on Indigenous Affairs, dominated by the PRI. Finally, reform of article 4 was achieved on 3rd July 1991, one day before the last period of session of the LIV Legislature came to a close. A report on these and other difficulties in achieving this reform can be read in Aracely Burguete "Los

indios a la Constitución. Crónica de una Reforma en la Cámara", *Revista México Indígena Number 23. August 1991*. Mexico DF. The position of FIPI on the reform of article 4 can be read in "Reforma constitucional: un nuevo cambio de piel del indigenismo. FIPI" in *Boletín de Antropología Americana, Num. 21, July 1990.* Panamerican Institute of Geography and History. Mexico DF.

11 The eleven points are: work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace.

12 See the reports of this event in the newspapers *La Jornada* and *El Día*, 15th May 1994.

13 The EZLN sent a public communique to the Guerrero 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Council in response to a letter received from that organisation. See the newspaper *La Jornada*, 6th February 1994.

14 ANIPA replaced the Mexican 500 Years of Resistance Council. This disappeared in May 1992, as the member organisations considered that it had fulfilled its useful life cycle and that it was necessary to move on to another stage in the struggle. In order to have a global vision of this stage in the indigenous movement, see the individual works of Sergio Sarmiento and Joaquín Flores, both academics closely linked with the process of the Mexican 500 Years Council. Sergio Sarmiento Silva, *Voces indias y V Centenario*. INAH, 1998 and Joaquín Flores Félix, *La revuelta por la democracia. Pueblos indios, política y poder en México*. UAM, 1998.

15 I am referring to the *"National, International and Youth Consultation on Peace and Democracy"*, held from June to September 1995, which included a sixth question about the rights of young people. In reality, the process of incorporation of the right to self-determination and autonomy into the Zapatista programme was slow. Even on 24th January 1994, when the EZLN proposed its list of four points with which to start the negotiations to the first Commissioner for Dialogue, Manuel Camacho Solís, indigenous demands had no significant place. The four points were, "economic, social, political and military demands".

16 Between February and July 1994, virtually all the indigenous organisations in the country held meetings and workshops inspired by the Zapatista energy and by the actions to be undertaken.

17 These commitments were fulfilled. The largest indigenous group which the Union of the Congress has ever had via the different parties was in the 1994-1997 LVI Legislature. It is thus not surprising that the consultation on indigenous rights which the Committee on Indigenous Affairs organised in 1995 and 1996 came up with results and conclusions similar to the proposals which were being debated at the table in San Andrés Larrainzar at the same time.

18 The First National Electoral Convention of Indigenous Peoples was held in Mexico City on 4th and 5th March 1994. It issued its **Declaration of the Indian Peoples of Mexico with regard to the government response to the EZLN. First stage of Dialogue**.

19 Only a few days after the armed uprising, Carlos Salinas de Gortari issued an agreement by which he created the *"National Committee for Integrated Development and Social Justice for Indigenous Peoples"*.

20 An ongoing problem which arose at the time of this first CND Assembly and which persisted until the negotiation of the San Andrés Accords was the presence of the concept of EZLN "advisors". For the organisations which had fought for autonomy and for the recovery of the right to have our own voice for over a decade, such people seemed to us - at the very least - a contradiction in terms, if not contrary to autonomy. The greatest consequence was that in the

end, in all cases, it was not we Indians who drew up and gave final shape to the documents and agreements which were reached. There was certainly "consultation" of indigenous opinion, but it was not we Indians who gave the form and content to the final resolutions, as it was frequently they who ended up writing texts with which the Indian autonomist organisations were often not in agreement. This was the case in the CND and later at San Andrés Larrainzar. Thus, for example, in the *General Resolutions of the Plenary Assembly of Aguas Calientes* concepts such as "sectors", "minorities" and "ethnic groups" were used, amongst others, terms which indigenous people had rejected years ago. Thus, in the resolutions of work group 3 of the CND can be read, "...the general agreements revolved around the introduction of a social system recognising a plurality which expresses the diversity of cultures and egalitarian participation of Indian peoples in the political life of the country on an equal footing with other sectors (sic). Recognition, respect and strengthening of regional autonomies; that the transitional government should attend to the needs of minorities (sic), that ethnic groups (sic) should have their own representation in government, the drawing up of a new constitution; restructuring and rethinking the relationship between State and civil society...". See Mario Monroy B. and Carlos Zarco's *Los hombres sin rostro*. (CEE-CIPRO) Centre for Ecumenical Studies-Processed Information Service A.C. Printed in Mexico DF 1995.

21 The highlighting is my own. The 13 organisations which signed this political agreement known as "Manifesto to the Nation" were: the Guerrero 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Council, the Purépecha Nation of Michoacán; the Independent Front of Indigenous Peoples, FIPI; the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations, CEOIC; the ARIC-Union of Unions of Chiapas; the Traditional Council of Indigenous Peoples of Sonora; the Regional Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organisations of the Zongollica Veracruz Mountains, CROIZ; the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus of Oaxaca, UCIZONI; the Democratic State Assembly of Oaxaca; the Zapotec and Chinantec Assembly of the Oaxaca Mountains, AZACHIS; Development Services AC Sedac-Ixmiquipan Hidalgo; the Worker Student Peasant Coalition of the Oaxaca Isthmus (COCEI) and the Independent Office of Agricultural Workers and Peasants, CIOAC. See *Revista Ojarasca Nums. 38 and 39, November-December 1994*.

22 The Declaration of the Guerrero Mountain was issued by this Congress which agreed, amongst other things, on the following, "We, the participants in the CNI, conclude that autonomy constitutes one of our fundamental rights which, to date, has been denied us ...This right must remain clearly established within the Constitution, in a special chapter on indigenous rights. Consequently, we consider the content of article 4 insufficient and it must therefore be broadened to include recognition of our political and territorial rights. We will continue promoting the autonomy of our peoples, communities, municipalities and regions... We will recover and strengthen the autonomy of each of our decisions, both in our communal life and at municipal and regional level..."

23 The announcement was made by Auldárico Hernández Gerónimo, Senator Chontal of the State of Tabasco and Antonio Hernández Cruz, Maya-Tojolab'al deputy for Chiapas.

24 Chaired by Gilberto López y Rivas.

25 The organisations and NGOs involved were: the Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions of Chiapas (RAP), the Support Group for Regional Pluriethnic Au-

tonomy (GAARI) and the Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights. Mariclaire Acosta and Martha Recasens, from this latter organisation, supported a number of ANIPA assemblies.

26 Héctor Díaz-Polanco and Consuelo Sánchez gave the following account of this event: "For the first time in the history of the Congress of the Union, delegates from dozens of organisations from the north, centre and south of the country were able to meet within the confines of the Congress of the Union - traditionally forbidden to indigenous people - in order to debate the proposal for a new constitutional framework which would include Indian people's aspirations for autonomy. The aim of the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy, held from 10th to 11th April 1995, was to discuss an initiative for a decree which would make reforms of, and additions to, a number of articles of the Political Constitution with the aim of creating autonomous regions in Mexico". See "Las Autonomías: una formulación mexicana" in *La autonomía de los pueblos indios*. A compilation edited by the Parliamentary Group of the PRD LVI Legislature, Mexico DF, 1996.

27 The Finance Committee sought "micro-funds". The fact that ANIPA's logistics team operated out of the offices of Antonio Hernández Cruz and Andrés Bolaños both indigenous deputies from the PRD, was very important. For each of ANIPA's Assemblies, a number of PRD deputies of the LVI Legislature were extremely generous and donated some air tickets for the delegates living furthest away. Similarly the leaders of the Parliamentary Group and the National Executive Committee of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) also collaborated in a specific way. Additionally, some international bodies such as the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development from Canada, the Abya Yala, Tonantzin and Tonatierra Foundation from the United States and IWGIA from Denmark, amongst others, provided small funds to finance some of the stages of the ANIPA process. Despite this, ANIPA never lost the plural and independent nature which characterised the whole process of formulation of the proposal.

28 Accounts of ANIPA's proposal and its development can be read in: Consuelo Sánchez, "ANIPA: lucha por la autonomía en México" in the journal *Cemos-Memoria Num. 104 October 1997*. Mexico DF; Héctor Díaz-Polenco and Consuelo Sánchez, *"Las autonomías, una formulación mexicana"* already quoted; Héctor Díaz-Polenco, *La Rebelión Zapatista y la autonomía*, Siglo XXI, Mexico DF 1997 and in Cecilia Espinosa Bonilla et al. "Municipios y autonomías en México (Leyes, proclamas y propuestas)" in the journal *"Quorum"*. Publication of the Institute of Legislative Investigation of the Chamber of Deputies. Year VII. Num. 60. May-June 1998.

29 See *"Iniciativa de decreto que reforma y adiciona los artículos 4, 73 y 115 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos para la creación de las Regiones Autónomas Pluriétnicas"*. Mimeo.

30 The revised proposal for this assembly was *"Iniciativa de decreto que reforma y adiciona los artículos 4, 53, 73, 115 y 116 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos para la creación de las regiones Autónomas Pluriétnicas"*. Mimeo.

31 In his message, published in the newspaper *La Jornada*, Sub-Commander Marcos told ANIPA, amongst other things, "...The proposals which reform and add to the 4th, 73rd, 115th, and 116th articles of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico seem to be fine in general. However we think that they should consider two fundamental questions: a).- They should be written into the project

for a New Political Constitution, and b).- They should be put to a referendum or plebiscite among the indigenous peoples and communities throughout the country. The opinion of those people most directly affected is the most important." *Message to the II National Indigenous Assembly. EZLN: our struggle depends on a solution to national problems. Sub-comandante Insurgente Marcos.*

32 The proposal presented to the Third Assembly was: *Iniciativa de decreto que reforma y adiciona los artículos 4, 53, 73, 115 and 116 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos para la creación de las Regiones Autónomas*. Mimeo.

33 This was the so-called "communal trend" headed principally by the distinguished Mixe leader Floriberto Díaz, unfortunately now deceased.

34 The italics are mine.

35 Proposal presented to the Assembly. *Proyecto de iniciativa de decreto que reforma y adiciona los artículos 4, 53, 73, 115 y 116 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos para la creación de las regiones autónomas*. Leaflet, document.

36 An important paper regarding the announcing and organising of the analysis and formulation of the legislative proposal for autonomy from a gender perspective has been written by Margarita Gutiérrez and Nellys Palomo.

37 National Meeting of Women. Resolutions. ANIPA Women's Follow-Up Committee. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 1995. Mimeo. Written by Nellys Palomo.

38 *"Declaration of Jovel, Chiapas"* 9th December 1995. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. Mimeo.

39 Proposal presented to the Assembly: "Proyecto de iniciativa de decreto que reforma y adiciona los artículos 3, 4, 14, 18, 41, 53, 73, 115 y 116 de la Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos para la creación de las Regiones Autónomas" published in the *Journal CEMOS-Memoria Num. 89, July 1996*. Mexico DF.

40 See the resolutions of the Forum. **Revista C'acatl**.

41 The most recent version of the ANIPA proposal is published in the Journal *CEMOS-Memoria Num. 89, July 1996*. Mexico DF.

42 Pedro de Jesús Alejandro was appointed President. He is currently also in charge of national indigenous representation to the Indigenous Fund.

43 The National Political Association is a form of people's association the aim of which is to contribute to creating the conditions for development of democratic life and the creation of a political culture and well-informed public opinion in the country. The legal basis for the National Political Association is found in articles 33 and 35 of the Second Chapter of the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE).

* ANIPA's seventh Assembly functioned simultaneously as the Constitutive Assembly of ANIPA as a National Political Association. This assembly appointed its national leadership and approved its basic documents. Nevertheless, the process for obtaining its legal registration is still far from complete. This is a decision taken by the Council of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), if ANIPA manages to fulfil the long list of requirements which the IFE demands in order to be able to concede this registration. ANIPA's Declaration of Principles can be found in the December (number 118) issue of the journal CEMOS-Memoria or can also be found on this publication's website at http://www.memoria.com.mx. Note by Aracely Burguete.

44 In contrast to other indigenous organisations which have maintained anti-party or anti-electoral positions, ANIPA decided to undertake political alliances in order to get Indian deputies into the national Congress. To this end,

they presented a list of ten members to the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The PRD only accepted the first name on this list, that of Marcelino Díaz de Jesús. ANIPA did the same in Chiapas with its member organisation. The Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions (RAP) presented it with a list of candidates from which Marcelino Gómez Nuñez was elected (1995-1998). Within this same strategy, members of ANIPA participated in the PRD's National Assembly where the leadership of the PRD's Secretariat for Indian Peoples was elected. This resulted in the election of a Collective Executive Council of 20 people, in which there are ANIPA members. As a result of this presence, we have been able to exert pressure to introduce changes in the basic documents of this political body to ensure the PRD undertakes a commitment to regional autonomy and so that indigenous people are guaranteed space within the structure of this body. As a result of the pressure and lobbying carried out from within this space, we thus achieved - in the 1998 Fourth National Congress - modification of the PRD Statutes to make a quota of indigenous deputies compulsory. In the First Title of Chapter 1, article 7, point III, of the said statutes, the following is thus established, "III. Indigenous representation will be determined in accordance with the proportion of people in all levels of the leadership, and in the popularly elected positions. This regulation will also be applied to the National Executive Committee and the plurinominal lists for electoral districts, respecting their autonomy and self-determination, in their forms of decision..." We have already managed to get this new reform applied in the case of Chiapas and under this new ruling we have managed to get Agustín Gómez Patishtán - a native Tsotsil from Chamula and leader of the Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions (RAP) - elected as a plurinominal deputy for the PRD in the LX Legislature of 1998-2001.

45 Other members of ANIPA were also at the UN on this occasion. The speeches of Marcos Matías Alonso, Martha Sánchez Nestor and Marcelino Díaz de Jesús and the resolution (E/CN.4/Sub. 2/1998/L. 18) are published in "Voces Indias en la ONU", *CEMOS-Memoria Num. 116, October*, Mexico 1998.

** The presence of women in the Assembly of ANIPA-National Political Association (ANIPA-APN) was significant and after interventions on the part of 35 speakers, the Assembly agreed that within the Statutes total gender parity would be guaranteed in the structure and leadership of ANIPA-APN. Thus financial resources, delegations, and everything that ANIPA-APN promotes, will be made up of 50% men and 50% women. Note by Aracely Burguete.

46 ANIPA forms part of the National Indigenous Congress, an organisation created at the request of the EZLN in October 1996. As such, the member organisations of ANIPA have agreed to join and participate in the mobilisations and actions in support of the Zapatistas call for action in the Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle.

47 An account of the ins and outs of this negotiation can be read in Héctor Díaz-Polanco, *La Rebelión Zapatista y la autonomía*. Siglo XXI. Mexico DF. 1997.

48 The document "Full Stop" is published in the Journal *Convergencia Socialista Num. 1 July-August 1997*. Mexico.

A WOMAN'S EYE VIEW OF AUTONOMY

Margarita Gutiérrez
Nellys Palomo

With the Zapatista uprising of 1994, the indigenous world acquired great relevance on the nation's political, economic and social scene. As of that moment, the rights of indigenous men and women necessarily became incorporated into the destiny of the country. Within this emergence of Indian peoples, the women members of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), with their *Revolutionary Women's Law*, opened channels and legitimised the urgent participation of women in their communities. The rights which had for so long been refused us were put into "thought" and "action" in the "Women's Laws". And so we said, *"We do not want them to force us to marry someone we do not want; we want to have as many children as we want and can take care of; we want to have the right to hold positions of responsibility within the community; we want the right to have our say "*.[1]

We are taking our ethnic identity as the starting point of this rebirth, recognising the situation we live in and the role we have carried out in our communities. For this reason we are working towards building a new image that will articulate a presence in order to be considered as active subjects with rights within these emancipatory processes of freedom that our people are now experiencing.

In order to become involved in our people's struggles and to speak of autonomy from a woman's point of view, we work from a perspective of gender identity and ethnic membership, within the framework of the following three aspects: the personal, the community and the organisation.

Our body, that stranger

Up until now, women's bodies have been seen largely as "givers of life", denying a woman's body as a source of pleasure, or women as thinking beings, forming a myth around the reproductive womb and reducing sexuality to mere motherhood.

Women increasingly have less power of decision over their reproductive capacity. The conditions of extreme poverty in which we live, the domestic and productive tasks we take on, malnutrition and birth

control policies prevent many of us from having the number of children we want whilst others are subjected to the demands of having *to live for others*. Here are some indigenous women's perceptions of our lives and bodies. This is how indigenous women see this reality:

> "We do not have this right. We cannot decide how many children to have because we do not know how to plan. But we do not like having too many children..."

> *"If we have a lot of children, we cannot give them an education, you have to contribute to the schooling and it is always a lot of money. We want to be trained in methods of contraception, there is no other solution, otherwise we will just continue to have children without planning them."*

Our sexual oppression as indigenous women expresses itself in other ways such as domestic violence, sexual violence, forced sterilisation and teenage motherhood. Sexual violence is a constant in our lives, justified and accepted by moral standards; in many cultures fathers, husbands and brothers have the "natural" right to beat us if they consider we have done something wrong.

> "There are many women who are beaten by their husbands, their sons and even their brothers or sons-in-law..."

> "We thought that we were behaving badly and so we did not say anything and we put up with it, but they were the ones who were behaving badly..."

> "Sometimes they beat us because we do not want to marry a particular man... "

> "There are men who beat their wives when they go to meetings or join organisations. This is wrong..... "

This situation is becoming worse with the increase of alcoholism in the communities:

> "The men drink too much and the women suffer. All the money we earn from selling crafts is spent on drink, leaving us poor and the children without food".

> "Today alcoholism has become a real problem for women and for the whole family, for when the men drink they want to beat us and use us like objects, not considering our bodies as those of human beings but just there to satisfy their sexual, emotional and practical needs, never considering our feelings, whether we are happy or not, whether they are giving us pleasure or sadness in sexual relationships and love, at home and in the community."

We continue to find cases of parents who marry their daughters to men they do not even know, and because the decision has already been taken they have to go through with it.

> "This has been one of the issues we have discussed most with the authorities, the elders, and with parents; we want this custom to change because we are treated like chattels, as if we are worth nothing and our bodies can be offered to just anyone, without our consent. We think this custom must change..."

But we also hear these women sharing with us the hope of which we are convinced: that the autonomy we are now beginning to glimpse contains collective and personal elements too. It thus becomes a vital process covering not only ideals but individuals, people who enter into conflicts and who are making the journey from sexual, economic, social and family dependency towards freedom, with contradictory and ambivalent practices which imply emotional and subjective ruptures. Each one of us is developing these in a process of identity and search as social subjects in a clear process of construction. We are clear that collective autonomy cannot be at the cost of the individual but believe that it is fuelled by the personal dimension, by the internal processes of each and every individual.

As indigenous women we are journeying along different paths, looking for new referents which we will have to feed back to the different sectors of our people. These imply deep changes from within the body, and both the private and public spheres.

A community issue. "If we change, the community changes"

Within the scope of the community, we proposed some changes which led us towards a new understanding and construction of our subjectivity, understanding what "being a woman" and "being Indian" means; changing the essence of community relationships within our people. The identity we are building is located within the symbolic-community

order, as Monserrat Guntín y Gurguí said, *"Identity is the difference that a woman is able to (consciously) establish between herself and others, and between herself and society"*.

We are now trying to emphasize – from within the community – what our position in that community is. We now know which of our people's habits and customs we want to change, whilst maintaining a dialogue with the different power bases existing in our communities. We demand the right of women to be taken into account, to have a place. This should not be the sole prerogative of others, even if those others are our *own brothers.*

This identity and belonging has been nurtured by the customs of our grandmothers, but we will not stop questioning customs, *"which bring sadness to our hearts"*, if they promote our devaluation. *"They treat us like animals"; "the men drink too much and the women suffer", "all the money we make from selling crafts is spent on drink and we are left poor and our children hungry"*.

For example, a *"Chopol"* custom (which is not good) is that the girls are married off very young; it makes no difference if they leave in tears. This is not a custom which should be respected. Another example is a *"Lek"* custom (a good one). A woman of Chiapas said that in her community, *"when the woman is older she can decide if she agrees to marry the man. This custom should be respected "*[2].

The following is a general opinion of indigenous women from different parts of the country. They say:

> "From our point of view, the Law should only protect and promote the habits and customs which the communities and organisations consider to be good, because the customs of our peoples must not harm anyone. Habits and customs must be good for all men and women, if they are not it is not good that they remain in place; on the contrary, they must change."

In our questioning of habits and customs as women, the lack of harmony in gender and power relations within our communities must be emphasised. Our reflections are not based on an uncritical view of culture and customs. On the contrary, what we are looking for are new reference points with which to construct citizenship as indigenous women; such reference points refer to the recognition of diversity, of difference, tolerance and plurality, not forgetting the great cultural wealth of some customs we want to continue such as our clothes, language, food and celebrations.

We do not want to continue living in our communities behind the backs of the different powers that marginalise us. We do not want to be *women for other people*, but to rid ourselves of our alienation and act as *people for ourselves*, facing up to the situation of oppression and seeking to improve our own gender condition and the condition of the community as a whole.

We believe that we are constructing our history, creating historical referents which break with the habits and customs that keep us subjugated. We want to recreate ourselves in a common history as Indian people and as women. On this subject, Micaela, a Tsetal from Chiapas says, *"Not all customs are good!* Some are bad. If the government says it is going to respect the customs of indigenous peoples, we women must say which customs are good and must be respected, and which customs are bad and must be forgotten". Another Tsotsil woman says, *" How good it was that it occurred to Ramona to drag the truth out of women, her law is for all women"*[3].

In the negotiations between the EZLN and the federal government, indigenous women managed to get the following paragraph added into the accords:

> *"To legislate on the right of indigenous peoples to choose their own authorities and, within the scope of their autonomy, to exercise that authority according to their own standards, guaranteeing the participation of women in conditions of equity"*[4].

This means that in order to implement autonomy from a woman's perspective, a number of processes that take individuality as their starting point must be taken into account, not forgetting that these occur in relation to other people, the community, the family and the region. This is what indigenous people said in the meetings for consensus to reach an Indian agreement on what autonomy ought to be:

> *"It is fundamental for our people that there is total recognition of the right and exercise of autonomy in the communities, municipalities and regions, because this will be the framework which enables us the exercise and action of our rights as citizens"*[5].

This means that, as indigenous women, we are beginning to develop a way of thinking that values those community practices which give us joy and enable us to implement integrated development processes as human beings.

These changes do not occur in a void but in a clear context of relations of power and strength which can be modified by action and personal decision and by the social subjects of the community group. For this reason we say:

> *"we want to take on autonomy as a process of transformation, a process of political and social change which the country has to go through, recognising the plurality and diversity of Mexican men and women. We demand the right to a space where our voice and power may be exerted as indigenous men and women".*

The organisational process

The spaces we are constructing at an individual and collective level try to make visible and mark out *our place* as women. In some peoples, specific spaces for women already exist, in others they occur within mixed organisations where women's or women elders' committees exist. In all of these experiences, we have very much taken into account the fact that our fight cannot be divorced from the community or from the fight of our peoples and brothers.

Over the last four years, the process of women's organisation has extended over the whole country. It has not been easy to have our own ethnic-gender identity and, at the same time, to have a clear sense of belonging in the community. We generally found ourselves opposed both inside and outside of our communities.

The presence of women in the EZLN was the first act of organised participation on the part of indigenous women, as noted in the document Revolutionary Women's Law:

> *"...the EZLN incorporates women in the revolutionary fight regardless of race, creed, colour or political connection... taking into account the situation of women... incorporates their just demands for equality and justice"*[6].

Major Ana María, of the Zapatista High Command, comments:

> *" but the fight is not only with weapons, the work of indigenous women is to organise to undertake collective work, to study and learn something from books "*[7].

A role model for many indigenous women has been the already almost mythical, figure, Comandante Ramona, because she embodies the courage of being an indigenous woman and speaking of her experiences from the very particular situation of her organisation. In the National Encounter of Indigenous Women (Oaxaca, August 1998) she said:

> *" to get this far we have had to defeat all those who see us as superfluous, something they wished did not exist. We have got this far by overcoming resistance on the part of some of our comrades who do not understand the importance of the fact that women are participating alongside men".*

Within Ramona's words can be felt the gender identity and the struggle we are going through within our own peoples, with our own brothers.

As previously mentioned, the organisation of women has spread to many corners of the country, thanks to the fact that indigenous women responded to the following question: *"If the Zapatistas can have the right to hold office, to be respected, to have a voice, why can we women not have this in our communities?"*

At the moment there exists a great number of indigenous women's organisations, each with their own demands, with voices to make known their opinions and which want to move in the same direction as men. We can be heard in the streets, in rallies, meetings, fora, in the Zapatista National Liberation Army, in the civil resistance. We have managed to make the unusual become regular, the hidden become public and the individual become collective, and in this task we transgressed and constructed new reference points. Some leaders of indigenous organisations say that this fight as women of the "feminist liberation" is an attempt at "acculturation"; others, however, have understood it, have tried to change and have supported us, giving the Zapatista struggle as an example. Some of our sisters also suggest that, *"the fight is not against our men, but against the economic, political, social and cultural system imposed by neoliberalism"*[8]. And we agree with them, but without ignoring the fact that many of our brothers also violate the dignity of women in their communities and homes, beating them, harassing them or punishing them.

We believe that if we only look at part of the story, putting to one side the situation of oppression which we experience as women and only giving importance to the social or economic fight, we thus generate contradictions between the demands of gender and those of ethnicity. But it is important to note that through the experiences we have had as indigenous women's groups, we have learned that we cannot divide our fight, that the demands of our peoples for their recognition must

go hand in hand with the demands that we have as indigenous women. We cannot forget that,

> *"Women are in the majority amongst our peoples and we no longer want to continue in the shadow of the men"*[9].

We are convinced that the relationships in our lives are determined, as Marcela Lagarde says, by the relationships we establish with men (both those of our people and non-indigenous); these relationships have oppressive aspects for us and must be changed. For that reason, women's organisations are a space to be valued and which we are seeking to build, where we can develop an identity which marks and defines the gender condition and enables a flow and interaction with other men and women and which has enabled us to establish a dialogue of re-encounter with our own people and customs and to make alliances and take actions with women in general in order to demand recognition as indigenous women.

We have constructed this identity as indigenous women through participation in different women's events: the National Democratic Convention, the National Encounter of Indigenous Women, the Seminar on Reform of Article Four of the Constitution and other regional events where we have met with sisters from other peoples. These have been the collective space which have enabled us to clarify this *self-awareness*, from our historical knowledge. The common conditions of life we share as women, the blows received from our fathers, husbands and brothers, the violations which have left after-effects in our lives and those of our daughters. We have heard many women say they do not want to suffer with unwanted children nor do they want the kids to suffer for that reason. But suffering is already taking place, the daily discrimination we suffer inside and outside our peoples, as well as the denial of our participation in our communities and our right to speak in community spaces. It is this common history which has caused us to have a questioning and constructive attitude, with integrated proposals for liberation for our communities and so as to be in the forefront of our peoples with a voice and our own face.

We learned that when we come together *"our hearts feel strong"*; if there is no organisation or participation, *"our eyes are as closed"*; if we do not listen we do not know how to defend ourselves and this is causing us much suffering. These were strong reasons to motivate women's participation, both in the home and in positions of authority within the community.

The voice of indigenous women is one of great hope:

> "When we began to organise we did not have our own face because we always merged into the fight of our peoples, but that beginning was fundamental for the space we have today. We began with a voice that hardly anybody could hear, like a small whisper, but today we can say with a strong voice that organising has helped us to mature and move forward."

Since 1994, indigenous women of this country have had a history in common with that of the Zapatistas of the mountains, that of the National Democratic Convention, that of the process towards Beijing, that of ANIPA, that of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and that of the National Indigenous Coordinating Body. The indigenous women's struggle already has a history.

Let us not forget that from 6th to 9th August 1994, many indigenous women participated in the National Democratic Convention that was held in Aguascalientes, Chiapas, and at its second session, in November of the same year, where the mandate was given to summon all the indigenous organisations of Mexico to participate in the great National Indigenous Congress to be held from 16th to 18th December 1994, in Tlapa, Guerrero. In announcing this, a call for unity, for a collective and plural meeting, was made in order to emerge from the obscurity, building a new dawn and hoping for a new awakening for our Indian peoples. Nobody and nothing should be an impediment to participation; religious, party or language reasons were no reason for division. In this announcement, a point regarding women's participation in the process towards autonomy appeared on the programme's agenda.

With music and dance, with joy and pain for the situation our peoples were going through, we initiated the first National Indigenous Congress. Our participation as women was noticed and was reflected in the *"Declaration from the Guerrero Mountain"*. In point five of this declaration, the participants welcomed and congratulated the enthusiastic and significant participation on the part of the women delegates. At that time, women's participation in the indigenous fight was already evident[10].

At the end of August 1995, the third ANIPA Assembly was held in the city of Oaxaca. The inaugural event was held in the Monte Albán archaeological ceremonial centre as a symbolic act of taking that which belongs to us, and we listened to the words of welcome from a *ñu savi* woman, Josefa González Ventura, a highly respected comrade with a

long history of fighting. The establishment of a working group on women's rights was achieved at this meeting.

At this event, the Mexican delegates who attended the *First Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women of the First Nations of Abya Ayala* held in Quito, Ecuador, informed us of the commitment undertaken to hold the *Second Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women of the First Nations of Abya Ayala* in Mexico in 1997. We also analysed the problems of indigenous women and the initiative for a law regarding autonomy. In the final resolutions, it was concluded that it was necessary to make changes. Women's voices for the incorporation of these rights into a proposal for autonomy were insistent:

> *"In the home it is always the man who gives the orders, this is why we have been marginalised and oppressed since the day we were born. Previously we demanded the equality, participation and dignity of women because we are the givers of life, the transmitters of our identity, language, education and attire. We propose a change in the harmonic and democratic law and for that reason it is important that the other half is included, that is, the women. Women are left out of all aspects; men say that our voice has no value but we are the ones that carry more of the weight of family tasks. Preferences exist for men to study because it is thought that women will marry and so school is a waste of time."*

At this event, ANIPA's initiative for constitutional reform for the establishment of a System of Autonomy was debated, and in relation to the proposal we said that:

> *"The initiative for a decree for the creation of autonomous regions does not consider, in its justification, the problems and exclusion of women; for that reason, we women energetically protest because our participation was never taken into account in the meetings of Tlapa Guerrero, Juchitán Oaxaca, the Federal District and Sonora, which were organised by ANIPA. Women have presented proposals in writing and they have not been taken into account in the justification, nor in the writing of the initiative. We hope that in this Assembly our voice and our proposals will be taken into account ".*

Similarly, we said that when habits and customs were mentioned in this initiative, they should be with the following condition, *"As long as the human rights of indigenous women are respected, and their dignity is not threatened"*. With regard to political representation it should be stated,

"that the full participation of indigenous women be guaranteed". We demanded the right to participate in decision-making in the home, the community, the municipalities, the independent regions and at national level. It was in this assembly that a national meeting of indigenous women was proposed, in order to have a more thorough discussion and analysis of the legal initiative for autonomous regions.

The San Andrés dialogue: a meeting point

We arrived at the Dialogue in its first phase, held in the Carmen Conference Centre in the Jovel Valley, Chiapas, better known as San Cristóbal de las Casas. In the work group on 'Indigenous Rights and Culture' there was a sub-section on the *Situation and Rights of Indigenous Women*.

In this work group, unanimously and by consensus between guests and advisers of both the government and the EZLN, the triple oppression of women was recognised, the marginalisation they experience both inside and outside the community, the urgent necessity for greater participation on the part of women under conditions of equality with men, and the need to have access to the different levels of representation and power in order to hold positions in different areas and at different levels, both inside and outside their communities.

In relation to our gender situation, the indigenous advisers and guests of both negotiating parties recognised that, as Indian peoples, we share a common situation, that indigenous men and women in this country are oppressed and discriminated against and that the present Mexican State has demonstrated a racist, sexist and centralist attitude, scarcely disguising its desire to eliminate us because it considers us to be a hindrance which represents Mexico's backwardness.

Hard days of work and intense debates took place in the next two stages of discussion in the San Andrés Sacamchen work groups, where we continued to reflect on the situation of indigenous women with EZLN representatives and comandantes, representatives of the federal and state government, the Commission of Concorde and Pacification (COCOPA) and the National Intermediation Commission (CONAI), along with the advisers of both parties. In these meetings, the non-indigenous advisers informed us of the agreements that Mexico had signed regarding Indigenous Rights at an international level. The reference frame used to demand our rights as peoples and instruments which recognise the oppression and discrimination of women was largely that of ILO Convention No. 169.

During this period of intense work, between fora, congresses and meetings we recognised the urgent need to boost our participation as indigenous women in conditions of equality; to demonstrate our capacity to exercise leadership posts, and to recognise the diverse contributions we have made to our organisations, which will be memorable for the history of our peoples.

The impetus of the San Andrés agreements

At the end of the San Andrés work groups, we undertook a commitment to promote the accords amongst all our peoples and make them known to everyone. For that reason, and with this mandate, we arrived at the National Meeting of Women of ANIPA (December, 1995), in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, which was held two days before ANIPA's fourth Assembly, with the presence of 270 women from different parts of the Republic and diverse indigenous peoples. On this occasion we also had women from the United States and Guatemala attending. For many, this meeting was one of pleasant surprise and great joy: they were captivated listening to the other languages, for this meeting was characterised by the time given to the languages of the different women's teams, where each subject discussed was patiently explained and reviewed.

This National Meeting had as its agenda:

1. The international and national context of indigenous rights:
   a) ILO Convention No. 169.
   b) A fund for the self-development of indigenous peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.
   c) Article 4 of the Constitution.
   d) Article 27 of the Constitution, Part VII.

2. A Report on the Continental Encounter held in Quito, Ecuador in August 1995, and proposals for holding a 2nd Encounter in Mexico in 1997.

3. To analyse and propose changes to ANIPA's initiative for a Law regarding Autonomous Regions, and to the women's discussion on indigenous rights and culture at San Andrés Larrainzar.

4. To support the process of the National Indigenous Forum called for by our Zapatista brothers, to be held in January 1996.

The fundamental agreements were:

1. To spread information on the indigenous movement; what was achieved by the women at the negotiating table; ANIPA's proposal and the international treaties. All of this had to reach more women. This was why a liaison committee was formed, with one member from each State present.

2. To be alert regarding any emergency against our Zapatista brothers, because according to information at that time there was a strong mobilisation of federal troops towards the mountains, threatening continuation of the dialogue in San Andrés.

3. To take the resolutions from this Women's Encounter to the National Indigenous Forum organised by the EZLN from 3rd to 8th January 1996.

4. To work towards developing the 2nd Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women.

5. To create a favourable atmosphere for a space for reflection and rapprochement between indigenous women regarding our rights, habits and customs.

6. To discuss the proposal for autonomy of Indian peoples from a gender perspective.

7. To seek forms of organisation and participation for indigenous women, promoting a National Women's Network.

In the final Declaration of the Encounter, we noted our presence as women:

> *"Yaquis, Mixes, Nahualts, Tojolabals, Tlapanecas, each and every one of us have come from afar to have our say in this Chiapas territory [...] During these two days of work, we have spoken of the violence that we experience in our communities on the part of our spouses, husbands; on the part of the local chiefs; the military; of the discrimination that we suffer being women and Indian, of how we are refused the right to land and of how we now want a proposal which takes women's opinions into account".*
> *"[...] We want an autonomy which includes the voice, face and conscience of women, thus will we be able to reconstruct the female half of the community, the half that has been forgotten "*[11].

In the women's work group of the National Indigenous Forum held in January 1996, an analysis of what was discussed and approved at San Andrés was continued, and how to give continuity to these agreements was considered. Regrettably, a disagreeable split appeared between the indigenous women and the non-indigenous women advisors because it was not made clear that this Forum was part of a process of recognising the specificity of the indigenous women's fight and their proposals, of recognising ourselves, of together forming a force to demand our participation within the community and to be able to live in conditions of equality with our partners and our indigenous comrades, thus jointly obtaining the rights of our peoples and the need to listen to the voice of indigenous women. But the advisers did not understand this and for this reason a split appeared between the two groups.

On the basis of this discussion, we understood that although we are all women (indigenous and non-indigenous), we indigenous women do not have the same perspective or the same problems or the same customs and culture as other non-indigenous women; we agreed on some aspects but on others we differed because of the triple oppression we experience, that is, being indigenous, being women and being poor. In addition, we insisted that we wanted to develop, to learn to walk by ourselves, without having our hand held, because the day we no longer have that hand to do everything for us, we will feel like orphans. This split between the advisers and indigenous women ended in an agreement to initiate a new relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous, one of tolerance, of respect for the space and voice of both parties. We concluded that being women does not mean we all have the same problems. Men also have their differences but they do not externalise them, they shut them up and repress them.

In order to give continuity to all these advances that we had made as indigenous women and in order to avoid losing the momentum of the discussions and proposals, a Seminar on Legislation and Women, Reform to Article 4 of the Constitution, was organised in May on the initiative of K'inal Ansetik and SEDEPAC. This seminar lasted from May to December 1996, with two days being set aside every month. Its main objective was to formulate a proposal for legislative reform of Article 4 of the Constitution from a woman's point of view, guaranteeing the full exercise of our rights. In this space for indigenous women and gender, legal and indigenous specialists, the deficiencies of the San Andrés Accords were analysed in relation to indigenous women's rights. Most importantly, we noted that the mechanisms for implementing and making these rights effective within the law were not agreed upon.

The results of this Seminar were taken to the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) that was held in Mexico City (October 1996) where we fought for the women's work group, to which there was opposition, to be established. This proposal was taken to the plenary where a discussion commenced on the importance of having a work group where women could reflect on their own situation. Arguments against this proposal emphasised that the fight of Indian peoples was the joint struggle of everyone. Here we won one our first battle, because the debate took place between men: some leaders supported the proposal and others did not. We were thus able to note that we were no longer alone but that we had some male allies in favour of the organisation of women. Nevertheless, it should be recognised that the women who were present there gave a lukewarm, weak and hesitant fight to gain this space, and finally when the vote took place on the proposal it was lost by 50 votes out of the 500 delegates who were there at that time. The concluding resolution proposed that the women's document should be discussed in all the work groups. The presence of Comandante Ramona of the EZLN at this event was an incentive not to fall into pessimism and disillusion and it opened our hearts and gave us the strength to continue in the conviction that it was indeed possible for women to organise themselves.

From January to July 1997, we worked intensively to develop the strategies which would be required to hold the *2nd Continental Encounter of Women of the First Nations of Abya Ayala*. We analysed our weaknesses and our organisational capacity. It was then necessary to exchange our experiences of international spaces. Many of the indigenous women who had been participating in international spaces and in the women's movement were there: those that participated in Quito, Ecuador; in Canada; in Beijing, China; in Rio de Plata, Argentina; in New York; in Panama; in Guatemala. We met to share our experiences and the commitments undertaken at these meetings, which were already a part of the process of coordination of indigenous women's organisations at international level.

The decision to host the *2nd Continental Encounter of Women of the First Nations of Abya Ayala*, as indigenous women of Mexico, implied a process of discussion and organisation amongst the different organisations involved. At first it was only the ANIPA women's committee and K'inal Ansetik who took up the challenge but during the processes and work a space was opened for the participation and involvement of more organisations and more women, for we were all very clear as to what a commitment of this magnitude meant. From way back, there had been the idea of organising this event and for that reason we

women had been preparing via activities aimed at strengthening our national process of organisation in order to have clear proposals for the 2nd Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women. For this reason, as a prior step, it was agreed to hold a *"National Encounter of Indigenous Women. Constructing our History"* with all the organisations and sectors of the indigenous movement.

We thus arrived at the *National Encounter of Indigenous Women* in August 1997 in Oaxaca, with the participation of 700 women representatives from the majority of Indian peoples of Mexico. There was also a committee of grassroots women from the EZLN and Comandante Ramona.

The objectives of this encounter were:

- To strengthen the process of coordination and organisation of indigenous women at national level.
- To plan the preparation for the 2nd Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women.
- To deepen and analyse the scope of the San Andrés Sacamchen Accords.
- To look for forms of organisation and representation as indigenous women within the different national, regional and community authorities.

The subjects that were considered were:

1. Indigenous women in the Mexican Constitution
   a) Review of the San Andrés Accords.
   b) Proposals for Reform of Article Four of the Constitution.

2. 2nd Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women of the First Nations of Abya Ayala
   a) International Decade of Indigenous Peoples
   b) Indigenous Fund
   c) Ways or mechanisms for participation in this Encounter
   d) The search for financial resources
3. Forms of organisation and participation
   a) Mechanisms and strategies for coordination at national level
   b) Forms of organisation at continental level which bring us nearer to other experiences, visions and objectives as women
   c) Spaces for participation at international level
   d) The different processes and stages we have gone through since 1994
   e) Strategies for fulfilment of the *San Andrés Accords*

The conclusions of this Encounter are summarised in the Final Declaration where we stated:

"That indigenous women form an important part of the development of our peoples and country."

"That the great cultural wealth of our peoples has been maintained, reproduced and enriched by women and is used for economic interests foreign to our way of seeing and feeling life."

"That the rights of women and, in particular, those of indigenous women, are not recognised in the Mexican Constitution."

"That the situation in which our sisters live in the militarised zones has reached extreme violations of their human rights which shatter the balance of their daily life and profoundly harm their identity."

"That our rights as women continue to be violated, both by the government and its institutions and by our peoples, through the existence of habits and customs that attack our dignity."

And we denounced:

"The lack of fulfilment of the San Andrés Accords on the part of the federal government, particularly the agreements of the work group on Indigenous Rights and Culture, signed on 16th February 1996. In these agreements, our rights as women were recognised along with the clearly established right to parity and equity."

"The movement of the Mexican army onto indigenous territories with the pretext of providing social services for our communities, given that it is the army which destroys life, sows death, rapes women and promotes prostitution and drug addiction."

We also demanded:

- *"That the Federal Government fulfils the San Andrés Accords."*
- *"That the educational programmes of the Mexican State take into account our culture and languages."*
- *"That special resources (pre-school, primary, secondary, preparatory and university) are destined for the education of women."*
- *"That the Mexican army is withdrawn from the indigenous territories and returned to its barracks, in accordance with the stipulations of the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico."*

- *"That women should manage and control projects and resources directed at them."*
- *"That there should be direct information for indigenous peoples and, in particular, for women in order to obtain the resources already destined for the benefit of the development of our peoples."*
- *"That article four of the Constitution is reformed so that the full exercise of our rights is guaranteed, proposing equality between men and women and pluriethnic recognition."*
- *"That there is a need to change article 27 of the Constitution so that it enables women to have the right to inherit land through direct relationship and through the respect we have for Mother Earth and natural resources."*
- *"That the autonomy of our peoples is recognised, demanding parity for women in all representational bodies."*

It was also decided to form the *National Coordinating Body of Indigenous Women of Mexico* in order to coordinate at national level, to concretise and strengthen the project for the self-determination of our Indian peoples. Here, the Women's Committee which had been set up was ratified and others were appointed to form a Follow-Up Committee to this Coordinating Body. It was also decided to take up the challenge of holding the *2nd Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women, coordinated by the National Coordinating Body of Indigenous Women of Mexico (CNMI).*

The work and the accumulation of international experience was very important in the process of clarifying our struggles. As a preparatory meeting to the *Fourth World Conference on Women*, it was decided to hold the *First Continental Encounter of Women of the First Nations of Abya Yala* from 31st July to 4th August in Quito, Ecuador. One of the objectives of this Encounter was to reach a consensus amongst the majority of indigenous women of the continent in order to coordinate a proposal and to improve the planning of joint strategies for "The Path to Beijing 1995". Another objective was to present a position with regard to the decade of indigenous peoples.

Four Mexican indigenous delegates attended this meeting: Marta Sánchez Néstor of the Guerrero 500 Years of Resistance Council; Beatriz Gutiérrez, Hùave from San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca; Sofía Robles, Zapoteca-Mixe, from Oaxaca; and Margarita Gutiérrez, Hñahñu Hida, who highlighted the importance of the indigenous fight in Mexico and the significance of the full participation of the indigenous Zapatistas in the struggle for the self-determination and autonomy of Indian peoples. Thus, and in recognition of this struggle, it was decided that the 2nd Encounter would be held in Mexico, appointing the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) as the body responsible for organising the event, through its representative Margarita Gutiérrez; it would also have responsibility for disseminating these agreements and inviting more women's organisations to become involved in the preparatory work.

Thus from 4th to 7th December 1997, the *2nd Continental Encounter of Indigenous Women of the First Nations of Abya Yala*, was held in Mexico DF, with the participation of Mexico, Canada, the United States, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Argentina.

The objectives proposed for this Encounter were:

- To look for alternatives, to share experiences and to invigorate the participation of indigenous women in the social, economic, cultural and political processes occurring among indigenous peoples.
- To promote the proposals of indigenous women so that they are incorporated within the platforms of action of Indian peoples and governments and any other ethnic or racial initiative.
- To present a position to the UN, as indigenous women, in relation to the Decade of Indigenous Peoples.
- To familiarise ourselves with other indigenous women's organisations of the continent and to strengthen the personal and collective processes of each and every one of us.
- To strengthen the leadership of indigenous women from a gender perspective, taking our cultural identity as a starting point.

The subjects considered were organised into the following headings:

a) Indigenous women and the Decade of Indigenous Peoples.
b) Marketing of crafts and intellectual property.
c) Indigenous women's leadership.
d) Forms and strategies of organisation and participation.
e) Formal constitution of the Coordinating Body for Continental Liaison.

In the *Declaration of Mexico Tenochtitlán*, we gathered together the thoughts of the participants, as well as the different analyses that were made.

Being aware of the fact that, as indigenous women, we are on the margins of participation and discussion in international fora and that our male brothers are always the ones who participate in these events, the decision was taken to encourage the education and training of indigenous women at all levels. A continental liaison committee with

an office in Ecuador was created, along with two regional liaison offices for North and Central America. Two work commissions were created: a commission on education and one on training; international and marketing instruments were discussed as well as the intellectual property of indigenous peoples.

Our autonomy: the views of indigenous women

It is clear that we have not only put the process of autonomy now being constructed as Indian peoples within the framework of women's issues but we have also tried to have a wider vision of what affects us in general, never forgetting the woman's point of view. In that sense we have analysed each one of the essential aspects of our autonomy to see how we can apply a gender perspective to it. Our autonomy is fuelled by the following aspects and concepts of autonomy from a woman's point of view:

1. *The importance of land-territory.* Men and women, we are today fighting for our autonomy as peoples. We have said that, to have full autonomy, it is important to have control over territory, that is, not only the piece of land or plot but a wider area which covers our ceremonial centres, our rivers, forests, in fact the whole environment which unites us spiritually and materially.

For our Indian peoples it is important to obtain autonomy over territory, because we are aware that it is the only way for resources, which are also alive and need to be used in a reciprocal manner, to be used more rationally, respecting the cycles of the moon, that of giving something in return for what is taken, and not continuing to depredate Mother Earth.

It is a way of protecting our sovereignty as Mexican territory, because what the federal government has done up until now is that where natural resources exist, they have been given in concessions to companies - most of the time to transnational companies that only consider profit - in order to exploit to the maximum what they find in their path without thinking about the harm they cause in the long term to the land, the forests, the rivers and the different forms of life that exist there. But this is not enough for them, they also pillage the knowledge of our peoples regarding plants and ancestral medicines; such is the case of *sangre de grado* (croton), which an American company now has the patent for, claiming to be the owner of this plant.

We indigenous people are not even aware of many of the abuses which occur within our territories. They have, and will continue to have, consequences on the reproduction, existence and balanced conservation of our relationship with nature.

We women unite our voices to this demand for autonomy because it is we who are the closest to the problems and we notice the things which are wrong, in the case of health and food. We are more sensitive to the ecological barbarism occurring on the planet, and which is affecting us all.

The territory shelters us, the land gives us our sacred foods and medicines (*maka, hñuni*), our sacred sustenance.

We women cultivate the land, we know the importance it has for our peoples and yet we do not have the right to inherit a plot of land. The general tendency is that women do not inherit land; we know of few cases where women have land. This puts us at a disadvantage for, in many communities, when the husband dies and leaves a widow, the land goes to the eldest son or the brother, always a man. And yet we still have the responsibility for looking after the children.

With the modification of Article 27 of the Constitution, the woman's right to a plot was lost. Now we no longer even have a piece of common land on which to grow our vegetables. In the case of single mothers, we think that the woman and her children should be considered as a family and, when marriages split up, things should be shared equally between husband and wife. We want our right to property to be recognised. Territory and land are life itself. This is why we women are fighting.

2. *The importance of culture.* Up until now, the role which culture and tradition have played in keeping women oppressed has been very strong. It prevents us from fully realising ourselves and limits our participation in all areas and at all levels. In the communities, it is customary that women stay at home, taking care of the children, the house and the animals. Most adult women, our grandmothers, mothers and older sisters, teach us that we must obey men, even when they are in the wrong, for - they say - they are always right because they are strong. So we must respect them and not upset them. Our indigenous society is sexist and patriarchal. The vast majority of women do not take decisions, we only support in a secondary role. Our central role in life and in the continuity of the family and society is not valued. In our cultures, the women are in charge of preparing sacred foods, or making sure the kitchen is well-supplied, and caring for the children.

There are concepts which do us much harm. In our cultures, the principle of *"the man gives the orders"* reigns and men perpetuate it with pride saying, *"I order my wife about"* and women perpetuate it by saying, *"I do what my husband says"*. Women who perpetuate this role are absent in all types of discussion and decision-making. With all that goes on in our communities, our men are not so different from non-indigenous men. We are not saying our cultures are more violent than non-indigenous society. What we are saying here is that we want to change our indigenous cultures because this is what we are experiencing. Today we have men and women with strongly colonialised minds, who faithfully reproduce the attitudes of the State and of the dominant society, which we know to be sexist, patriarchal, racist and classist. Women have historically borne all the work tasks, draining us physically and emotionally, giving us no time left to think about ourselves, our education, our health, or any pleasant pastime. We always solve problems for others: our husband, our children, our parents. We live for others. For that reason, increasing numbers of indigenous women are now fearlessly making a critical and severe analysis of the customs of our culture, reflecting on those customs which harm us, which offend our hearts, our being, our dignity and those which we must maintain, reproduce and strengthen.

We conclude that the customs that harm us are: sexism, where men are always considered to be right even if they are not, and where men control our destiny. We want decisions to be taken between men and women and for women's opinions and voices to be respected by men. We are like sheep, alienated and numb, we never question where and with what aims the creeds and policies direct us. Alcoholism also now badly affects our communities, causing the men to be troublesome and dangerous.

We believe that what we must preserve from our cultures are our language and our arts and crafts, because through these we learn mathematics, behaviour, philosophy and science; the integral vision of our life which we still have, in which each being, each member, is an important and fundamental part of the balanced development of life. Man-woman, woman-man, man-nature, are important, are complementary. To recover reciprocity, with its resulting solidarity, so characteristic of indigenous peoples: you take - you give - you take, it is the chain of life.

3. *The importance of justice.* Indigenous justice is talked of when it applies to the collective, but when it relates to the individual woman it is not just. We do not understand why custom and tradition weighs more heavily on women, we have more obligations and responsibilities, a greater workload falls to us, we work many hours in the communities and we do not have the minimum public services, so we have to walk to wash the clothes, or to carry water from the spring, to grind *"nixtamal"* to make tortillas, to take care of the children and to serve our husbands: all this we do because this is what is indicated by custom and culture but we realise that men are never judged for being drunkards, rapists or polygamists. Indigenous justice is extremely benevolent towards men but pernicious for women.

Because of this, in the proposal for autonomy which we are now promoting, in which customary law is talked of, we emphasise that we are in agreement with the preservation of a custom as long as it respects the human rights of women. One of the proposals is that women be included in the traditional councils, so that justice may be impartial.

When our peoples impart justice they are always seeking the spirit of fairness, nobody is deprived of their freedom by going to jail, nor are they tortured or beaten. Human rights are taken into consideration, for that reason we are optimistic and we are confident that our rights as women will be respected, even though up until now the only justice we have known has been the blows when we protest, express an opinion or participate in meetings. Up until now the role of the State, which answers our demands for rights with aggression and repression, has been faithfully repeated and reproduced within our communities.

4. *The importance of self-development.* Is it possible to have autonomy with poverty? Can we be independent when we still cannot satisfy our basic needs? What do we men and women understand by self-development? What is a woman's viewpoint on self-development? These are some of the questions that we have considered in our women's meetings. For indigenous women cannot have autonomy if, with our support, basic goods and services have not been achieved. If the governmental authorities and the Executive continue pigheadedly to do things to and for the indigenous population they will always fail, because they do not respond to the reality of the communities and the money will not be sufficient to carry out ever more works. There must be a guaranteed Fund for the indigenous regions, a budget heading, and it must be left to us to carry out these initiatives. In this way we will be developing a capacity for self-management. We do not want poor autonomous regions, we demand fulfilment of the State's obligation to satisfy our needs.

We are over-exploited, our natural wealth has been looted and we have become so dependent we cannot solve our problems alone. But this is a process. When we gain the fundamental rights of our peoples, such

as the recognition of our territories, our political participation, our autonomy, the exploitation of our natural resources, then we will be able to have better economic conditions. This will enable us to develop our lives with fairness and dignity, in harmony with the natural and spiritual world. We are going through a process of restitution of our rights in order to generate our self-development.

If we do not manage to recover and strengthen the distinguishing values of our peoples, such as reciprocity (giving and receiving), solidarity (mutual support) and the holistic (integral) nature of our thoughts and attitudes, we will not be able to say that we have self-development because we are rapidly and systematically losing these values, in the shadow of the economic, social and cultural policies of the federal government and globalisation. We live in a world of globalisation where indigenous peoples are no longer on the margins, where people are laboriously trying to make ways of living, being and thinking more uniform. The paradox is that today we indigenous peoples are becoming stronger, we are raising our eyes with dignity, and women are playing a fundamental role in this, for it is we who train and prepare the indigenous men and women of tomorrow.

Indigenous women are establishing the need to help in this great task, and for this reason we have decided that we cannot be autonomous until we can satisfy our basic needs. They say that food comes first. Although it is clear that our first concern is to give our family food, to obtain sustenance, and that we have little energy or time left to fight for self-determination, we are trying to solve the problems of the community by doubling our efforts.

5. *The importance of the participation of women in communal, municipal and regional governments.* We believe that the time we are living through is an historic and fundamental one because indigenous men and women are fighting our oppressors to obtain our historic right to freedom; and with determination to obtain our autonomy, our self-government.

We are undergoing a process of self-criticism and reflection within the communities and organisations because we are questioning the habits and customs related to the exercise of authority. According to custom, it is the men who have the right to office. This custom is a great limitation to the participation of women and their occupation of some positions of responsibility in the community. On the basis of women's demands nowadays, they are already allowed to attend meetings and assemblies in many communities, and they can speak, express their

opinions and feelings, and can assume posts. And it has been seen that we are more responsible, that we do not hesitate or falter but that we thoroughly fulfil the roles we assume.

We are sure that when indigenous autonomy is achieved and the regional governments are recognised, we women will be present in local or community governments (although they do not have a great say in the decisions at municipal level) with the experience gained from all these fights, from participating in that arena. So far, our strategy has been to create awareness and to open up spaces, extending and developing the participation of women both in the community and municipal government, organisations, the Senate and House of Representatives, as well as in the international arena where governments sign agreements and conventions for indigenous peoples.

It is important to state that the most significant revolution is occurring within our organisations and communities because the custom and tradition around the NON participation of women, as well as the argument that indicates a lack of capacity to participate and to take decisions, continues to be very strong. This mentality must change and it must be accepted that indigenous women today have responsibilities and perspectives. We must fight so that our capacity and our rights as thinking and acting human beings are recognised.

We also propose the participation of women in the Councils of Elders. At the same time we must develop and convince ourselves of our rightful participation and representation without feeling guilty or feeling that we have violated or offended custom. We have to understand that we are in a state of flux and that all movements cause reacommodations and changes and, moreover, we have to understand that we are contributing to the growth, development and strengthening of our peoples and our nation.

Recognition of our right to self-determination and autonomy, which is fundamental for the exercise of plural, democratic and inclusive self-government, with full participation on the part of the women, will be a legal conquest and we will have to inaugurate a new way of exercising power which has a place for all.

Why autonomy from a woman's point of view?

We are taking our first steps towards exposing the fact that indigenous women are triply discriminated in our country, for being women,

indigenous and poor. We are now getting to know our rights as peoples and putting them into practice. We are keeping abreast of the restitution of our fundamental rights. Much intra-family psychological and physical violence exists and this has to be recognised. There is no point shielding it behind habits and customs, this cannot be justified.

Indigenous society must be self-critical and take into account the fact that decomposition and excesses can lead to ruin. The agreements obtained at San Andrés Sacamchen are a fundamental step towards providing oxygen and life to our peoples, as well as towards recognising our autonomy as peoples. It will be a vital one in the reconstitution, reconstruction and strengthening of our identity.

The lack of recognition for the San Andrés Accords implies an historic step backwards for Mexico and exposes the anxieties of the governing mestizos to perpetuate themselves in power and to continue discriminating and subjugating indigenous peoples. In the approaching new millennium, new horizons for Indian peoples and indigenous women are heralded. We will continue advancing, strengthening, growing and increasing our indigenous identity and our being as women.

We have a very hard challenge in the long term, we know that even when the rights of our peoples are recognised in the Constitution and in Mexican laws, these may be dead letter if the legal instruments are not accompanied by a change in the attitude and mentality of non-indigenous society. It is not enough to name and recognise the contribution of indigenous peoples in the history books or the museums, if this is not followed up with action. The challenge that is now raised with mestizo society, for them to recognise us as subjects with political rights, is the same one that we indigenous women are raising with our ethnic and class brothers. The question we have is the following: will the next millennium arrive without the rights of Indian peoples and women being recognised?

So far, it has been largely indigenous men who have assumed power and represented us. We are not now saying that only women should assume political responsibilities. What we want is to be on an equal footing, without polarisation of gender but as a complement, so that tasks at all levels are shared equitably, so that the greater workload does not fall to us, so that we do not continue to be recognised only as mothers, old relatives or wives, but as human beings. *"What we want is for men and women to be on an equal footing, so that our hearts are happy and so that the autonomy of our peoples may advance."* This is the consensus of women.

For that reason, we women must form new mindsets and attitudes in the girls and boys who will be the women and men of tomorrow. Our brothers of today are not going to change so very much; they recognise the word, but not the deed. For that reason we must continue promoting our own agenda, our own spaces, to awaken our minds and the colonised consciences of our men.

We see the autonomy to which we aspire as a mature act, that is, autonomy begins with ourselves, in our homes, at work, in the organisation, the community and the people. To have autonomy is to be able to say complete things, to speak without repressing everything our heart thinks and feels; it means not being subjugated, shut up and submissive. Although we fight and we demand the rights of our peoples, we also raise a voice for our specific rights: there will be no autonomy for any of the peoples if women, half of those people, continue subjugated and without their own autonomy!

The autonomy we are fighting for must guarantee a new relationship between the national State and indigenous peoples, starting from the basis of a democratisation of national political life and the establishment of a true rule of law based on legal pluralism, the right of people to defend their interests and control their lives and their resources, the biodiversity of their territories; to the exercise of political rights, to respect for the laws and customs of their ancestors and recognition as subjects with rights.

And it is from this basis of demands that women speak and say what type of autonomy they require: *"Autonomy begins in the home, at work, in the community and region. Equality between men and women must be guaranteed in the decision-making organs, seeking forms of organisation and participation".*[12] We are speaking clearly of a democratisation of the State, which must go hand in hand with a democratisation of the home which, from a feminist viewpoint, affects private life, so that the public changes will have resonance within the scope of the intimate sphere, the family, love, accompanied by processes of change at the level of the individual.

This autonomy implies and confronts powers, both within the frameworkof the State and the current legal system, and within the indigenous communities themselves, by protesting our specificity and questioning certain habits and customs that violate our rights. We emphasise the asymmetry in power and gender relations which occurs in the communities. We assert our claim to our culture and certain customs, but not from an uncritical point of view; on the contrary, questioning it and looking for new images and referents with which to construct our own

citizenship, such as recognition of diversity, differences, tolerance and plurality.

As Virginia Vargas says, *"Autonomy is not, then, a concept which is useful only in analysing processes of participation and/or empowerment of women, it is not a privilege of women but is rather something extended to all social subjects who, from their specific positions in society and their demands, seek transformation of their conditions of subordination".*

Marcela Lagarde, on the other hand, speaks of autonomy in the following way, *"The different dimensions of autonomy range from the physical, the biological aspect, which implies complete control over one's sexuality and motherhood, to the economic aspect, which implies living without violence, sustained by equal access to, and control of, the means of production. They range from basic political rights, the right to representation and to self-determination, to form pressure groups with their own directions and proposals, freely chosen, to socio-cultural rights, which imply the right to an independent identity and self-esteem with which to vindicate our specific identity as indigenous women, within a dimension sustained and enriched through the personal and collective forms of daily community processes."*

These elements are mutually strengthened and taken on board by some indigenous women's or mixed organisations, but on other occasions they have caused contradictions leading to skirmishes and divisions which have occasionally slowed down the advances and discussions within the organisations. When women began to stand alone and to make reality out of their illusions, the answer in many communities was repression, rejection and even expulsion and rejection by their own family. They were no longer considered a part of the community and this had an effect on many sisters as some decided it was better not to participate if they were going to be treated in this way. But the benefits and changes have also enabled other women to look on us in a good light and think: *"This must change"*.

We have known sisters who have had to uproot themselves from their communities and live with the pain of the loss of their surroundings, the isolation, silence, censorship, the punishment. To take such a decision is very painful for any woman and for the men and young people too, but it has often been a necessary one. This uprooting is frequently an escape, a flight in the face of narrow-mindedness and intolerance towards differences in our communities, which refuse to accept that there are indigenous people who are "different", that we do not all think the same and that we do not all have to be the same. This sometimes happened and it really was this way.

In order to take this decision, the traditional authorities and the family exert a great deal of pressure. On the basis of these experiences we understand autonomy as a multidimensional, flexible and dynamic component and that there will be many knots for indigenous women to undo in order to weave our own history. Having autonomy implies negotiating the plurality and diversity of interests that we women represent. For this reason, we consider *gender democracy* as the guideline by which to negotiate the multiplicity of interests and conflicts and not the imposition of a specific interest that denies and destroys the others. Gaining autonomy thus implies having the proposals of the subjects involved from the perspective of action, pressure and mobilisation, generating democratic mechanisms which guarantee the equal participation of all.

In this sense we agree with Marcela Lagarde when she says: *"Women have the right to the social recognition of their peoples and their genealogical and identity referents within the State along with their legal status as peoples, and they have a statute that guarantees their autonomy, that is, their self-determination and their right to self-government, to exist in well-being and to preserve themselves. Women have the right to expect that their peoples, societies and cultures should be respected and considered an indispensable component of the Mexican nation and of the new federal pact. Women have the right to be considered inhabitants and full citizens, that is, not to be considered inferior, discriminated, rejected, despised, harassed, excluded or mistreated for their ethnicity and their gender. It is also a right of women in Mexico not to be victims of racism, ethnophobia or sexism."*

We consider that autonomy is a path towards democracy and in a democracy all voices are important, all people's rights must be respected. For this reason, indigenous men must not deprive us of our spaces, of what is ours, otherwise they will be doing just the same as the mestizos do to our peoples, disregarding their rights. We want customs which dignify us. Our proposal for autonomy is just, democratic, inclusive and plural. It necessarily involves the other half - the women. We recognise and are making known to our comrades the situation of discrimination and marginalisation which we experience as women, how in the name of respect for the habits and customs of the peoples and communities, woman continue to be beaten, harassed and raped.

We will conclude by saying that true autonomy must be liberating and not conservative. Autonomy is by definition a proposal for liberation, for that reason men, women and autonomous societies must change from within, become more democratic, recognise women's

liberation. We want a new relationship between men and women that leads to peace and harmony.

For this reason, the autonomy that we Indian peoples propose is not to continue in captivity, nor to relax in our traditions; rather, it is an emancipatory, mobilising strategy, which means that collective life is organised around the idea that the individual is able, in one form or another, to act, to be free and independent within the context of his or her social life, based on freedom and responsibility. This is the autonomy which indigenous women are fighting for.

Notes

1 Sub-comandante Insurgente Marcos. In Sara Lovera and Nellys Palomo, *Las alzadas. Testimonios de lucha zapatista (EZLN).* El "primer alzamiento", March 1993, Convergencia Socialista and CIMAC, 1998.
2 Mujeres Indígenas de Chiapas. *Nuestros derechos costumbres y tradiciones.*
3 This refers to the *"Revolutionary Women's Law"* which was promoted by Comandante Ramona of the EZLN.
4 Joint proposals which the Federal Government and the EZLN signed within the framework of the San Andrés Accords.
5 National Indigenous Forum.
6 See, *Las alzadas,* "Revolutionary Women's Law", page 40. Already mentioned.
7 *Las alzadas,* page 34 and *Demandas de las mujeres zapatistas,* Women's Group of San Cristóbal.
8 Declaration of the National Indigenous Forum.
9 Nellys Palomo, *Influencias del zapatismo.*
10 Declaration from the Guerrero Mountain
11 *Influencias del Zapatismo en las mujeres indígenas.*
12 Declaration of the National Indigenous Forum

SELF-DETERMINATION AND AUTONOMY: ACHIEVEMENTS AND UNCERTAINTY

Héctor Díaz-Polanco
Consuelo Sánchez

What is the current situation in relation to formulations regarding the rights of indigenous peoples, both at an international and a national level? And what problems can be discerned? There are a huge number of documents in the form of conventions, declarations, draft declarations, resolutions, initiatives for legal reforms, etc., which today constitute the basic materials for a better understanding of "where we stand" on the ethno-national issue. In order to encourage reflection on a subject that is of concern to us all, we here examine a selection of two types of document: those that conform, or will be conforming, to the international legal framework on the rights of indigenous peoples; and central texts which in some way synthesise the theses and essential proposals of the Mexican indigenous movement over the last few years. The intention is not to make a detailed examination of documents here, but to succinctly indicate some of the issues which are becoming crucial for the immediate future.

Self-determination: the international debate

With regard to international texts, two points must be emphasized. Firstly, the great progress that has been made in terms of recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and, secondly, the risks which are, at the same time, implied within international law, given that certain approaches can significantly limit the exercise of such rights in the respective national spaces. This is indicative of the two directions of the course of the indigenous issue in the international arena.

Let us look firstly at Convention No. 169, approved by the General Conference of the ILO in 1989 and ratified by a sufficient number of countries (Mexico among them) for it to take effect in 1991. Above all, its great value in indigenous people's struggles must be recognised. This convention is important, firstly, because it is the first international instrument that explicitly rejects the integrationalist approach which has sustained government policies towards indigenous peoples for

decades[1]. At least as a formulation, therefore, it constitutes a parting of the ways. As is known, the fundamental premise of the old approach was that indigenous people had to renounce their own cultural forms and identities and, in effect, to disappear as such, through their "integration" into the nation. All government actions were consequently aimed at obtaining that goal. There was an ethnocentric vision in this approach and its aim was ultimately that of ethnocide[2].

Secondly, Convention No. 169 is significant because of the set of rights that is included in it (regarding land, conditions of employment, health, education, etc.), maintaining principles of respect, indigenous participation and consultation of ethnic groups, and also because of the establishment of substantial obligations on the part of governments towards these groups.

In the relatively short time this convention has been in effect, a positive assessment of it can be made. Although governments are not outstanding in their will to respect and to apply its content, the convention has at least provided indigenous peoples with a useful instrument with which to fight, sometimes successfully, for their rights in the face of abuse on the part of authorities and individuals[3]. It has also contributed to developing an indigenous conscience regarding the value of their own identity. It is a basic platform, a reference point, from which people can consider their demands and define their goals within the context of nation states.

However, the agreement reveals its social and economic limitations once the indigenous movement has achieved a certain degree of maturity and begins to propose not only the recognition of its cultural rights but also to claim the *political rights* linked to the exercise of self-determination. This is also the case of situations (such as that of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua) where the people have already obtained recognition of autonomous governments and territories. In both cases, the ILO convention demonstrates its limitations. It includes the possibility of being used by governments to restrict the political demands of indigenous peoples because its main weakness lies in the area of politics, relating to self-determination and autonomy. This point is of enormous importance, because only with difficulty will peoples fully be able to exert their rights as peoples without the self-government, the institutions, the responsibilities and territorial jurisdiction that autonomy implies. In other words, the recognition of socio-cultural and economic rights is of little value if the political instruments and institutions are not put in place to make them effective in practice.

This is why the right of self-determination (fundamental to sustaining autonomy) is being debated with renewed determination in the international community. The course that this discussion is taking and its outcome will determine the future for indigenous peoples and other ethnic communities. The risk is that a path will be opened up - particularly by governments - which attempts to limit indigenous peoples' right of self-determination in international law. On the basis of this it will thus be possible to reinforce restrictions in the respective national arena. We believe that this is one of the most serious challenges to the future of autonomy in Latin America. In the long run, it is feared that the resulting limitations in international law could have negative effects on systems of autonomy which are already in force.

The concept of autonomy is closely and indissolubly linked to the notion of peoples and to the right of self-determination. This explains why the discussion is centred around the *who* and the *what*; that is, whether an indigenous group constitutes a people or not, and if so, whether they have the right of self-determination or not. Both terms are inseparable, as it is the peoples who are the subjects of the right in question. For that reason, the first problem is to clarify who are peoples and, after solving this issue, to define the scope of the corresponding right. As is known, in the first article of the two international covenants signed by the States (I am referring to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), it is established that *all* peoples have the right of self-determination[4]. No kind of restriction whatsoever is indicated with regard to this right. Thus when acceptance of the status of indigenous peoples was being discussed within the international fora, fears immediately arose on the part of many States with regard to the legal implications. After strong resistance, the tendency seems to be that indigenous people are recognised as having the status of "peoples" but at the same time the scope of their rights which, by virtue of this fact, should correspond to them, is limited. The first opportunity at which this was considered was precisely at the time of formulating Convention No. 169.

In effect, the only international instrument that, to date, recognises the indigenous as peoples is ILO Convention No. 169. But this has led to an issue which is being debated within international circles: whether there exist, to speak plainly, "first tier" peoples and "second tier" peoples. Unfortunately, the convention gives fuel to the belief that these two categories exist. First-tier peoples would have the full right of self-determination. They are generally those who are attributed as having constituted a nation-state or as having a state history, or those

who, not having constituted the above, correspond to patterns similar to this[5]. However, for other peoples this condition is in doubt.

Indigenous and other communities find themselves in the realms of uncertainty, because Convention No. 169 says they are peoples but that in their case the notion of "peoples" should not be taken to mean any implication in international law[6]. This is an elegant way of saying that they do not have the right of self-determination which, as stated, is the main implication. It should be recalled that during discussion of the issue at the ILO conference, the opinions of the three sectors of which it is made up were polarised: whilst the government members, together with the employers, formed the block that pronounced itself in favour of the restriction, the worker members (supported by the international non-governmental organisations, without the right to vote) expressed the opinion that the term "peoples" had to be included "without qualification, comment or condition that might prejudice it". The point of view of the former prevailed with regard to the relevant statement, which was considered by those indigenous organisations present as "discriminatory"[7]. To maintain and affirm this formulation in international law would give us the case of a status of peoples who would not have the capacity for full self-determination. Their condition could not thus be determined by themselves but by the unrestricted will of the States within which they exist. It is not difficult to draw conclusions about the future consequences of this.

It could be argued that we are dealing with a unique and special situation derived from the limitations of the United Nations organ which issued Convention No. 169 itself. In the introduction to the convention it is indicated that the reserve responds to the need to limit "any interpretation which could go beyond the sphere of competence of the ILO and its instruments". In principle, the apology could be accepted, as long as there was no attempt to generalise this reservation. But what can one think when the same limitation is noted in institutions that would have the competence to pronounce on the right of Indian peoples? Then it is to be suspected that the restriction introduced in the convention responds to something more than the ILO's limits of competence.

This mistrust gains strength if one takes into account the fact that many States members are already pressing for the future *Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, whose draft is being prepared by a UN working group, to establish the afore mentioned restriction of rights, which would transform it into a general principle with great moral and political strength. And the mistrust is reinforced even more if it is observed that the original formulation of the ILO is

already beginning to spread to other instruments. For example, it is worrying that this restrictive principle has been incorporated into the *Draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (approved by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the O.A.S. in September 1995), copying it almost word for word from Convention No. 169 [8].

Presumably, the American Declaration would be the regional document which corresponds to the aforementioned Universal Declaration that is being drawn up by the UN working group. It could be that this is approved first (the UN working group has already spent 15 years on its task); in any case, it may be used as a maximum measuring stick, ceiling or insurmountable limit for indigenous aspirations in the Universal Declaration. It is true, as the expert Denis Marantz indicates, that indigenous peoples could see the O.A.S. declaration as, "merely the foundation, instead of the sky which cannot be transcended". But I am afraid the idea the indigenous have of the sky and the earth is not the same as that of those who call the shots in the international forum. For that reason, the same author has warned: *"the preoccupation, perhaps justified, that [indigenous people] have, is that a regional document [such as that of the O.A.S.] may be interpreted within UN circles as representing the extreme limits of their rights "*[9].

As it is, whilst the proposal for the American Declaration already incorporates the same restriction as Convention No. 169, amongst those who debate the elaboration of the Universal Declaration, the criterion that the indigenous people's status of "peoples" should not be limited has, until now, prevailed. In the subject under study, the draft of the Universal Declaration continues to be the most advanced instrument. In fact, by incorporating all other rights (often with a better and more effective formulation), the UN draft puts no restriction on the self-determination of indigenous peoples. It firmly establishes in article 3: "Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development". If the Universal Declaration also becomes contaminated with the apprehensions of a good part of the member States, there will clearly be serious and profound consequences for the future of indigenous peoples.

The problem under discussion is a serious one. It is difficult to conceive of partial self-determination. On the basis of the condition of fenced-in people, States will be able to limit the right of self-determination of indigenous peoples, alleging that in this case it is "internal" self-determination or something of the sort. It is not a speculation

without substance. Those theoreticians in favour of this interpretation are already refining arguments with which to justify the "internal" approach. In Latin American countries, and particularly in Mexico, the first mumblings can be heard. With a critical eye, Lâm has observed the recent boom - in certain intellectual and political circles - of the opinion that, for certain peoples, self-determination only refers to the right *"to exercise internal democratic power"*. And she adds, *"It is important to note that the terms 'internal' and 'external' do not appear in any legal instrument of the United Nations relating to self- determination but they do appear, as Gudmundur Alfredson says, 'as the subsequent invention of political speech and scholarly writings' "*. I totally agree with this professor from the City University of New York School of Law, in that the use of a "double yardstick" for self-determination is unacceptable.

It is true that in Latin America, indigenous organisations are not demanding self-determination in the form of independence. But it also has to be accepted that it is by exercising the full right of self-determination that these peoples want to exercise their rights to autonomy within the national sphere. If the power of choice and decision do not exist, then self-determination cannot be conceived. Perhaps it is useful to make a clear distinction in this respect. One thing is to define *a priori* and arbitrarily that, for indigenous peoples, self-determination is only "internal", and quite another to say that the full right of self-determination can be exercised *internally*, as a system of autonomy freely accepted by both parties. In either case, the premise and consequences are different. In the second option, the basic assumption is that indigenous peoples have the full right of self-determination; the most obvious corollary is that governments must negotiate the most suitable form of autonomy with the peoples, without prior limitations. There is certainly no separatist intention in indigenous people's demands for recognition of their right of self-determination, but it is inadmissible and unjust that under the pretext of the "separatist danger" it is hoped to limit a fundamental right of all peoples.

I conclude this point with a great text of Mrs. Lâm's, which I subscribe to fully,

> *"If the opportunism and partiality that [..]. in my opinion, impel some commentators to give preference to internal rather than external self-determination are not controlled, they will limit radically and, in fact, will render inoperative a fundamental principle of international law which is still necessary to save the weak from the series of subjugations which they continue to suffer, be they external or internal.... "*[10].

Autonomy in Mexico

Moving now to a national level, the body of documentation on indigenous rights elaborated over the last few years is marked by a similar debate. The common thread that runs through all the texts is the right to autonomy as the concrete expression of self-determination. In these texts, the fruitful internal efforts to give concrete form and content to the demand for autonomy can be noted, as well as the influences which international documents (in particular Convention No. 169) have exercised over them. This influence, too, has positive and negative points.

This can be illustrated by considering the documents signed by the EZLN and the Federal Government, which make up what are known as the *San Andrés Accords*[11]. The tensions and the occasional lack of a clear correspondence between, on the one hand, the declared acceptance of concepts such as self-determination, indigenous autonomy, territory and peoples, and the *political* rights recognised by these on the other, are undoubtedly related to the influence of formulations that are taking shape in the international sphere, particularly Convention No. 169. Their ambiguities or restrictions thus filter through into the people's arrangements with governments and, what is worse, the authorities cleverly take advantage of them to impose or to try to enforce restrictive interpretations. This is encouraged by the fact that, in documents, definitions are adopted from the aforementioned agreement with regard to key notions such as peoples and territories[12]. In relation to the category of indigenous peoples, for example, the Mexican government has tried - as part of its strategy of non-fulfilment of the agreements signed - to interpret it by restricting itself to the limitations examined above, that is, it has endeavoured to make prevalent the idea of "peoples" as dispersed villages or communities with certain socio-cultural characteristics but without the possibility of constituting themselves as political subjects or a form of government. This is a way of denying, in practice, the right to autonomy which is accepted in discourse.

Another way of draining autonomy of its essential content is to reduce its scope thus making its exercise, and the possibilities Indian peoples have of reconstituting themselves on the basis of forms of government and institutions that link and give cohesion to their component parts, territorial in scope. What the Mexican government offers, however, is an increasingly crude and narrow *communalism*. This is why the document issued by the EZLN and its group of advisors in February 1996, days prior to the signing of the San Andrés Accords, is so important: *"The San Andrés dialogue and indigenous rights and culture. Full stop"*[13]. It is a text that deserves a thorough reading. In it, the

Zapatistas note that the *"fundamental demands of indigenous peoples have not been completely satisfied in the present phase of negotiation"*; and they go on to indicate the main "omissions" in the areas of land, autonomy, legal pluralism, communications, rights of indigenous woman, et cetera.

With regard to autonomy, the EZLN document affirms that in the agreements, *"neither municipal not regional autonomies are recognised"*. And it adds, *"It is not enough that indigenous communities have the right to associate in municipalities in order to coordinate their actions. They need autonomous structures which [...] would form part of the State structure and make a break with centralism"*. Reiterating the point of view expressed by the Zapatista grassroots a few days before[14], the document in question clarifies that they subscribe to the San Andrés commitments with the government as "minimal agreements", without renouncing the fight to obtain the *"total satisfaction" of the outstanding demands"*. What is striking here is the will of the EZLN to arrive at a negotiated arrangement, so far from the "intransigence" attributed to them by the government's spokespeople. It is in the light of this characterisation of the agreements that the government's desire to reduce their scope is all the more disgraceful. It assumes moving from the minimum to nothing.

It is worth stopping briefly to take a look at the history of this intention on the part of the Mexican government. After the signing of the San Andrés Accords in 1996, another act in the drama of autonomy began to open at the beginning of 1997: two proposals for constitutional reforms of indigenous rights became issues of bitter controversy. The formulations in question were those drawn up, respectively, by the Commission for Concord and Pacification (COCOPA) and by the Federal Government. Everything began when COCOPA presented an initiative of constitutional reform for recognition of indigenous rights to the EZLN and the government of the Republic on 29th November 1996, based on the agreements signed in February 1996.

The document of the legislative body constituted an answer to two closely linked situations. The first was the demand of the EZLN for fulfilment of the San Andrés Accords; stating principally that what had been agreed should be concretised in constitutional reforms. The lack of progress in this area had led to the suspension of dialogue on the part of the Zapatistas. Second was the evident lack of initiative on the part of the federal government to observe the commitments which had been agreed to. Nearly ten months after the signing of the Accords, the government had no appropriate initiative in this respect and there were no serious indications that it had any intention of elaborating one. Given these circumstances, and in order to promote an inescapable step

which, at the same time, could impel the reestablishment of dialogue, COCOPA drew up the aforementioned initiative, with the consent of both parties. The proposal was submitted to them with the following stipulation: it was a text which could not be modified, but had to be accepted as it stood or rejected. It seems the intention of COCOPA was to avoid the reopening of negotiations on the subject of Indigenous Rights and Culture, which had been formally closed with the signing of the document of principles in 1996. Otherwise, they would run the risk of returning to an exhausting process of textual proposals and counterproposals.

After studying the COCOPA initiative, the EZLN decided to accept it. The government, however, requested a period of time in which to study it and to make its "observations". Finally, the government's answer was made known on 11th January 1997. To everyone's surprise, the official document did not constitute a conclusive position on the COCOPA initiative nor a set of observations, but a *new proposal* in which the government gave its own interpretation of what had been agreed in San Andrés, distancing itself in central aspects from its content and spirit[15]. The government had taken a step backwards. It is hardly surprising, then, that the EZLN leadership totally rejected *"the government proposal for constitutional reforms as signifying non-fulfilment of the San Andrés Accords, being a ridicule to the national and international demand for a fair and dignified peace, and not satisfying indigenous demands for a new relationship with the Mexican nation"*[16].

Does this reaction of the EZLN imply some intransigence, as the official spokespeople alleged? Nothing further from the truth. The Zapatistas had been exceptionally flexible. But it was obvious they had arrived at a point at which, after removing all the layers of the onion, they had discovered that there was nothing in the centre. According to the limits of the official critique, flexibility meant that the other party should give up the demands and most fundamental aspirations of Indian peoples. If the whole process is analysed from the beginning of the dialogue in San Andrés to the aforementioned government proposal, it is clear that the executive power has wanted to throw out the main demands of the people, those that motivated the indigenous uprising in the state of Chiapas in the first place.

During the long process of dialogue and negotiation, there was a gradual reduction with regard to the original level of demands put forward by the indigenous party. At each stage, the government maintained a downwards pressure, looking to make the terms in which Indian "rights" were recognised meaningless. Let us draw up a balance

sheet. In the first and second phase of the dialogue of San Andrés, as well as in the indigenous fora, the Indian organisations demanded that autonomy should include self-government, territory, own responsibilities and legal pluralism and that this would be expressed by means of the creation of a fourth level of regional government. The government managed to exclude the main political-legal and territorial attributes of autonomy from the agreements, and maintained - imposed - the point of view that no additional level should be created. However, as can now be seen, what it tried to obtain was a *third reduction* in the quality of rights recognised to indigenous people. With the removal of one more layer, they would arrive at the centre of the onion: the *status quo* of the Indian communities would remain, without substantial changes of a socio-economic or political nature, and with no democratic progress. This seems to have been the government's goal. And all the while it speaks of "deep reforms to the State", "new federalism", et cetera.

As will be recalled, the *first reduction* was noted in the San Andrés Accords themselves, with regard to claims put forward by the indigenous organisations. Central demands were left out: the recognition of territory as the jurisdictional sphere of influence, independent self-government as part of the federal system, the scale of autonomy, the reform of the agrarian laws imposed in 1992, and a long list of others. Nevertheless, the EZLN decided to sign the agreements, whilst noting that important pending issues had been left out, issues which it did not renounce and which it would continue fighting for.

On the other hand, the COCOPA text is a partial reflection of the accords, because it leaves aside issues contained in these[17]. The indigenous organisations noted this; nevertheless, they recognised that COCOPA complied acceptably with the documents signed as far as the points it covered were concerned, above all when compared to the government's proposal[18]. In short, COCOPA's initiative constitutes a valuable effort but it takes up the agreements in an incomplete way. This is thus a *second reduction*, although nothing comparable to the first. In spite of all this, the EZLN accepted it. This is not in keeping with any form of intransigence.

Arrogantly, the government decided to give one more push. Its proposal extracts what little substance remains from the formulation of autonomy in the agreements signed. As an authorised voice of COCOPA openly admitted, autonomy had been pruned[19]; now, with this proposal, the government also demanded the cutting of its roots. Thus, the "autonomy" recognised in the general constitution of the Republic would become a hollow trunk. Self-determination and its autonomous

expression would be mere rhetorical formulae. By accepting this *third reduction*, indigenous rights would end up being dead letter.

Within the same perspective of the documents mentioned above[20], which pay attention not only to the inescapable immediate aims but also to the historical goals of greater scope — aims which can only be achieved in the medium and long term, but which should not be neglected for this reason — the *"Initiative for a decree for the creation of autonomous regions"*, of the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA), which encompasses numerous organisations of Indians from all over the country[21], is worthy of attention. ANIPA's proposal was drawn up by dozens of indigenous organisations over the course of five assemblies held between 1995 and 1997[22]. In this, the set of central demands relating to the *multiple* (in the community, the municipality and the region) and *simultaneous* (depending on the case) levels of autonomy could be appreciated, as well as responsibilities, jurisdiction and self-government. Formulated as an initiative for constitutional reform, the Assembly's proposal in fact constitutes an integral project for future autonomy which, including the vital sphere of the community, does not renounce autonomous municipalities or regions, the true constitution of self-government and own responsibilities within the framework of a united but plural, inclusive and democratic nation. The *Final Declaration* of the sixth Assembly of ANIPA, held in Mexico City in October 1996, authenticates the principles and goals previously mentioned.

It is foreseeable that the government will continue in its efforts to conceive a constitutional framework for autonomy which, at heart, wipes out the rights of the people or makes their exercise impossible. The latest attempt is an initiative of constitutional reform in the area of indigenous rights sent by the Federal Executive to the national Congress in 1998, which contrasts with the proposal drawn up by COCOPA in 1996. In this it is proposed, amongst other restrictive measures, to limit autonomy to the communal sphere. In fact, whilst in the COCOPA proposal it is the indigenous peoples who are the *subjects* of the "right of self-determination and, as an expression of this, to autonomy as part of the Mexican state", in the government initiative - by means of a play on words which dissociates the subjects of self-determination from those of autonomy - it is the *communities* which have this latter right[23].

For an influential sector of public opinion, the Zapatista position with regard to the scope of autonomy was not sufficiently clear. It was assumed that the proposal of an exclusively communal level was acceptable to the EZLN. By supporting a communal vision of au-

tonomy, many even believed they were defending the Zapatista position. In order to change that point of view it was not sufficient that the EZLN itself was promoting "autonomous municipalities" (and even "autonomous zones" and "regions") within its areas of influence from 1996 onwards[24]. Nevertheless, after the head of the Executive sent his initiative to the national Congress in the terms indicated, the overwhelming response came from the EZLN on the issue in the *Vth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*. There it is clearly argued:

> *"No legislation which tries to shrink the Indian peoples by limiting their rights to communities, promoting in that way their fragmentation and their dispersal which will make their annihilation possible, can assure the peace and the inclusion in the Nation of the very first Mexicans. Any reform which tries to break the bonds of historical and cultural solidarity which exist among the indigenous, is condemned to failure and is, simply, an injustice and an historical denial."*[25]

There is no doubt that because of its historical demands, the indigenous struggle will be a long and difficult one. But there are well-founded reasons to think that - by combining unity, organisation and clarity of goals - they will finally gain a system of autonomy which will allow them to stop being invisible peoples and to become citizens with full rights. And so it can be seen that this venture will not be an easy journey. Very hard battles will be necessary from within and, as can be seen, also in the international fora. As the last skirmish held during the XVIth period of session of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (in July1998) and the indigenous lobbying of the Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities - of the Commission on Human Rights - which culminated in its historical resolution of 14th August (entitled "the situation in Mexico and its evolution")[26] shows, indigenous people are learning quickly that their destiny is also at stake in this miry land.

Notes

1 As the General Conference of the ILO itself recognised, the integrationalist vision was that which fuelled the 1957 *Convention No. 107 on indigenous and tribal peoples*, which Convention No. 169 substituted. *Cf. International Labour Conference, Convention No. 169: Convention on indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries, ILO*, Geneva, 1990.

2 The founding forum of integrationalism as an indigenous policy on the part of States, was the First Inter-American Indigenous Congress, held in the city of Pátzcuaro (Michoacán) in 1940. From then on, reputable anthropologists (such as Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán) worked to give it a theoretical foundation and practical meaning. For more details, cf. H. Díaz-Polanco, "La teoría indigenista y la integración" in VV. AA., *Indigenismo, modernización y marginalidad. Una revisión crítica*, Juan Pablos Publishing, 4th edition, Mexico, 1987, pp. 11-45.

3 One illustration of the successful use of the convention as a tool in its fight is the case of the Nahua of Alto Balsas in the state of Guerrero, whose territory was to be flooded by the San Juan Tetelcingo dam which the Mexican government proposed building. In 1992, after intense mobilisations, they managed to get the work cancelled. Cf. Marcelino Díaz de Jesús et al. *Alto Balsas: pueblos nahuas en lucha por la autonomía, desarrollo y defensa de nuestra cultura y territorio. Historia testimonial de un pueblo en lucha*, the Council of Nahua People of Alto Balsas / Guerrero 500 Years Council, Mexico 1996.

4 In both Covenants, the said article 1 states to the letter, "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." More specific rights are also included, which are of great importance to indigenous peoples such as that of "freely disposing of their natural wealth and resources" without being "deprived of their own means of subsistence". Cf. Mexican Academy of Human Rights, *Manual de documentos para la defensa de los derechos indígenas*, AMDH, Mexico 1989, p. 22 and 44.

5 Maivân C. Lâm notes a lack of formal definition of "peoples" as subjects of the right of self-determination, the western powers have tended to respond to the *who*, favouring "peoples who, like them, have had a State history [...] This explains how easily the West recently recognised the re-establishment of the Baltic States, which perfectly encapsulate this paradigm". Maivân Clech Lâm, "El valor jurídico de la libre determinación: visión o inconveniencia" in *Pueblos o poblaciones. Igualdad, autonomía y libre determinación: intereses en juego en el Decenio Internacional de las poblaciones indígenas del mundo*, International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, Montreal, p. 79.

6 Article 1.3 of the Convention clarifies, "The use of the term 'peoples' in this Convention shall not be construed as having any implications as regards the rights which may attach to the term under international law." Cf. CIT, *Convention No. 169, doc. cit.*

7 Cf. International Labour Conference. *Provisional Report, 25, Seventy-sixth meeting*, ILO, Geneva, 1989, pp.1-6.

8 In fact, in sub-section 3 of article 1, the very text of Convention No. 169 is included.

9 B. Denis Marantz, "Temas de importancia para los derechos de los pueblos indígenas en foros internacionales", in *Pueblos o Poblaciones. Igualdad, autonomía y libre determinación...*, op.cit., p.46.

10 Doc. cit, p 105.

11 The documents which make up the San Andrés Accords can be found in *América Indígena*, vol. LVI, nums. 3-4, July-December, 1996, p. 209-249.

12 Cf. for example, points 3.1 and 4.2 of **"Pronunciamiento conjunto..."**, in the San Andrés Accords.

13 Cf. in *Convergencia Socialista*, year one, num. 1, July / August, Mexico, 1997, pp. 46-50.

14 On the subject of political rights in the agreements to be signed, the overwhelming majority of grassroots Zapatistas were of the opinion that, "Recognition of local and regional autonomies was not achieved. This point was partly achieved with the recognition of the right of Indian peoples to 'self-determination', but

the problem of autonomy continues to be an outstanding one and it is necessary to insist on gaining this just indigenous demand". See CCRI-EZLN, "Comunicado (Resultados de la consulta a las bases zapatistas sobre la Mesa 1 de 'Derechos y Cultura Indígena', febrero 1996)", in *Convergencia Socialista*, year 1, num. 1, July/August, Mexico, 1997, p. 44. Our italics.

15 See Federal Government, "Propuesta del gobierno de reformas constitucionales en materia de derechos de los pueblos indígenas" in *La Jornada*, Mexico, 12th January 1997, p. 6.

16 CCRI-EZLN, "Comunicado", in *La Jornada*, 12th January 1997, pp.6-7.

17 For instance: it does not include anything relating to the participation of indigenous people "in the electoral processes without the necessary participation of the political parties". Cf. *Propuestas conjuntas que el Gobierno Federal y el EZLN se comprometen a enviar a las instancias de debate y decisión nacional, correspondientes al punto 1.4 de las reglas de procedimiento*, doc. cit., III, 1, b.

18 The Union of Huichol Indigenous Communities of Jalisco, for example, considered, "Cocopa missed a number of our proposals which were contained in the San Andrés Sakamchen Accords, or took them on board with certain limitations; but their proposal is incomparably better than that of the Executive and more in accordance with the voice of the indigenous people". UCIHJ, "Wixaritari opinan sobre las propuestas de la Cocopa y el gobierno", *La Jornada*, 20th January 1997, p. 2.

19 In an interview with Ismael Romero, the COCOPA spokesperson, César Chávez stated that the legislators had avoided including the following points in this initiative: a) "a fourth level of government (the three constitutional levels are federal, state and municipal)"; b) "a plural system of justice" and c) "territorial autonomy". According to the legislator, because "the EZLN had not stated any claim to these" (sic) and in order to "avoid the Mexican State any problems, the three points mentioned are not considered in the commission's document". Cf. "Analizarán el contenido de la propuesta oficial. Guardia de la Cocopa previa a su encuentro con el EZLN", *La Jornada*, 23rd December 1996, p. 7.

20 See notes 16 and 17.

21 Cf. ANIPA, "Proyecto de iniciativa para la creación de las regiones autónomas", in *La autonomía de los pueblos indios*, Chamber of Deputies, Parliamentary Group of the PRD, LVI Legislature, Mexico 1996. Also included in *Memoria*, num. 89, CEMOS, Mexico, July 1996 and in *Convergencia Socialista*, year one, num. 1, July/August, Mexico 1997.

22 For more details on the conformation of ANIPA, see H. Díaz-Polanco and Consuelo Sánchez, "Las autonomías: una formulación mexicana" in *Ojarasca*, num. 44, May-July, Mexico, 1995.

23 The Executive's initiative establishes, "With regard to the remaining dispositions of this Constitution and to the unity of the Mexican State, indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination; the concrete expression of this is the autonomy of indigenous communities..."

24 For an overview of this Zapatista process in the Altos, see Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor " Las autonomías indígenas en los Altos de Chiapas", *Convergencia Socialista*, year one, num. 4, January/February, Mexico, 1998, p.16 onwards.

25 CCRI-EZLN, "V Declaration.....", in *Convergencia Socialista*, year one, num. 6, July/August, Mexico, 1998, p.19.

26 See the indigenous speeches and the resolution (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/L.18) in "Voces indias en la ONU", *Memoria*, num. 116, CEMOS, October, Mexico, 1998.

NATIONAL EXPERIENCES

HISTORIC AUTONOMIES: YAQUI AUTONOMY

Hilario Molina

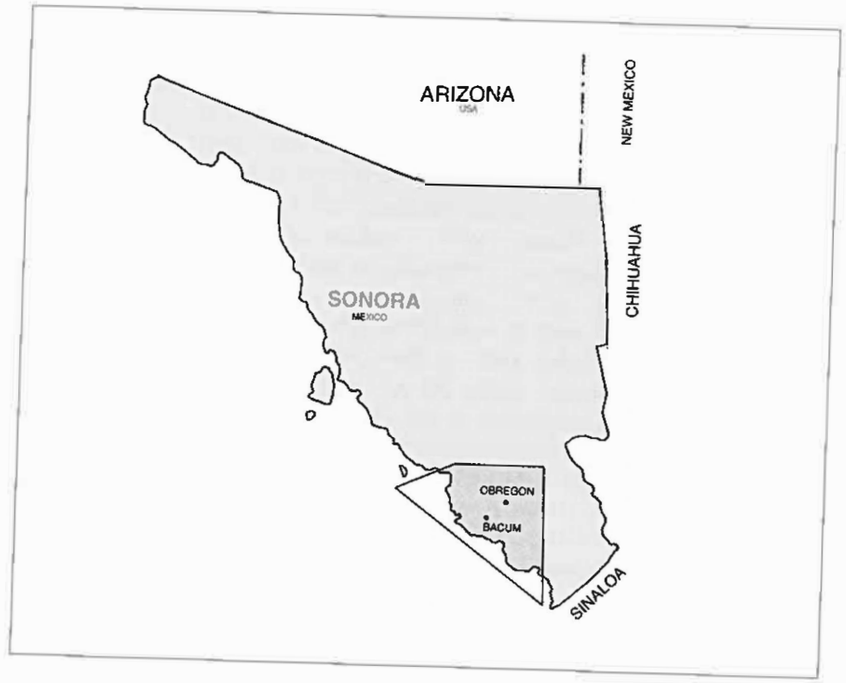
The Yaqui region is located in the south-western part of the State of Sonora, in the north of Mexico. We Yaqui are a people with a long history. Our past is very important to us but this does not prevent us from looking to the future. We are now fighting to maintain what autonomy we have, which is threatened by further territorial dispossession. Our territorial inheritance is our morning sustenance. Thus we see the past; thus we see the future.

This brief essay is structured in three sections. In the first I will give an account of our historic resistance in defence of our territory and autonomy; the second part describes how Yaqui self-government and our system of administering justice work within the framework of the exercise of our autonomy. On this basis, finally and briefly, I will reflect on the importance of development in the Yaqui territory, which is considered as just one more essential component in the exercise of our tribe's right to autonomy.

Yaqui resistance and territory

History shows how, throughout five centuries of attempted domination on the part of white people, we Yaqui have been perpetuating our ancestral responsibility: to continue to exist as a group and to continue to share our common history as a country with all Mexicans. These are the stories that we recall together with our ancestors and living old folk.

The Yaqui people or "tribe", as we call ourselves, has characteristics that differentiate it from other Mexicans and even from some of the country's indigenous peoples. I think that these characteristics can be likened conceptually to belonging to a "small nation", which for us is our "great nation". Such an assessment will obviously depend on the point of view or perspective of the person who writes, reads or makes history. Why do I think that the Yaqui constitute a nation? Largely because the Yaqui tribe has, to date, maintained an historic resistance. Ours is one long history of struggle, dating back to the period prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Our oral history tells us of the defence of our territory in the face of threats from other Indian tribes, such as the



Map of the location of the territory of the Yaqui tribe, State of Sonora

Apaches and others whose territories currently fall under the jurisdiction of the United States of America.

Our elders tell us that *Aniatba'alu'utek* (which means *"the water of the world has run dry"),* a soldier of high rank in the army, used to draw a line in the ground with his bow and say, *"If they cross this line they will be dead"*. This story, which we listened to as small children, has a profound impact on our emotions. We often ask ourselves what would have happened if our ancestors had not fought to conserve our territory for the generations of today? A great uncertainty comes over us, and we deeply value the bravery of our ancestors who gave their lives to inherit a wide area of land that, to us, clearly denotes the "Yaqui territory". These stories are the ones that sustain us on a daily basis. All Yaquis, from a very tender age, listen to tales that speak not only of the struggle and resistance of our distant ancestors but also of our living old folk. The will to continue as Yaqui is something that is very strong in the hearts and minds of our people, including the young people and children.

This is why the Yaqui people do not allow the presence of strangers in the mountainous part of Yaqui territory: because it is a sacred place of resistance. Lying in that ground are the dry blood and the dead spirits of thousands of Yaquis who fell defending our territory. The whole mountain range is full of historic sites of heroic battles and acts, of tombs of heroes such as Tetabiate, the Indian Dolores, Cajeme, Juan Banderas, and of places such as *Otankawi, Watachibe, Masokoba, Totoita, Kuse'epo* and others. The mesquite forests and as far as the coast, all are sacred places. We Yaqui know that any reference to our territory must not leave out the fact that its continuity has been at a high price in terms of the loss of our people's lives. Thousands of Yaquis have died in defence of their territory, and it is this that has prevented an increase in population. From 1617-1623, the Jesuits Pérez de Rivas and Basilio carried out a census, recording 30 thousand Yaquis. Today we number approximately 35 thousand, which gives you an idea of the systematic genocide we have been subjected to by the different governments from colonization to the present time.

The very first encounter with the white soldiers, and subsequent ones, were all failed attempts at domination and dispossession. For a century (1533-1617) the white soldiers fought the Yaqui in bloody battles in order to dominate them. They did not succeed; our people always won because they were skilful in military defence. In the face of repeated failure, the white men decided to change their strategy.

From 1617 onwards, the first Jesuits arrived on our territory: Andrés Pérez de Rivas and Tomás Basilio. It was thus that the dream of the Spaniards, who were looking to penetrate *Yoreme* (a term by which the Yaqui call themselves and which means "respected") life, was partly crystallised. After several years, the Catholic religion finally became a part of the life of our tribe. Some historians call this a "spiritual conquest". For the Yaqui, such an event had a different value. We believe that Yaqui culture was not lost. Throughout the last few centuries, a cultural-religious syncretism has taken place between the former Yaqui religion and the values of the Catholic religion. Today such a situation is not questioned; on the contrary, most of the Yaqui's contemporary cultural expressions are a mixture of both religions, uniting in support of our identity.

Our grandparents continued their struggle throughout the whole of the 19th century, and it did not finish there. It continues to this very day, in defence of our interests, territory and culture. This force is often condemned by people who are not Yaqui, which is why non-Indian historians explain Yaqui resistance as an attitude of rejection of "civilisation". Such a statement is not correct. Over the last few years, we have promoted regional development programmes – which will be discussed in more detail later in this essay - whose components combine modernity with tradition and change with conservation. The difference is that these development projects are determined and prioritised by us. We Yaqui are not against modernity, as non-Indians frequently say, but we want to ensure that this modernity does not affect our territories and vision of the world. For, in this day and age, the greatest threat to the integrity of our territories is hidden behind the word "development".

The defence of our territory has deep meaning for the Yaqui, it is the defence of much more than a piece of land. For the Yaqui, territory is rather like a "nest" or a "receptacle", a great space that contains. The sense of property and identity around our territories has mystical value. Our land is a sacred legacy which each individual, from the day he or she is born, is destined to preserve. But what they are thus preserving is what lies within its boundaries, its specificity. This specificity is our thousand-year-old culture of ancestral dances, such as that of the coyote - which is an eminently military dance -, or the dance of the deer, the pride of our group.

Our whole concept of life has been constructed around our territory, that is, our cosmogony or philosophical conception of the universe. To the Yaqui, it is also denoted by a language that is alive, developing and without variations in dialect. A social organisation led by a politico-religious government with clearly established norms and customary laws regulates all spheres of our society; these latter are in the process of being written down.

We look upon the land as our Mother, it is she who feeds us and cures our illnesses, who protects us and who guards us within her. We Yaqui have a concept known as *ania*, which means World, *juya ania* and *yoo ania* are a part of this, that is, the world of the trees and plants and that of the animals; we are a part of the latter. *Yoawa* means animal and *Yoeme* means man. Thus the prefix *Yo* is also the root of *yoreme*, the word which we Yaqui call ourselves by, which indicates to us that the *"Yoreme"* are nothing more than nature itself, we are a part of it and thus our territory is an essential space for our survival.

We Yaqui know the danger threatening indigenous peoples who have lost their territories, we are well aware that these peoples have ceased to exist after losing their territorial basis. We feel that a Yaqui outside his territory is less of a person because being Yaqui includes an identity which is the sum of many things: land, water, culture, language, sea,

mountains, forests and much more. This is very difficult to conceptualise. The notion of duty or "patriotism" towards our tribe is very important in the Yaqui cosmovision. This can be seen because, when a part of Yaqui territory is affected, there is always an immediate reaction and when threats are made against our culture which are seen as an imminent danger, no effort is spared to resolve them. Our people's vision of the world contains basic values regarding freedom, solidarity, collective care, respect and the general defence and reinforcing of our territorial inheritance. All these values make the Yaqui and their territory a single unit.

The history of the Yaqui is the history of the defence of our territory. Our grandparents and parents tell us many of these stories on a daily basis. In 1825 the Yaqui, Juan Banderas, initiated a movement of demand that brought together most of the Indian groups of the State of Sonora. It was called *"The Confederation of Indians of the State of Sonora against the White Man's Yoke"*, an initiative which was the beginning of a strong organised movement of special relevance for the Yaqui tribe and which contributed to strengthening its cohesion. Years later, during the government of an indigenous brother, the President of the Republic, Benito Juárez (1857), carried out the greatest act of treason towards our collective heritage. The liberal Benito Juárez promoted diverse laws – such as the "Laws of Confiscation" also known as the "Clumsy Law" – whose aim was to destroy communal forms of property which are the basis and means of support of ancestral indigenous property, at the same time as opening up the path towards the privatisation of territories and the introduction of landowners and individuals. This law had a strong impact on us and led to the loss of a very important part of our territories, which ended up in the hands of foreigners and Mexican estate owners.

Another president, also of indigenous origin, Porfirio Díaz, continued the devastation commenced by Juárez. With his slogan "Order and Progress" and claiming to "fight barbarism", Porfirio's government initiated a ferocious campaign of extermination of the Yaqui tribe. For more than 30 years, our grandparents maintained a continuous armed struggle of resistance, which had a high cost in terms of the lives of both Yaqui and soldiers. We remember heroes such as Cajeme, Tetabiate, and many others. At this time, the deportation of Yaqui to the sisal estates in the Yucatán and Campeche, the Oaxaca National Valley and elsewhere took place. Iron resistance meant that many of those deported returned to their place of origin, walking more than three thousand kilometres. Neither did the revo-

lution of Madero supporters, which began in 1910, resolve the legal ownership of the Yaqui territory, although our people played a very important part in it. The hostilities began again with the government of Plutarco Elías Calles (1924), as they once more dispossessed us of our territory and assigned lands to individuals, triggering the last armed Yaqui fight against the Mexican federal government in 1927.

Even today there are still many old folk who give testimony to this war of extermination against the Yaqui on the part of the Mexican government, a war that included the aerial bombardment of our communities and heroic resistance on the part of our soldiers and military. Some time later, with the arrival of General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (1934-1940) into the government of the Republic, some of our previous territorial demands began to take shape. The Cárdenas government recognised, albeit in a limited way, a part of the dispossessed territory (485,000=00=00 hectares). As can be seen from the annexed document, this text constitutes a first legal instrument for protecting the legality of our lands. Unfortunately, this recognition has been insufficient and territorial threats persist.

More than 50 years on, some people who have obtained individual and communal "legal" titles of possession within our lands – such documents were clearly obtained through corruption and illegal use of the legal recourses which neoliberal reforms have created - have caused a fissure in Yaqui loyalty, once again placing the integrity of our territory in danger. In January 1996, within this framework of renewed aggression against the Yaqui, Ernesto Zedillo's government in turn laid a new trap – under the guise of "development" - for our authorities, who signed documents that were later to be used against us. This skilful deceit on the part of the government meant the further dispossession of more than 2,000 hectares of land. In the face of this action, as a legal recourse, we Yaqui have lodged an appeal against this expropriation on the grounds of unconstitutionality. We do not hold out much hope, however. It is evident that once again we have the whole weight of the Mexican State and its legal norms, drawn up in order to "legalise" the dispossession of our territories, against us - just one more action in the long history of genocide of our people.

Traditional government and autonomy

Our territory is tied to a traditional and specifically Yaqui form of political government, with its own characteristics. It is a government

built to defend our territory. Our history tells of our people's ancient form of government. Our grandparents tell us that, in the beginning, our government was an eminently military organisation in defence of our inheritance (our *"bwi'a toosa"* which literally means "land-nest" - territory) and against those indigenous people seeking expansion of their domination. This form of strategic government lost its role considerably in times of peace. However, it sometimes remained effective for months or years, depending on the security situation or threats to our territory.

This government was based on the bravery and daring of the military leaders who held the rank of *"coyote"* and who acted alongside the Councils of Elders. These heroic deeds are still present today in our lives. The dance of the coyote - which depicts the main military ranks of that time, such as that of the *"wiko'o ya'ut"* literally 'head bowman' - is still danced and is greatly valued by our people. This rank is the highest in the non-Indian military order and is the one which leads the troops - *"wiko'o yoemia"* or *"bowmen"* (warriors or soldiers). Although this position still exists, changes in the government structure have nevertheless taken place over the course of time and its rank has been replaced.

The first changes occurred in the 17th century. With the establishment of the Jesuit missionaries in 1617-1623, whose tasks were those of proselytising and introducing projects of agricultural development, cattle and mining, the Yaqui settlements were reorganised. From then on, the Yaqui were grouped into eight communities and the ecclesiastical and organisational powers of both religious systems merged, giving rise to the present traditional form of government of the Yaqui tribe with the structure, functions, main laws and dispositions which are known today. The present Yaqui government is the product of a politico-religious syncretism made up of 8 principal governments from 8 communities. These are: *Bikam, Potam, Torim, Raum, Bakum, Wiribis, Kokorit* and *Beene.* Each one of these peoples has its own independent government, with a defined jurisdiction for the tasks of control and protection. Of these, the first two, that is, *Bikam* ("point of the arrow") and *Potam* ("place where water springs") are the main territorial centres.

With regard to their organisational structure, there are five main governors within each people. These coordinate, manage and exercise the power of collective decision over all kinds of problems. The hierarchy of the people's internal governments is as follows: *kobanao,* or head and protector of the ancestral roots who, with the passage of time and given the tasks of this position, has been given the name of "governor". The next in importance is *Jabo'i yo'owe,* the oldest person of highest rank in the Council of Elders; then comes the *Wiko'o ya'ut* (head bowman),

equivalent to a captain, then the *Nejja ya'ut,* who is in charge of jurisdiction and is equivalent to a commander and finally the *Ji'ojtereo,* that is, the one who writes or the secretary. Each of the members of this structure of traditional government has their functions clearly defined.

With regard to its functioning, the *kobanao*'s period in office is normally one year although it can last two depending on the degree of management or problems which the Yaqui community or people is facing in general. This level of government has the responsibility of notifying and taking decisions - in coordination with the others - in order to seek solutions to problems of internal concern. They meet daily with the traditional guards to receive information of new events. Sundays are put aside for appointments with other authorities in order to deal with the different problems that have arisen during the course of the week. In spite of his rank, the *kobanao* does not have the absolute power of decision; his role is largely an executive one. The discussion of problems, of the forming of a consensus and agreeing on decisions and solutions to problems is undertaken at another and lower level of power: by the people and the Yoremia troops, that is, the members of another hierarchy who make up the "military society".

On the other hand, the *jabo'i yo'owe* is normally an older person or elder, who has accumulated experiences throughout his life, making him the fairest and wisest person in the government. In most cases he has held the highest offices within the community and is the one who offers advice regarding cases of violations of the law; it is he who intercedes and ensures that the decisions are the fairest, and consults the grassroots, the people, when this is required. But he does not take decisions unilaterally, there is always the *basaariom* at his side in the meetings, as "Council" to his decisions. This is a very select group of people who previously held the position of *kobanao.* This group can be called the "consultative body" or "council of ex-governors" for a clearer understanding of its role. Although this position is a life one, changes in membership can be made if necessary.

The *Wiko'o ya'ut,* on the other hand, has territorial defence and protection of the people under his responsibility. The *wiko'o ya'ura* is the military section under its control. Their subjects obey and protect public order. Guard duty is held in the *komunila,* which are the traditional government buildings. They normally carry out night watches in the town.

Another important component of the military hierarchy are the *Nejja ya'ut* (warriors), who receive orders from the *wiko'o ya'ut,* and who execute all those dispositions aimed at protecting and monitoring

the Yaqui territory, in general and particularly within the jurisdiction of the people to which they belong; they restore civil order through norms and dispositions, and have under their responsibility the *wiko'o yoemem*, in other terms the military troops. With their group they traverse the whole of the corresponding territorial area.

The *Ji'ojtereo is* the person who carries out administrative activities, is the secretary and does the writing. In addition he serves as interpreter in cases of negotiation or discussion, he translates what is said, whether a disposition or an agreement, has no decision-making capacity and only receives directions from the authority; he is allowed to make suggestions but not provisions. When the time comes for a conclusion from the authorities, he must repeat it as it has been told him, whether or not he is in agreement. The execution of this role only takes place in cases of negotiation or discussion with external agents. In internal meetings, this function is not exercised and he does not take part directly.

The integration of these 5 authorities constitutes the fundamental core of the traditional government. In addition, there are other auxiliary positions of lesser importance. For example, that of the second *kobanao* who, should the first be absent due to health problems, takes his place in meetings. There are other lesser military posts under the orders of the *wiko'o ya'ut*, which carry out actions of a public nature. Like the position of *kobanao*, these posts are for a duration of one year.

On the other hand, one of the minor positions, but which is still important in the life of the Yaqui, is that of the *alawasin mool*. This person, by order of the government, is empowered - within the framework of the Yaqui system of justice - to deliver corporal punishment to those who fail to respect the authority. This is a subject discussed in more depth further on.

In general, these are the governmental positions in each one of the eight Yaqui communities. However, the most important of these mechanisms is the decision-making one. In no case are decisions taken unilaterally but always arrived at after having listened to the different opinions of the community members.

Another important aspect is the organisation of the Yaqui government as a regional whole, being the sum of the eight peoples making up the Yaqui tribe. When a problem requires a decision on the part of the whole group at a regional level, the 8 traditional authorities meet in plenary, each one sending their five governors, making 40 in total. They meet in the *Komunila*, the seat of government. This is characterised

by the circular way in which the chairs are positioned. From the centre back out to the last row, people sit in accordance with their rank.

Nevertheless, in these collective discussions not only the upper levels of government are present but also the military troops and the people. A solution to the problem can in this way be considered and everyone participates. It is important to note the presence and participation of the ecclesiastical authorities, linking to the rituals of the Church. Women occupy a predominant place within this structure, mainly those of high rank such as the *kopariam* and the *main teachers of traditions and customs.* All these are a part of and have a voice in decisions of all kinds, including the decisions regarding appointment of each of the governors. In this latter decision, the opinion of the women usually carries great weight.

The nature of these meetings means that consensus is the only mechanism for reaching agreements. Depending on the gravity of the problem, an assembly can spend a whole day and night or more, if the subject being considered is a complex one, until they reach a consensus for solution of the conflict. This mechanism prevents negative results or abuses of power from occurring as matters are widely discussed and everyone has the opportunity to give their point of view. In general, and given the conditions of the structure, these deliberations are made in an atmosphere of respect between members.

These government structures and mechanisms for internal decision-making within the Yaqui tribe are widely known and recognised by the government. This is why other government bodies, such as at municipal, state or even federal level, frequently know, understand and respect tribal decisions within their own governmental decisions. They are well aware that they cannot be involved. On some occasions when, for some reason, these authorities become involved in the knowledge of some conflict; the non-Indian authorities usually accept their solution with an attitude of, "It's your problem and you have to solve it" or "It's nothing to do with us". Even when national laws clash with internal ones, that is, when they infringe on the internal ones, the customary or traditional dispositions and norms of our people always prevail.

We Yaqui are well aware that this recognition of our forms of government is a forced acceptance on the part of these authorities, as a result of the strength of our people and our traditions. Amongst the Yaqui there exists an attachment to and value of traditions and customs and of internal law, as all Yaquis are trained from children in the knowledge and respect of the different roles of government, and a

desire for service and loyalty to our people is inculcated in us by means of special ceremonies and rituals which constitute preparatory ceremonies for the taking on of responsibilities to our people. The following paragraph is an example of this training, which gathers together ceremonial phrases that are said when taking up a position:

> *" Today we give you this position, the responsibility is very great but we have put all our confidence in you. From now on, the enemy will have his eyes on you, will be taking notice of you, because you are taking the forefront in our defence. Always have ready your essential items, your* nakapa'aali*((deer leather knapsack or bag), always have three pairs of sandals, hang them up, and do not forget your water bag. Your position and duties have no defined hour or day. From this moment, your duties are great, you must be responsible. You will have neither mother nor father, brothers nor sisters, nor relatives, all will be equal for you, you will enforce our law for all. Before hunger, thirst and disease must come fulfilment of your duty. You will live under the protection of the coyote* (go'i) *and the supervision of the eagle* (bwe'u wi'ikit)*, if you stray from the path the gentle breeze will give an account of you. If they say something to you, think about it, reflect, it may be that not everything they say to you is truth, but you must not lie. If something is proposed to you, whatever it may be, always remember that you have a place to deal with things: your* Traditional Guard, *your people ".*

This single paragraph illustrates the emphasis of the content of the speeches that are made during ceremonies when taking a position, ceremonies which generally last for a minimum of 3 hours, with dances of the coyote and a great mysticism and respect because it is a ritual of great importance for the continuity and maintenance of Yaqui identity. Many Yaquis are concerned for and involved in these tasks.

We cannot, however, ignore the risks that stand in our path. Perhaps the greatest danger is the loss of Yaqui values on the part of the young people who attend school. Many of them no longer want to understand the messages, parables and history of our ancestors, related in the *yo'o noki* language which the young people show little interest in learning. School education tends, in some way – even if it is in the form of "bilingual education" – to weaken Yaqui values. However, we are encouraged by the fact that there are also other young people who feel and act with their heart and do not deny their ethnic background. These are the Yaquis who will protect the existence of our people in the future. Those who renounce it and let themselves be influenced will lose that essential ingredient known as dignity and will be resigning the right to live history in a different way.

Yaqui justice and autonomy

Yaqui social organisation classes crimes as different behaviours that infringe upon the individual and the collective, including the territory as part of this collectivity. The Yaqui government also has jurisdiction over each one of the five communities and the territorial area.

The regulations establish that *"all Yaquis have the great responsibility of notifying the internal government of anomalies detected within"*. The complaint must be submitted to the *traditional guard* or the competent authority, depending on the case. For example, in the case of exploitation of a forest resource on the part of people from outside the tribe, this should be communicated to the *nejja ya'ut*, who is in charge of monitoring the area corresponding to his community. He goes out jointly with his military troops to correct the situation, but always after long deliberation in a meeting of the people and authorities. This monitoring is carried out with the support of different resources, depending on the distance, proximity or degree of difficulty of the problem.

In order to control the people's system of justice, a meeting of the authorities is held every Sunday in order to hear about the events of the week which need dealing with. For daily events, there is always a guard on the government premises. In case of problems with non-indigenous people, those involved are given an appointment and recourse to the interpreter, *Ji'ojtereo* or secretary is made.

In the case of offences such as robbery, physical or verbal aggression committed by a Yaqui, it is the *alawasin* who executes the orders of the authorities and an instruction to appear before them is always sent to the father of the person who has committed the offence; if there is no father then to the grandfather, the mother, or the grandmother. A date is given to this person to appear, along with the offending individual. Once they have arrived, the judgement begins with a ritual greeting on the part of the aforementioned *ala'ewan*. This greeting lasts 15 to 20 minutes, during which both parties enquire as to the health of the other, and of the neighbours, and the news of the people. Before tackling the central issue of the problem, a whole ritual of greeting and mutual respect is carried out.

After this, the offender is presented to the authorities. He is put in front of them, barefoot, and behind him settles the *alawasin* with a kind of leather whip. In case of lack of respect, he is obliged to use it on him but this is not always necessary. The most serious crimes are those which heavily impinge upon the integrity of the nation-tribe. In these

cases, recourse to justice is used but with greater force, that is, with the presence of the 40 governors and the people in general, in discussions which can last a whole day before giving the maximum punishment. The imparting of tribal justice is characterised by the staggered nature of the punishment. Each offender is given three opportunities. On the first occasion, he is warned and they are tolerant with him. If he does not respond favourably to the appeals of the authorities, a final decision of expulsion from the community can be reached or the case handed over to the non-Yaqui authorities.

Even when, in extreme cases, there is recourse to use of the whip on the body of an offender, in most cases the problems are solved by seeking acknowledgement of the error, repentance and the reincorporation of the offender into the daily life of the community. I consider that this system of justice has a more formative nature than that used in the national system, that of "economic punishment" - through a fine or jail. In cases of homicide, the offender is handed over to the non-Indian system of justice. Defence through our government is possible, in cases of negligence or self-defence. In all cases that deserve attention, the authority makes both parties appear. In the case of social conflict, both parties are heard and the issue is widely deliberated upon, so that when recourse to questioning has been exhausted and the judgement made, it is normally of an irrevocable nature.

The strength of the word of the elders is publicly known and it is known that when a decision is taken there is no turning back. Those who find this form of government most difficult are the non-Indian government employees. Our authorities do not put in place "negotiation" tables for visits of employees from the non-Indian government. When they arrive the visitors are listened to with all due respect, often making proposals for joint actions between the Yaqui government and the non-Indian government. The translator is the means of liaison between the two parties. After listening, the authorities deliberate in the Yaqui language. There have been cases in which it took more than 3 hours to give an answer to the proposal, only to respond with a "yes" or a "no", that is, whether they approved of the proposal or not. The authorities notify the agreement to the translator, who also transmits it to the government employees who patiently await the answer. The decision taken cannot be put to discussion and there is no opportunity for debate. It is important to note that this protocol of using translators on the part of the Yaqui government is used with all the non-Indian authorities, including the governor of the State and the president of the Republic, officials who, when they meet with the tribe, are classed as visitors. This capacity for decision and government as Yaquis is proof of our autonomy.

There are also internal norms or laws which exist to regulate the possession of land, in which the idea that "everything belongs to everybody" prevails, that is, when land is allocated to individuals in order for them to work it, it is granted to them along with advice in which the social or communal nature of ownership of the whole territory is made known, so that the individual is clearly aware from the beginning that he is not being granted ownership of the piece of land but only the usufruct of it. It is also made clear that a Yaqui can lose his rights if he betrays any Yaqui principles. Through such "advice", the young Yaqui farmers get to know the regulations that govern the exploitation of our territory and our natural resources. Some examples of this "advice" are:

- You who work the land, who sow the seed, we ask you to tell us everything you want to do in your field (Traditional authority).
- Treat your brothers, companions, neighbours, your people, all those that work alongside you, well; work through agreement and mutual support.
- Always look after your things, if you sow take care of the crop, do not neglect it.
- If you manage to multiply your goods, always remember that you are not alone, there will always be someone who needs your help, help them and request nothing in return.
- Your older children have the right to the land and its benefits.
- The work of the field should be left in the hands of men.

If the traditional authority comes to hear of an irregular situation committed by someone, the authority will call him to a meeting as previously explained. After the traditional greeting, he is asked to explain his situation calmly, it is not permissible - as already said - for him to get worked up or for the discussion to become polarised. After the chat, they somehow arrive at a good understanding. It is an internal recourse, non-coercive but regulatory, very necessary.

Norms for surveillance of the traditional grounds and for that of the people also exist. Those who safeguard order - this is normally at night - have the authority to warn the children and young people who are out to go home at a certain hour. They are warned on three occasions and, if they take no notice, then the procedure of calling upon their parents and the traditional guard is initiated, as previously

described. In the case of older people, they are given respect even if they are out at night, as long as they do nothing that affects other people. Everything normally happens peacefully, only in cases of lack of respect to the guards are people taken into custody so that punishment can be delivered the next day. The punishment normally consists of being a guard for a week. Fines are not allowed.

This is all I can say concerning Yaqui justice. Most other dispositions – our ancestral laws – cannot be divulged to the non-Yaqui population as it is forbidden to mention them. This is why I cannot reproduce them in this essay.

Keeping the secrets of our people is part of the advice of our elders and of our authorities. What we have presented in this essay on our government and system of administering justice has thus been told in a very general and limited way. The main restriction of the author is respect for the integrity of our people. One piece of advice from our old people which we have learned and which I accept is, *"Silence is the wise virtue of he who feels sure of his knowledge"*.

Autonomy and development

As has been made clear, we Yaqui are a nation-tribe that knows very clearly where it has come from and where it is going. This is why we have resisted the introduction of changes or innovations that are not personally controlled by us. For many years, Yaqui resistance was seen as conservative or in opposition to change or innovation at any cost. It has at last been understood that this is not the case and, in the latter years of the 1980s, the federal government gave special political treatment to the Yaqui tribe in order to implement a development programme.

Our small nation, people or tribe (this is the term which scares the government the least) has progressed significantly in the area of development, or at least is beginning to lay the foundations for it. In the early 1980s, the Yaqui people began to manage a federal fund for implementation of the *"Integrated Development Plan for the Yaqui Tribe"* (PIDTY) which began to bear fruit in 1983. The main needs of our group were shaped through this Programme. That was the beginning, hardly even a plan initially. Later, in 1989, under the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the plan was reconsidered and a more advanced proposal drawn up, in terms required by the Yaqui people. It was clear that, in this reformulation, one of the great intentions of the Plan was that each

of the actions of the programmes and projects should move towards strengthening the Traditional Authority. It is important to note that all management of resources going to the different Federal and State government bodies is the sole responsibility of the Traditional Government. Year after year, our authorities manage supervision of the budget.

Such a process, as will be understood, is not easy. The executing bodies (State Government) frequently use delaying tactics or excessive bureaucracy, which have the effect of diminishing the impact of the funds invested. The lack of fluidity of an investment usually has high costs, because of the agricultural cycles or the fishing seasons. As is logical, any delay in planning causes more loss than profit.

Relations with these executing bodies are frequently prickly. In spite of such deficiencies, the PIDTY has been an important instrument in the life of the Yaqui, because the whole programme is conceptualised, decided and implemented by members of the tribe. At regional level, a Trust of the Yaqui Nation-Tribe has been established, administered by Yaqui secretaries and technicians and with the participation of commissioners from the State Government. This institution is called the Trust Technical Committee. For organisational purposes, there are two institutions, one of them is the Department of Socio-Cultural Development, in which a series of programmes and projects with special purposes are grouped. For its part, the "Archives and Culture Project" has the objective of attempting to create an historical archive containing historical documents and video and audio recordings which gather together the testimonies of the old folk on diverse issues, ranging from the cultural to the political and more. A programme of organisation of social welfare has also been established, via a body that detects health needs. For this, health committees have been established with medical clinics in small localities where there is no other type of medical assistance available. There is also an educational project that has the purpose of creating materials and text books in the Yaqui language. With this aim in mind, a technical committee made up of teachers has been set up, whose aim is to implement a programme of grants with which to support young students at secondary, preparatory or university level.

For production purposes, the women have organised themselves within different programmes, such as supply stores, workshops for sewing and preparation of traditional clothes, tortilla bakeries, small-scale agriculture and beekeeping, among other things. A Production Development Department was set up for the smooth running of

these projects. All the fishing and farming programmes are grouped together within this institution, in addition to an Insurance Fund, which is vital, given the high risks from the agricultural cycles. All the professional staff are Yaqui.

Because of its importance, we Yaqui have put a great deal of emphasis on the training of technical staff. Scholarships to students are granted according to our requirements for professionals. This has enabled us to have a team for integrated technical assistance, which includes activities of farmer training. The whole programme is backed up by a computer centre in which Yaqui staff work. There is a coordinating committee which oversees monitoring of the organisation and which promotes actions tending towards improving each service. In concept and practice, the PIDTY is handled from a perspective of integrated development, as our proposal defines the interrelation and close ties between each one of the components of the life of our people, where territory, tradition, government, culture and development constitute a single unit. Being able to conceptualise and implement a development model from this perspective is the result of strength and our capacity to exercise our right to autonomy.

Continuing in our efforts will engender many risks. Very frequently, the government tries to "pay" us some investments in order to justify the dispossession of our territories. We have permanently been against any negotiation of this nature. For the Yaqui, our territory has no price and is non-negotiable. This is a highly risky point which we Yaqui are currently facing, at the crossroad of the millennium's end.

ANNEX:

Decree for the Restitution of the Yaqui Tribe's Lands

WITH A VIEW to the presidential agreement pronounced on 27th October 1937, restituting territories of irrigation, pasture, mountains and wild areas recognised to the Yaqui Tribe, of the state of Sonora, and the presidential dispositions of 10th and 12th June 1939, on the same subject, this present resolution is issued in which will be clarified the points to which will be subjected the final titling in favour of the centres of population of the tribe, in accordance with the dispositions relative to article 27 of the General Constitution of the Republic and relevant prescribed Laws.

FIRST. - In compliance with the plan approved and subscribed to by this Federal Executive, which is annexed as a complement to this resolution, the definition and demarcation of the lands being restituted to the Yaqui Tribe, Sonora, will be carried out according to the following boundaries: from the southern end of the Isla de Lobos, in a northeasterly direction, until arriving at the south-western vertex of the San José quadrilateral, from this point in a northerly direction, by the western edge of the aforementioned quadrilateral via the western edge of the mentioned quadrilateral crossing the Yaqui River until the point located on the right bank of the river, from this point, continued along the right bank of this river, upstream, until arriving at the point in which this margin crosses the southern edge of the Buenavista lands; from this crossing, following the southern edge pointing towards the west, until the south-western corner of the aforementioned lands of Buenavista; from this point, along the whole western edge of the lands of Buenavista, in a north-easterly direction, until the north-west corner of those same lands; from this point, in a straight line, with north-westerly direction, until arriving at the place known as Sahuaral; from this point, in straight line in a north-westerly direction, until the Moscobampo Peak; from this point, in a straight line, with a south-westerly direction, passing by the South Pacific Railroad station called "Las Guasimas", until the coast of the Gulf of California; from this point, in a southerly direction, along the whole coast of the Gulf of California, including the Isla de Lobas, until arriving at the point of departure.

SECOND. - The Yaqui Tribe will have at their disposal, during every agricultural year, up to half the volume of water stored in the "La Angostura" dam for purposes of irrigating their own lands.
Extraction must correspond to the agricultural requirements of their irrigable zone on the right bank of the aforementioned river, independent from the exploitation of uncontrolled waters from the "La Angostura" dam.

The rights over the said waters that are granted to the Yaqui authorises their centres of population to make use of the waters that correspond to them as long as the territories of their property that are being opened up to cultivation require it.

THIRD. - The agrarian department will appoint the staff in charge of carrying out the definition and demarcation contracted within the previous point, whose work will be managed by commissioners of the Tribe.

FOURTH. - The Secretariat of Agriculture and Promotion will also commission staff who, jointly with those appointed by the Agrarian Department, will carry out the work of definition and demarcation and will ensure fulfilment of the agreements and presidential dispositions pronounced in favour of the Yaqui Tribe, entrusted to this Secretariat.

FIFTH. - This present resolution serves as definitive titling in favour of the centres of population of the Yaqui Tribe, over the lands specified in point ONE of this decree.

Torreón, Coahuila, thirtieth September 1940.

Constitutional President of the United States of Mexico.
Lázaro Cárdenas.

Head of the Agrarian Department
Gabino Vázquez.

JUCHITÁN: A FREE AND AUTONOMOUS MUNICIPALITY

Leopoldo de Gyves

The history of the peoples of the Isthmus region of the State of Oaxaca is characterised by many episodes of rebellion and resistance against external powers, a rebelliousness that bears testimony to the strength of their desire for autonomy. This resistance stretches back to times prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. It was demonstrated through sensational and significant rebellions against the colonial power. This resistance continued throughout the 19th century in the historic struggle against the dispossession of their natural resources by the State government. The Isthmus region of Oaxaca maintained its tradition of struggle into the first years of this century, with the resistance movement led by Jose F. Gómez against the imposition of the political leadership in Juchitán in 1911.

The resistance of the peoples of the Isthmus has been constant and has extended to this present day, through the struggle of its people to gain the full implementation of a federalism that is based on complete respect for the local powers of the people, as expressed through municipal autonomy. The 1968 to 1971 civic-political struggles, aimed at establishing respect for the popular will and which were frustrated and quashed by the Federal Army and the government, combined with the people's ongoing struggle to obtain control over local power in the municipalities of the Isthmus since the Seventies, are contemporary expressions of the historic resistance of the peoples of the Isthmus. The aim of this essay is to systematise the most contemporary stage of resistance of the people of Juchitán in their efforts to obtain respect for their desire to choose and appoint their own government.

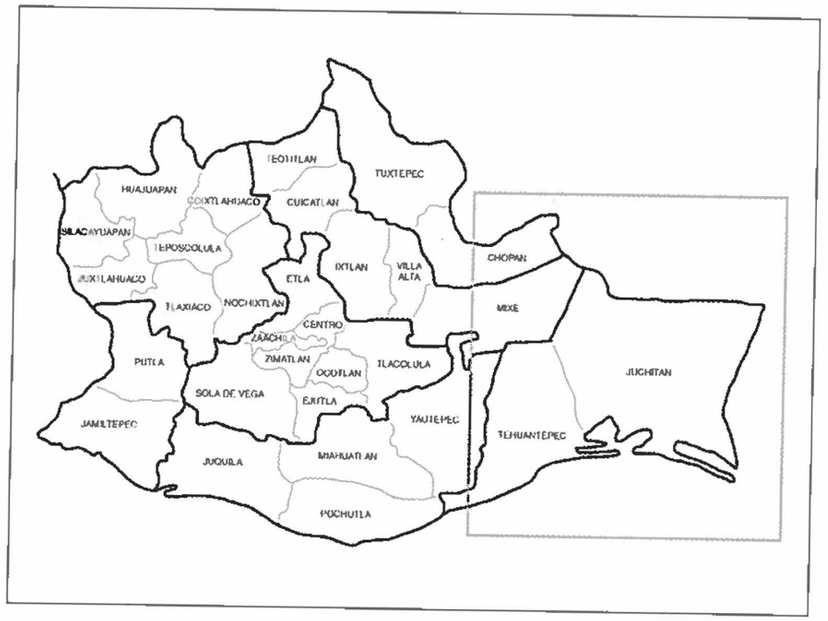
The emergence and construction of COCEI

In 1974, the Student Peasant Worker Coalition of the Isthmus (COCEI) emerged in the municipality of Juchitán, Oaxaca. Their numbers were initially made up of indigenous Zapotec farmers and bolstered by certain sectors of Juchitán society who were not in agreement with the

government. From the beginning, COCEI was ideologically and politically linked to the theories of the democratic emergence and popular defence movements whose purpose was that of organising the discontented population. This activity was key in the process of consolidation.

Although the most widespread part of the struggle promoted by COCEI emphasised the demand for transparent electoral processes in the municipalities of the Isthmus region, COCEI's fight did not, however, end there. In fact, COCEI's social base was made up of diverse components and throughout the course of its life it has grown by diversifying and incorporating new sectors. Initially, in 1974, COCEI was born as part of the peasant struggle for recovery of their lands; the Juchitán workers were also involved - they carried out numerous strikes and union fights for wage improvements – as did the student and popular movement, this latter made up of fisherpeople and craftsmen and women. The sum of all these actors was the essential substance from which the popular movement arose and around which the organisation and struggle of the peoples of the region, and concretely that of the people of Juchitán, was being constructed. All these processes were taking place in an organised manner, until they formed what we called a popular power, real and parallel to the official one. In short, a political force whose backbone in Juchitán - and in the Isthmus region in general - was, and continues to be (although not to such an extent), the Zapotec peasant farmer, whose fight has been linked to the indigenous, peasant and popular resistance movement since the 1970s and 80s. A fight that has bequeathed us a moral and political contribution, laying the foundations of this political achievement by its example of dignity and rebellion in times of scepticism and, above all, in electoral processes and in its opposition to the political intolerance which has been evident since the Sixties and Seventies.

Because of its eminently popular nature, COCEI quickly became the expression of resistance of a popular struggle with deep cultural roots, fed from within the Zapotec people. Defence of the customs and traditions of Zapotec culture were the battle cries of this fight. In this phase, the organisational process became the main instrument through which the Coalition was able to demand the exercise of culture as a focus of political organisation amongst the Zapotec population. This cultural slant was linked to the organisation of the people into Section Committees, which is the basic unit of family organisation, of kinship and of union organisation in the urban settlement of Juchitán. The success of COCEI in its first phase was centred around the success of linking culture and politics as the main aspects with which to construct its fight



Map of the Isthmus of Oaxaca, showing the location of COCEI's area of influence

for emancipation from the imposition of governments foreign to the popular will of the people of Juchitán.

I would like to emphasise the importance of the role of women in this process. The strength and power the women of Juchitán have in the life of the community and the people as a whole is common knowledge. The presence of women is so strong and so powerful that we men, when talking of our emancipatory achievements, frequently joke that, "the first people we have to free ourselves from are our women". And this has a great deal to do with the role they play in the family economy, adding value to virtually all the products which the men contribute. For example, the main farming activity is maize production but it is the women who are in charge of processing it, removing its grain, making totopo (fried tortilla) and guetapiquí (a variation on tamales), amongst other things, and they are the ones in charge of marketing the processed product. Income is thus controlled by the women.

It is the same with the fishermen: the man goes away to sea, he is the one that fishes but afterwards, it is the woman who prepares the

shellfish and fish and takes them to market, thus adding value to them. Through the marketing of these products, she controls the family income and this gives her greater independence in comparison with the role of women in families working in the cities, the urban areas, the state capitals or the centre of the country, where there is great industrial development. In the case of Juchitán, we are talking of a small city, with some urban development, mainly populated by indigenous Juchitec farmers and peasant families. And so the women, because they have a high place in the family economy, have greater independence, greater decision-making power within their households and in the marketing centres, both local and regional but also national, where the presence of women is considerable.

As an example, the *vayunqueras* can be mentioned. These are women with a strong commercial vocation who traverse the whole zone of the Isthmus of Oaxaca, Veracruz and Chiapas, and even the route towards Mexico City, marketing their products. This commercial activity gives the women great independence, which is obviously reflected in their great political participation, as they are always at the head of the movements of resistance and popular struggle and are distinguished by their radicalism and resistance in the achievement of popular conquests.

Thus the farmers, together with the craftsmen, workers, fishermen and women, found in COCEI an instrument for responding to their demands and felt needs. Culture and a solution to the concrete demands of the people were the elements around which the daily fight was organised in the construction of COCEI's popular power. These served as a basis for the political action it was undertaking in order to gain political space and boosted its immediate integration into electoral participation.

From that initial social basis, made up of the working and exploited classes, political support was given to the Popular City Council of Juchitán and its commitment and its programme of government were thus inspired. We learned of our own history and struggle and that freedom is gained, first and foremost, and in spite of everything, by exercising that freedom.

The fight for democracy and for local power

The alliance established between the Mexican Communist Party and the Student Peasant Worker Coalition of the Isthmus in 1980 was translated into an electoral triumph. The conquest of the municipality of Juchitán and the access to power on the part of COCEI members

in 1981 must be understood as the result of an organisational process which, during the Seventies, bloomed amongst the people of Juchitán.

In 1981 the triumph was overwhelming, gaining the town and consolidating a popular will that acceded to power. COCEI's experience in power was in fact the restoration of a government of indigenous extraction. COCEI's Popular City Council had the aim of seeking out and rescuing Zapotec culture, reclaiming the ethno-cultural and demanding urban development with autonomy, which would enable them to have a political presence in the region and, through this, to gain national and international recognition.

But the rights we gained through the ballot box were abused and COCEI was exiled from government: only strength of will and perseverance enabled us to gain power again. It was in 1989 when we governed once more; the progress of our organisation began to have greater impact, our triumphs could be observed in other municipalities of the Isthmus region and our representation in other spaces of power could also be noted.

Both the federal and state governments saw several dangers in the Popular City Council, which represented a negative precedent that led the PRI to lose other town councils in the region in subsequent municipal elections, including political repercussions in the state of Oaxaca and the whole country. There was also a fear that COCEI would gain strength, by means of regional expansion, damaging the PRI's political control and, according to the then Secretary of the Interior, the government's concern - more supposed than real - was that a state within a state might be created in Juchitán. Consequently, a plan of attack was designed at the highest levels of government which - from the first day of exercising power - was put into practice, with the officers of court firing on the Municipal Palace, and a conspiracy was orchestrated that included: pressure on the part of the Oaxaca government to subordinate the City Council to its policies and decisions, accompanied by their expropriating the very functions of the City Council, thus violating municipal autonomy. They stifled us economically and incessantly provoked us, under the watchful eye of the state and federal officers of court. There was the inconvenient presence of the federal army in the Palace and murders, even of aldermen.

All this repressive activity was accompanied by a well-orchestrated smear campaign in the newspapers, on radio and on television, aimed at creating an image of political instability in the municipality among

the general public, along with the existence of a City Council supposedly linked to the Nicaraguan and Guatemalan guerrillas.

It was no surprise to us that the government saw the supposed threat of indigenous separatism in the Chiapas Indians' proposals for regional autonomy. It was in this way that the Popular City Council was thus condemned to the separation of municipal powers. Faced with these adverse conditions, we initiated our first activities. We drew up a City Council of popular composition, whose members were appointed in meetings of selection committees made up largely of peasant farmers. These committees were the Juchitán equivalent of the district committees, which are similar to the independent local Councils that have been formed in the indigenous communities of the Chiapas region. From the base of the City Council, we intended to fight the privileges of the PRI politicians and ex-municipal authorities, who had taken over the municipal buildings, premises and lands, so that we could make better public use of them.

Faced with a lack of financial resources, we decided that both municipal employees and civil servants would receive the minimum wage, including the municipal President. The works which were carried out were done using the voluntary labour of the people of Juchitán through *tequio* (mutual support) and, at the same time, the City Council led mobilisations to demand increases in federal and municipal contributions as well as resources for the work accomplished. Examples of this were the councillors' hunger strike in Juchitán and the last march to the Oaxacan capital, held in 1983.

Through such actions, we forced the government into negotiating support for the municipality. However, it must be emphasised that external resources were not the most important. Most important was the voluntary work - *tequio* - of our countrymen: this was what made possible the fixing of the streets, the introduction of drinking water, the construction of health clinics in the municipal offices and the redesigning of the ruined municipal palace - then one hundred years old. We formed popular patrols, organised by the section committees, in charge of keeping watch; two popular literacy campaigns were carried out in the shanty towns and, in coordination with the Independent University of Guerrero, we founded the preparatory school and the Popular Teacher Training College of the Isthmus, from where a group of teachers from Chiapas graduated. At this time there was an explosion of literary, pictorial and musical creativity, under the auspices of the Juchitán House of Culture and in coordination with the City Council, and it was in 1983 that we set up the Popular City Council Radio, which

broadcast from the municipal palace in the Spanish and Zapotec languages, without permission from the Secretary of Communications and Transport, which had been firmly denied us.

Each one of our initiatives in power was consolidated with the people's participation. This caused a deep desperation in the government since they were worried that popular power was being consolidated. In despair, the federal government, in collusion with the state government, imposed a permanent blockade against our actions. Defeated, the government was uncovered and had to act in a direct manner, proceeding to remove recognition of the City Council. This repudiation of the Popular City Council of Juchitán occurred on 3rd August 1983. Three days previously, whilst bringing a campaign to a close, PRI supporters in Juchitán had fired upon a popular COCEI gathering, leaving two dead.

The state government called the local Chamber of Deputies to an extraordinary session in which, in disregard for all procedure, all their municipal powers were removed. This was an attack on the people of Juchitán and on municipal sovereignty itself. In response, COCEI held a referendum on 6th August, in which 30 thousand people from Juchitán responded and which was presided over by recognised intellectual and democratic progressives of the country. This referendum bore witness to the decision of the people of Juchitán to maintain the City Council. The next four months were the most heroic, since municipal activity continued exclusively at the expense of the people of Juchitán, whilst provocations on the part of the PRI and governmental pressure became worse.

In the early hours of 13th December 1983, an evacuation of the municipal palace was carried out. Hundreds of uniformed police, the federal officers of court and the army took the palace by violence and jailed two hundred and fifty men, women and children. Two hours later, at five in the morning, with sticks and stones, thousands of men and women faced the bullets and tear gas that flooded several blocks of the city centre with smoke. Faced with the imminent recovery of the municipal palace by popular force, over the next few days units of the federal army from Oaxaca and Veracruz arrived in Juchitán and, with bayonets, broke up the barricades which the people of Juchitán had set up around the city centre. At that time, the number of prisoners increased to four hundred, whilst the government ordered the suspension of school activities and once more established a state of military siege in Juchitán.

Eleven years on, the Juchitec people returned to government a third time, and unlike before, municipal autonomy was respected within the

limitations of the law. Financial resources for works have flowed in like never before. This does not mean that the present regime has changed its policy substantially. The change in treatment is due largely to a correlation of forces markedly favourable to COCEI. Thus, the carrying out of works of public benefit - proof of the efficiency and progress of a government - are possible only when the organs of power are in the hands of the people.

One of the multiple lessons that the experience of non-recognition of the City Council taught us is the certainty that there is a continuing national need to make deep democratic reforms which, amongst other things, will guarantee respect for municipal autonomy, as well as reforms to article 115 of the Constitution. This is because whilst, on the one hand, very limited authority is granted to the city councils, on the other, excessive powers are given to the Chamber of Deputies, which are damaging to the former.

Eleven years on, we too have consolidated. We are now a regional government, governing six municipalities of the region but, above all, we are today a broad popular movement in which indigenous communities - Zapotec, Huave, Mixe, Zoque and Chontal - have together built unity with other popular sectors and we are fighting to solve our problems, as a concrete way in which to maintain resistance in the face of ever more powerful threats which are trying to extinguish our cultures.

Women and autonomy in COCEI

In COCEI, we believe that the fight includes everyone, men and women; indeed, this is how it has been from the beginning. In the concrete case of Juchitán, women participate very actively in the economy and in politics: this has always been so, it is a fact of history, not something new, and not something which COCEI has thought up. There are examples in history, such as the battle of 1866 against the French, which was virtually led by Juchitec women. It is not the same in the mountain communities, where there is greater marginalisation of indigenous communities and also of women. It can be seen, for example, in the Chontal zone, that men attend the assemblies whilst the women's only responsibility is to prepare the food for those attending, perhaps standing at the back and listening with much respect to the men's interventions. This is observed mainly in the communities located in the mountain range, where the highest marginalisation exists, because we Juchitec are not marginalised peoples.

COCEI has promoted the organisation of women with two aims: one essentially political, that is, to endorse our struggles, be they agrarian, labour or electoral, and the other to obtain resources and to promote production projects. At the moment, organised groups of women exist: there are the *totoperas*, craftswomen who embroider *huipils* (tunics) and skirts; fisherwomen; and those that sell jewellery. There exist very stable women's organisations based around concrete production projects and, naturally, a political base. The idea was to organise such groups as a sector on the basis of a very concrete necessity of an economic nature and, in this respect, I believe that we are promoting a kind of autonomy, although I do not consider the term to be the most appropriate. We are trying to organise women so that they have a space for decision-making within the movement as a whole, within the general framework and where they can decide not only on production issues but also on policies.

This is the issue at hand. Women have greater possibilities for participation if they are organised as a sector. They participate politically in the struggles which are occurring, in the economic and productive aspect, but we see that in no City Council of the Isthmus region, including those of COCEI, is there an alderwoman; sometimes they occupy secondary positions, but they have no significant representation. Up until now, the political task of governing has been the responsibility of men but it is clear that the political hegemony of women has much to do with directing the fight and resistance. This aspect of increasing women's representation in government is a subject around which there is still a great deal of work to be done. Women play a decisive role in the fight for construction of autonomy in the community and the region.

The life of COCEI is undertaken with the participation of professionals whose background is in the area of the humanities. Concretely, one of the main founder leaders of COCEI is a sociologist but the process does not take place as a phenomenon of "consultancy" towards a popular movement or organisation. In COCEI, the figure of "advisers" does not exist, we do not agree with such people. All those within the organisation, professionals or not, act as and are Juchitec people who, having been able to study at university and have a profession, a political conscience and preparation, return to the community and carry out the task of organising and advising on issues of political management.

It has always been like this, we do not form teams of professionals who offer support in the form of advice; this is not how it is. They are

the children of indigenous people who, having gained a profession, reincorporate into the community, are sensitive to and understand the problems. They become involved in the political task and become leaders of the organisation. This is the process. The cultural movement of COCEI has trained its leaders - it has been a necessity of the Juchitán culture - so that they return and lead the movement. It has not been an explicit or calculated thing, but a process which has occurred very naturally; the children of the people of Juchitán return and they integrate into or they create the movement; they give continuity to it, as a team that works closely together and directly incorporates into the community and promotes its political development. This is why the vision of autonomy that COCEI has promoted has a viewpoint which is far remote from that of "advisers".

I consider that, as a popular movement, the organisation is primarily made up of working and lower classes but that everyone can fit within the proposal for autonomy; that is, we imagine that a proposal for autonomy includes, in addition to the Indians and non-Indians, workers and industrialists. The autonomy that we are conceiving must be really inclusive and plural and within the organisation, the working classes, ethnic groups, indigenous groups and communities as a whole must participate. COCEI is geographically based in Juchitán and throughout the whole Isthmus region and it currently has a presence in other regions of Oaxaca such as the coast, the Mixteca, and as far as the Isthmus, coastal and Soconusco regions of Chiapas. COCEI has a presence and political force in the Chiapas municipalities of Tapachula and Frontera Hidalgo. There has been a political expansion of the organisation and its common denominator has always been the organisation of the communities, the farmers and the workers; in other words, COCEI has the capacity to organise different plural autonomous regions.

Nevertheless, we are not looking to create a regional autonomy in which the great industrialists and businessmen are the ones who set the standards for that autonomy, on the contrary, we think that organised, humble and exploited sectors should direct the development of the autonomous region. Although we do not have a very clear specific development project, one does however exist. It has been constructed alongside the progress of the organisation itself. It has to continue to take shape and we believe that we have now arrived at a time when it will be necessary to sit down and discuss the elaboration of that development project.

What we are clear about is that it will not be possible to continue forcing responses to the very particular demands raised by each community. We feel that the dominant culture, from its power base, subjugates the communities, despite attempts to strengthen community power, in other words, it stifles it. But one way of being able to boost the power of each community is by building a regional unity that will enable dialogue on an equal basis with the government. Not with a government that comes and imposes its projects on us but one which will first present its project and then hand it over for consideration by a regional authority of the organised communities so that we can see to what extent the project serves our interests, and in any case, to have our own alternative project. This is the point.

Evolutionary process of COCEI

The COCEI movement is used to political repression. From the beginning we were the objects of kidnappings, murders, violations, harassment and imprisonment. But flying the flag of freedom, justice and democracy, and even covered with the blood of our own brothers, our fight did not stop. To gain power for the people in order to defend our rights, our culture and our customs became our motto.

COCEI understands the importance of being in government and of the commitment that this requires. It is for this reason that its political fight has never left the demand for Zapotec culture and customs to one side; it must be clarified that the very identity of the members of COCEI is maintained by demonstrating their customs and roots in such a way, even if this becomes the vital reason as to why they are trying to govern.

From our point of view, freedom and autonomy are exercised at the level of local government, they are implemented via actions. When I was called upon to head, for the first time, the presidency of Juchitán (1981-1983), the characteristics of the COCEI popular movement were very different from those of today. At that time, there was a basic element representing the backbone of the popular movement in Juchitán: the indigenous peasant farmers. They were the main social force in this great process. It was through this force that we governed at that time, a force which arose from the fight for land and its recovery. We achieved the direct recovery of the communal land that had been occupied.

Today things have changed. Later city councils, from 1989 to 1992 and the current one from 1992 to 1995, have had other characteristics. It is no longer a City Council in which the aldermen are appointed only by the section committees, who are fundamentally peasant farmers. Now there are people from the middle classes, not necessarily indig-

enous or farmers, but closely identified with our culture, even outsiders amongst the group of councillors.

The profile of the movement has become wider and more plural. It is, however, a movement that responds to its own identity and which puts itself forward as a synthesis of the indigenous struggle of our ancestors. It also jealously guards its organisational autonomy. We consider that a movement cannot be subject to a partisan position or status; on the contrary, it must, aside from this, provide the best understanding and development that overall benefits both sides. In the case of COCEI, alliances with political parties in search of power, throughout its experience in government, have enabled it this freedom of action and struggle.

It is thus that, over the last the nine years, preservation of this power has grown, its freedom of action and its transparent commitment to society as a whole has enabled it to incorporate other sectors of society in such a way that they recognise the Student Peasant Worker Coalition of the Isthmus as an organisation capable of orchestrating sustainable and harmonious development policies.

This means that COCEI, with its political task and from the municipal City Council, has been able to attract other sectors not native properly speaking, but who could be called foreign. Juchitán is, to a certain degree, cosmopolitan even though it is a small city, and people from all over the country live there, due to the presence of numerous federal government offices and the proximity of an oil refinery in Salina Cruz. These factors have considerably increased the population, mainly floating population and people who have settled, who live in the place, and this gives it another urban and social shape. For this reason, given the incapacity of the previous PRI City Councils to respond to the demands for service and attention of these sectors because they brought in other cultures and other habits accustomed to other types of services, on settling in Juchitán they found in COCEI a movement of indigenous and peasant farmer origin with which they could coexist and be a part of. In its struggle for services, COCEI even became an alternative for them, an option to support and promote the continuation of this City Council.

Within this context an ethnic movement - I am not confident of naming it thus - was occurring, not only of Juchitec people, but much wider, and includning other social sectors. We are currently constructing an autonomy that includes not only indigenous Zapotec, or rather Juchitec, but also the non-indigenous. This is the autonomy we are trying to construct in Juchitán.

COCEI's fight is also pluricultural. Its area of influence covers an extensive region in which there exist diverse peoples speaking different indigenous languages. COCEI has come to constitute a force which, although it does not include all five ethnic groups that make up this region, does have communities from all groups involved in this popular movement. In COCEI there are Zoque from San Miguel Chimalapas, from its communities and in its municipal offices, there are Chontal from the coast and the high part of the Chontal zone, Zapotec from the mountain range and the Isthmus, as we call those of the plain; there are also Mixe and Huave from San Francisco del Mar and from San Dionisio del Mar. Meaning that the regional movement is promoting a process of autonomy from within its own communities but it is also aiming at a wider proposal for regional autonomy with these indigenous communities as its social base. This is where the base is.

We make up a wide movement which wants to establish autonomy from within the communities. This cannot be something imposed on the communities but built on the basis of organisational work, in order to harness the real power of each community; this is the basis on which regional autonomy will be formed. We believe that we are achieving this, in the Isthmus region at least. We are proposing a reflection on this process with its starting point basically in the awareness which the indigenous struggle gives us and which the struggle of the Zapatista army and all the Chiapas struggles represent, naturally. In COCEI we are aware of what we represent in the region and the government accepts that it is facing a new correlation of forces in the Isthmus. Consequently, we must propose a political structure and development project for the region and, at the same time, the government will necessarily have to deal with the existing organisations, in order to be able to implement its programmes.

Nevertheless, COCEI is neither alone nor isolated in this regional struggle because other forces exist that are developing work of a similar nature, for example, the Union of Communities of the Isthmus Region (UCIRI) in the Zapotec mountain range and the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Zone of the Isthmus (UCIZONI) in the Mixe zone. The pluriethnicity of COCEI is not only made up of the indigenous movement; there also coexist other sectors, such as in Salina Cruz, for example, where the workers do not necessarily belong to the ethnic groups of the Isthmus region but come from other federal areas of the country, such as Morelos and Veracruz. In places such as Tehuantepec or Salina Cruz, where we have a significant social contingent, we are no longer speaking of indigenous communities but of other social sectors, which we can call non-indigenous, and with them

we are forming a movement on the basis of the struggles for their demands.

Clearly, the phenomenon of labour struggles has been a part of COCEI from the beginning and, indeed, it considers itself a class-based organisation. This is the reason for its name, this is why we call ourselves the "Student Peasant Worker Coalition of the Isthmus" and since the beginning we have had a political commitment with the marginalised working and exploited social sectors. But the problem is at another level because a moment has arrived in COCEI's own development when we face a new problem.

For example, we have seen that, because of its diverse composition, bosses may now coexist alongside their workers in the rank and file of COCEI; but who are the bosses? In this case they are the small cattle ranchers, small farmers, workshop, shop and business owners, those who are affected by economic policies and the government, by tax policies and so on, all reasons why COCEI has now become a multi-class organisation. This is why it can act as a political party - obviously in alliance with the PRD, which is the registered party - and win elections in numerous municipalities of the area. In this way COCEI has been shaping itself as a new social force, with the inclusion of new social elements. This is the organisation as it is now. In other words, the cap has become too small because now it no longer involves only the workers, farmers and students but also craftsmen, fishermen, teachers, the unemployed, traders, artists, all types of professionals, government employees and small industrialists. To state otherwise is to deny the reality, the development of the movement has enabled this integration and this is possible because the culture of the Isthmus is permeable; it accepts and understands the importance of integrating other social sectors. Contradictions may well exist with these sectors but priority is given to forming a broader cultural and political movement.

We cannot thus define COCEI as an ethnic movement because it is not exactly this. Juchitec exist that no longer speak Zapotec. This is a characteristic of this region: the influence of the other culture. It is very different from that of, for example, the communities located in the mountains, in the state of Oaxaca, where there is - let us say - greater purity, but this is within the community. In the case of Juchitán and the Isthmus this is not the only way it works. Communities with a great ethnic purity exist, not with regard to race but with regard to all the components of what can be considered the cultural identity of an indigenous community; in COCEI it is much broader since there are sectors of workers, farmers, craftsmen, et cetera, it is much more plural.

I am talking of a popular movement that has as its main base the indigenous communities and whose fundamental struggle is one of cultural resistance in order to avoid its cultural annihilation.

We are now aware not only of our weaknesses but also of our strengths. We are beginning to consider more clearly the need for a regional development distinct from that which the government has been imposing on us. We want to participate in decisions and handle our development autonomously. From the heart of the mother country, our people are beginning to demand a new relationship between the regions and the national State and, if we are now able to build unity within our communities, we will gain it and we will gain respect from the other sectors of the country that are also demanding democratic change. Only then, fully mobilised, will we force the regime to sit down and give account to the nation and only then will we turn history around.

In summary, a fundamental task of COCEI members was that the organisation should not only be for the benefit of our region but one which collaborates with organisations of other peoples from other municipalities, other regions of the state, in order to construct a popular power and form a government. A great number of peoples, and a good part of our Oaxaca brothers, are now organised, are now already in government, deciding what they want and no longer allowing the government to come and impose its governors on them. Part of our task has been fulfilled but there is still a lot to do: this is why our fight continues. Our main concern now is to achieve deep reforms of the State which will make federalism a reality. Let us do this from a local power base, from the strengthening of local governments in order to contribute to the national democratic struggle.

The challenges for the new millennium

In 1998, the Student Peasant Worker Coalition of the Isthmus celebrated 25 years of struggle, of demand for the exercise of our culture, our customs, our Zapotec language. In all this time, organising has been essential; by making the organisation known to our brothers, we have also become aware of the importance of indigenous rights. We know that, in our state, 70% of the total population is indigenous and for that reason, right now, we are in dispute, within the PRD as state government and as majority in the Local Congress. We are fighting to give power to each one of our indigenous peoples and each one of our languages in the state of Oaxaca, to safeguard our culture, that is, the

ethno-cultural mosaic that represents our Oaxaca; a sovereign government which truly respects the rights of the Indian peoples from a different perspective, in order to promote a more balanced economic and social development.

Integrated into the Party of the Democratic Revolution for the last nine years, COCEI has gained political spaces which have enabled it to form the government in several municipalities of the Isthmus region, constructing a local autonomous power of a regional nature. During this time, we have also achieved - in a sustained manner for almost a decade - representation in the local Congress, the House of Representatives and, in recent years, in the Senate. Plus a Juchitec, and member of COCEI, in the 1998 elections contested the government of that body, managing to significantly increase the PRD's percentage of the vote to the point of almost obtaining the same number of votes as the PRI opponent.

COCEI's strength enables us to attain great autonomy. We are an organisation linked to the PRD in the political-electoral fight. Integrated into the rank and file of PRD members individually, COCEI remains intact within the interior of the party without risk of dissolution or corporativism. The conflictive "harmony" between the PRD and COCEI is a sign of the internal relationships between their members. Something characteristic of the Coalition is its political identity, which is an example for so many other organisations coexisting within the party of the Aztec sun.

The experience of governing has enabled us to combine our efforts and experiences within an Association of Municipal Authorities, both within the party system as in traditional municipalities. The exchange of our experiences has led us to maintain a relationship of open coexistence with which to construct a political force, with greater capacity for dialogue with the state and federal powers. This is a subject of great importance for COCEI, which it wants to contribute towards strengthening over the coming years.

In January 1999, I once again assumed the municipal presidency, with which COCEI formed a government on a third occasion. It is evident that many of the challenges being put to me and which, as COCEI members, we considered in 1981, are now in many ways outdated. Our movement has been successful and has had conquests. We do not want to dwell on the past. Our strength is in the conquest of new rights and new liberties. We are engaged in the fight for a democratic Mexico with a true federal system and strengthened local powers. This

is what is on COCEI's agenda, and with which we are preparing for the new challenges of the millennium to come.

We believe that the first thing is to make it clear that we want no more impositions but to attempt a project of our own, because if we do not have autonomy in the area of political practice, we may suffer from a serious deficiency. We must therefore formulate these projects on the basis of the needs of all the communities, although obviously it is not only the sum of needs because it is not a list of demands. It is a question of carrying out a complete regional analysis in order to be able to formulate them. We do not yet have this and it is a task the organisation needs to carry out.

Faced with the advance of neoliberal projects and free market relations, COCEI members understand the importance of economic development but this does not imply that we neglect our main objective: the demand for the exercise of our culture. Wanting to distort the wealth of Oaxaca, its culture, is an attack on our roots, our past, our patrimony, our way of life. This must be safeguarded and any attempt to establish a project will have to coexist with it; it must not fracture it but strengthen it. At a time when the policy of interference on the part of the powerful countries continues to attempt to impose its law on the underdeveloped nations of the world, the unity of the indigenous peoples of each country and Latin America as a whole will be a bastion against these interests.

To recognise then that the unity, the organisation, of indigenous peoples is an important task, to recognise that to accede to spaces of power is vital, is to have journeyed a good part of the route. But to be in government, to know how to govern and to uphold transparent and capable administrations is another conquest of great importance. I firmly believe that to defend our rights and our freedoms, organisation is necessary and that this is the key to the exercise and defence of the right to autonomy and for the defence of our peoples.

ALTO BALSAS, GUERRERO: AN EXPERIENCE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTONOMY

Marcelino Díaz de Jesús
Pedro de Jesús Alejandro

At the end of the 20th century, a sign of our times seems to be the emergence of the unexpected and the sensation that something has to happen in this country, something unanticipated and perhaps unimaginable, something which shakes its foundations. For the route of poverty, of political decomposition, the exhaustion of official speeches and of the parliamentary opposition, as well as of the increasing violence of the various demonstrations which the country has been experiencing, seems to have no viable, foreseeable solution and seems to go beyond the imagination, escaping any manipulable control. The sweeping and overpowering triumph of neoliberalism, and its consequent economic devastation, have triumphed over the old alternatives doctrines offered by the Left and has left them with a subordinate discourse which is only raised in the electoral fight and which enables the State to incorporate appendices and to attempt reforms in its obsolescence. But nowadays people want much more than this.

It was in this context that the unexpected happened in Chiapas, the night prior to the day of entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), in the form of an indigenous armed rebellion. It emerged as a symbol of the inevitability of change; it was accompanied by a new, guiding and far-sighted message, but one incomprehensible to those following the old ways and who were striving to journey along the old paths, passing via the exercise of power. But Chiapas is not all of Mexico. Or rather, whilst not all of Mexico was being shaken like Chiapas, from its regional veins the unimaginable would, nevertheless, also emerge. In each region, this would occur in its own way, with its own style and pace, a product of its time and place of emergence.

And in Guerrero the unexpected also happened in several ways. The existing but ignored indigenous movement took on a new form and became unified around the construction of a dam and an unacceptable celebration when, after 500 years, the system wanted the

Indians to swallow the motto of "An Encounter of Two Worlds". Neither marginal poverty nor discrimination had given rise to the mobilisation that these attempts at ridicule caused and which contributed, moreover, to creating the conditions for the arrival of the hour of the Indian peoples; the hour for raising their demands and the unification of the Nahua, Mixtec, Tlapanec and Amuzgo grouped together in the Guerrero 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Council.

This situation enabled the irruption of one of the new actors which unexpectedly emerged in the face of the threat of involuntary immolation, which in the name of the country's "development" was going to sacrifice a part of the Nahua people of Alto Balsas, who were going to be submerged under the waters of the dam. This was when the unexpected happened. The movement of resistance against the construction of the hydroelectric dam was also a struggle to reject "progress", that neoliberal modernity which wanted to destroy the Nahua peoples with the wheel of its history. But the unexpected happened and "modernity" came up against the tenacious resistance of that age-old people and its determination to write its own history, not that of the past but that of the future.

The San Juan Tetelcingo hydroelectric dam: resistance and identity

The first signs of the resistance of the Nahua peoples of Alto Balsas arose as a natural reaction in face of the threat of extinction. One day, some white crosses began to appear in the hills which the Balsas River in Guerrero flows from. It was the symbol of the cross, a black omen announcing devastation and extermination. Without the knowledge of the people, and resorting to their old authoritarian practices, the government of Mexico - the highest echelons of governmental power - had decided, in secret, to flood an extensive territory of the Nahua peoples of Alto Balsas. The white crosses painted on stones in the hills indicated the level of the dam. Perplexed, we did not know what to do. On the one hand it seemed that these great crosses brought bad omens in their wake, that they were the preamble to 1992. There had been rumours about the construction of the dam, but now it seemed imminent. Something special shocked our conscience. One of these crosses was painted very near to the ceremonial centre of Teopantecuanitlán, and this was interpreted as a decisive sign that our ancient ceremonial temples would be covered by the waters of the reservoir, which it was assumed would be formed by the San Juan Tetelcingo dam.

The uncertainty began to seize all of us. There was no organisation of an indigenous nature in the region, nor was there any organisational experience that would enable the riverine peoples of the Balsas to unite in some form of resistance. The main problem was the uncertainty and lack of information, nobody really knew what was going on, or what the future held, but once we had found out the resistance began.

Within the previous framework of the preparations for the festival of the 5th Centenary of the "Discovery of America" or of the "Encounter of Two Worlds" - and ironically, the end of the Nahua culture, something which 500 years ago not even the Spanish invaders themselves could do - in August 1990, the Congress of the State of Guerrero obtained news regarding the construction of the dam by the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE). A newspaper, the Diario de Guerrero published brief information on 19th August, without making much of it. It recounted that this institution had been working since 1989 (digging tunnels and making openings around the place where they had chosen to construct the barrier) without informing the people who would be affected by the reservoir caused by the dam. Everything was done in secret, ignoring our rights.

The San Juan Tetelcingo Hydroelectric Dam (PHSJT) was considered a project which would form part of a great system of seven dams to be established along the Balsas River, three of which had already been constructed some years back - the Villita, Infiernillo and the Caracol - with harmful consequences for the population. People knew of the dispossession and losses that dams left in their wake and were very scared and worried about the threats of the symbols of the white crosses.

On the basis of this newspaper article, the population of Alto Balsas came to know that they were on the verge of beginning the construction of the San Juan Tetelcingo Hydroelectric Dam and began to look for more information on the matter. This was the starting point for the indigenous people's concern and so they began a series of mobilisations of resistance against the hydroelectric dam. Little by little, we got to know more details. More precise information on the dam project came to us in a circumstantial way or through the solidarity of some anthropologists who knew about the matter.

According to the new regulations of the World Bank, who were financing this project, the Federal Electricity Commission had to carry out anthropological studies with the aim of complementing the technical file for the San Juan Tetelcingo Hydroelectric Dam. We were

Map showing the location of the Alto Balsas region and the area of influence of the San Juan Tetelcingo dam

infuriated by the fact that the CFE consulted the "Indian specialists", on the "appropriateness" of constructing this dam but never thought to consult us, the people. It was some of these anthropologists who alerted us to the details of the hydroelectric project. We believe that the CFE committed an error in initiating the construction of the dam without taking into account the circumstances of 1992. We believe that if the news had been made known some time after this historical conjuncture, the response might perhaps have been a different one, thus preventing the commencement of a whole struggle for the defence of our ancestral territories which, in the preamble to 1992, bore fruit on fertile ground.

Although the specific objective indicated by the CFE for implementation of this gigantic hydroelectric project was the generation of 609 megawatts (Mw) in order to provide "the people of Mexico" with electrical energy, we were later to find out that its main objective was to stop sediment which was increasingly being deposited along the bed of the Ramirez Ulloa Hydroelectric Dam (better known as the Caracol Dam), which had been in operation since 1986, constructed down river, and which was year by year leaving deposits. Accumulated deposits had reached a total of 25 million cubic metres, according to information provided by Ivan Restrepo, a prestigious Mexican ecologist.[1]

The Nahua peoples of Alto Balsas were horrified that they would have to pay the costs of the errors committed in constructing the Caracol Dam. We Nahua found it offensive to know that we were to be the victims who would pay the cost of bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency. We knew that the CFE was required to construct the PHSJT in order to correct the "error" of sediments from the Caracol dam which, twenty years after its construction, already had problems.

In Mexico, for a hydroelectric dam to be constructed, its high level of investment must be justified, a useful life of at least 50 years being guaranteed, and this one (the Caracol Dam) had not even reached half of its estimated life when it already began to show serious problems of deposit of sediments. In order to extend the life of the Caracol dam - constructed down river of Balsas - and in order to be able to move ahead with their policy of power generation on the basis of huge hydroelectric dams, the CFE decided to install further dams up river, beginning with San Juan Tetelcingo, which would flood the community of Xalitla - place of origin of the authors of this article - along with dozens of other communities. It would then continue with the Oztutla dam, affecting the municipality of Copalillo, among others. Thus, from

their offices, the CFE planned their dams, with no concern whatsoever for everything the Nahua peoples of Alto Balsas would lose.

At the bottom of the deep blue, or a balance sheet of the losses

The losses we would suffer were huge. Our houses would be flooded under the water, houses built with so much sacrifice, often taking more than a generation to complete, and with the sacrifice of our people, many of whom had to emigrate for many years to places far from the lands they were born on, for example, some went as far as the United States, risking life, family and property.

We would also lose the lands we cultivate, where we sow our maize, sesame, pumpkin, melon, watermelon, beans, mango, lemons, gourds, etc., and which have been a fundamental part of our economy, on which we depend to feed our families and our animals. Without our land we would lose everything that identifies us as Nahua of Alto Balsas; for without it there was no raison d'être for our culture or our life, which are based on respect for the land, for the benefits we receive from her, for which reason we love and care for her.

We would lose our burial grounds, the resting-places of our ancestors. For us, the place where our dead rest is not a place of forgetfulness but an important part of our culture. We hold our ancestors in deep respect for it is they who gave us life. If our towns were flooded and our burial grounds left under water, we would lose our beautiful customs that make us pay homage to our ancestors on 2nd November every year, a date we know as the "Day of the Dead" or "All Souls Day". On this date we celebrate our dead, preparing them their favourite food: nejo tamales wrapped up in maize leaves accompanied by turkey or chicken with green chilli sauce, different shapes and forms of bread of the dead, richly adorned and accompanied by chocolate, all made by ourselves. We would also give seasonal fruits as an offering to them and, in some cases, mescal or tequila, on altars adorned with zempazuchil flowers and green leaves of azuchil, chamol or mata rata, and with incense giving everything a pleasant aroma and a more mystical feel, one of deep respect to our dead.

This annual ritual keeps our ancestral roots and customs alive, along with a close relationship with our ancestors. If the PHSJT were constructed, this beautiful custom of ours would be lost and we would have to throw our offerings to our dead into the waters of the dam by boat, guessing where the flooded burial grounds were, and we would

have to pray on the banks of the great artificial lake, as we knew the Mazatec and Chinantec of Oaxaca currently had to do, whose territories were flooded by the Cerro de Oro and Miguel Alemán dams. We did not want this to happen to us.

We would lose our churches, which in spite of their having been an instrument of the Spaniards' domination of our peoples, today nobody questions. On the contrary, there exists a deep-rooted religious custom in our region, which maintains a whole calendar of annual traditional celebrations around these churches, intimately linked to our production in the fields and our social life.

We would lose our ceremonial centres, such as the places already known in our region where native traditions have mixed with our Catholic religious life, such as the places that are used to request good rains and harvests in the month of May (Tepebola, El Calvario, etc.). These paths have traditionally been used for communication for centuries by our peoples.

The raw materials with which to make our crafts would also be left under the water, such as the mud for pottery, the fine zompantli woods that are used for carving and making elaborate artisanal masks and other objects, as well as the other woods which are used for this activity such as aloe, silk-cotton (ceiba), cuajiote, etc., also the palm from which palm matting, hats, bags and other decorative pieces are made, and which we were even beginning to market at international level, some of them considered true works of art and an activity on which a large number of Nahua Indians subsist.

We would also lose the medicinal plants which abound in our region, and which are used to cure many diseases, according to the medicinal knowledge of our ancestors. Such is the case of *damiana* and mint for stomach aches, *chalalate* for healing the wounds of our animals and even those of people: the Paraca, Sávila, etc. In some cases our medicinal plants, applied according to the inherited wisdom of our ancestors, have cured diseases which doctors from the Universities themselves have not been able to cure, which is why, unable to explain such things, they simply call us "witch doctors" or "quacks".

All that inherited wealth of the ancient knowledge of the Nahua of Mexico would disappear under the water. All our knowledge and age-old pride in our people would be drowned, forgotten. We Nahua Peoples of Alto Balsas speak the Na'huatl language (Mexican) and are one of the founder peoples of the Mexican nation. At the moment in

Alto Balsas, Guerrero we inhabit 37 communities, with approximately 46,000 inhabitants, located along the banks of the Balsas River. These are located in 6 municipalities: Tepecoacuilco, Mártir de Cuilapan (Apango), Copalillo, Huitzuco, Eduardo Neri (Zumpango) and Atenango del Río, in the northern zone of the State of Guerrero, better known as the Region of Alto Balsas, Guerrero, Mexico.

Of the total population of Guerrero, the indigenous peoples speaking the four languages: Na'huatl, Tlapanec, Mixtec and Amuzgo, make up 15%, according to the 1980 Census of the Population, of which 47% are Nahua, 23% Mixtec, 19% Tlapanec and the remaining percentage is made up of the Amuzgo.

In its part better known as Alto Balsas, the Balsas River is made up largely of the river Tlapanec, which is made up of the tributaries that come down from the mountain and the Oaxaca Mixteca, to which the Amacuzac River also joins, fed from the drainage basin of the Xonacantepec volcano in the State of Mexico, and which is also joined by the rivers San Jerónimo and Chontalcoatlan which flow down through the State of Morelos, and the drainage of the Popocatépetl volcano, all part of the basin of the upper Balsas River, which runs through the State of Puebla, the States of Mexico, Morelos and the Guerrero Mountain zone.

The region of Alto Balsas was inhabited by the Olmec, a culture known as the Mother culture, from which the other cultures populating Meso-America were derived. The Nahua of today maintain very weak ties with that culture which disappeared leaving its mark in the archaeological site of Teopantecuanitlán, 3,500 years old, on the banks of the Balsas river in the municipality of Copalillo. The region of Alto Balsas was populated for hundreds of years by successive waves of Yope, Coixca, Matlatzinca or Chontal, Tlahuica and Xochimilca, until culminating with the Nahua. However the archaeologists and anthropologists now recognise that more studies on this region are needed in order to determine precisely and accurately by whom and how the populating of this region by its original peoples was carried out.

Although our lands are eroded by the excessive heat and an almost desert landscape, we love them and we have learned to live in them. With rains during the months of June to September, an average height of 800 metres above sea level, little vegetation, the most significant being small trees, such as: the plum tree, tinaloe, zompantli, cuajiote, tamarind, mezquite (not dissimilar to the acacia), pochote and huisache, amongst others.

With the arrival of the Spaniards on our lands, and in the face of the obstinacy of our ancestors to accept a God that was not theirs, the friars of the Order of Augustin arrived to convert us to Christianity. As a result of this, they even changed the names of some of our towns (imposing on us a calendar that indicated the dates on which we had to celebrate the saints of the Catholic religion) which were distributed along the shores of the Alto Balsas River, even assigning to the people the name of a Saint whom they had to venerate. And so we now have San Juan Tetelcingo, in honour of Saint John the Baptist, San Miguel Tecuiciapan, in honour of Saint Michael the Archangel, or San Francisco Ozomatlán in honour of Saint Francis of Assisi, towns which before were only called Tetelcingo, Tecuiciapan and Ozomatlán, respectively, to name but a few. This is also the reason why our region is known as the "route of Saints".

This route means that traditional celebrations in honour of some "patron saint" still exist to the present day, celebrations in which the towns are collectively involved, with religious ceremonial songs, native dances (the dance of the crown, of the rabbit, feather dances, dances of the revolution) and mestizo dances (the dance of shepherds, the dance of three powers, dance of the challenges, this latter so typical of the region of Alto Balsas) which we have appropriated and put on them our own Nahua stamp, with castles and pyrotechnic toritos - bull runs where one risks one's life purely for the pleasure of demonstrating skill and valour - in which the patron saint is celebrated. And meanwhile the bands of wind instruments untiringly play night and day, and we savour huge rich doughnuts glazed with red colouring.

A meal is also organised by the whole town in the municipal police station (Tequiapan), for neighbouring visitors from the Nahua peoples attending the celebrations while the Steward also prepares another meal in his house with the same aim.

These annual traditional celebrations in honour of the saints of the towns of the "route of saints", enable the Nahua peoples to remain in constant social contact all year round since we visit each other from town to town on the occasion of the festivals of our respective patron saints.

This is what we Nahua are, and our hearts were filled with sadness because we could see ourselves losing all of this. And the threat of losing our mother territory is something incalculable in our lives. The Nahua are considered to be farming peoples, 50% of our economy rests on agricultural activities of a subsistence nature, seeds being sown with

rains that fall in the months of June to September, with the help of our teams of oxen and trunks. We mainly sow maize, beans, pumpkin, watermelon, melon, tomatoes and chilli peppers on the slopes and small plains, for domestic consumption; we also sow sesame and peanut which are mainly sold to pay part of the costs of the agricultural activity of the sowing season.

The other 50% is made up of the production and marketing of our painted amate (a type of fig tree) paper crafts, of international fame, even being used in the Mexican TV commercial "México se pinta solo", showing our beautiful drawings painted on amate-tree paper, giving the Balsas painters national and even international fame, thus recognising our art as already being considered part of the cultural heritage of Mexico.

Our crafts - mainly those of painted amate-tree paper - are marketed at a national and international level, but in an unorganised manner; to date there has been no really representative marketing organisation grouping the sellers from Alto Balsas together, and which would prevent the intermediary retailers from soaking up most of the profits with which we try in some way to alleviate our battered economy.

In recent years we have been trying to reverse this tendency through the Regional Solidarity Fund for Alto Balsas (FRSAB) which was created by the CPNAB's efforts and through which approximately 40 production projects are currently being implemented.

The anguish of losing a territory is a fear that is difficult to express in words. When we began to feel that our territories were being threatened, we began to value them and to understand what exists in a habitat. The environment and the territory of the areas in which we live are not separate concepts within our Nahua philosophy. They form part of a whole. If we attack the environment which surrounds us, we know that we are thus also attacking our very life, since there exists a real interdependence between nature and ourselves, and we make use of nature. This philosophy, inherited from our ancestors and which has deep roots amongst our Nahua brothers, is what has made it possible to prevent the degradation of our territory.

The ecosystems in our region still retain a great biodiversity, unique in its type in our country and, indeed, conserved because of the respect our ancestors taught us to have towards Mother nature, to maintain an equilibrium with her. This is another strong argument as to why the San Juan Tetelcingo hydroelectric dam should never be built. Such is

the case of the Cañón de Tulimán, which is still inhabited by the white tail deer, a type of deer that is extinct throughout virtually the whole country. In our ecosystems there also exist great numbers of birds, such as the chechetl with its beautiful plumage, parakeets, guan, owls, buzzards, doves, quails, turtle doves, etc., which would no longer be able to sing our children to sleep.

This great biodiversity would be enormously affected since this river basin is unique in its type. Because of its importance, we thus proposed that it should be declared an ecological reserve, a proposal that SEMARNAP (Secretary of the Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries) is currently reconsidering.

The experience of other Nahua peoples who have been flooded by dams has led us to conclude that dams generally cause great upheaval in the environment. After construction, the solar rays which fall on the mirror produced by the dammed water raise the temperature, devastating a large wooded area, and the decomposition of this organic matter causes a deoxygenation of the water, leading to the death of innumerable fish and other aquatic riverine animals, not to mention the fact that some species of tree will be in contact with the water in a state of decomposition. The dam becomes a real source of poison for fish and other aquatic life forms since, in all the cases to date where dams have been built, the areas to be flooded have not been cleared first.

In addition, the dam would flood the important Archaeological Zone of Teopantecuanitlán, of Olmec origin and more than 3,000 years old: the oldest of its kind in Meso-America. This archaeological site is very important, being the umbilical cord of Meso-America, located on the banks of the Balsas River in the municipality of Copalillo. According to the person who discovered it, archaeologist Guadalupe Martínez Don Juan, little is known of the Olmec culture and this archaeological zone could well throw light on the numerous question marks regarding this important culture, known in Meso-America as the Mother culture from which other cultures derived. Without wishing to exaggerate, this fact could even change the knowledge of our historic roots, by showing the state of Guerrero to be the origin of Olmec culture as opposed to the states of Veracruz and Tabasco, as assumed until now.

This argument has been constantly disputed in official circles of power. Recently, however, another archaeological zone was discovered near the town of Paso Morelos, in the place known as Los Querendes in the municipality of Huitzuco, when the Mexico-Acapulco superhighway was opened (Of course, they quickly tried to conceal it and destroy the

remains which we - together with other responsible Guerrero citizens - opposed, forcing the construction company, ICA, to construct a by-pass, through a tunnel, in order to save the new zone of Olmec origin that was discovered in Guerrero, which was approximately 2,500 years old.) This event has strengthened previous arguments stating that, prior to Tabasco and Veracruz, it was the state of Guerrero which saw the first blooming of this age-old Olmec Mother culture.

This argument could well force the Mexican Government to declare the archaeological zone of Teopantecuanitlán as part of the cultural heritage of humanityand UNESCO to register it as such: a site of prime importance on the same scale as the pyramids of Egypt. With this argument we would very easily manage to prevent the PHSJT from ever being built.

With the construction of the PHSJT, we Nahua peoples would lose our specific forms of social organisation. The dam would not only physically destroy our communities but also the way in which we Nahua relate to each other and how we govern ourselves. In the region of Alto Balsas, each town holds annual traditional and democratic elections, that is, the general assembly of the community chooses its municipal authorities: its own municipal president and deputy. This authority has the role of administering justice in the town, as well as of organising community works. It in turn chooses the commissioners who will be in charge of keeping order. All citizens must show obedience and respect in order to ensure harmony and public order. The commissioners are under the direct command of the municipal president, and these authorities may have a certain relationship with the structures of State power.

The topiles (lesser officials) are also chosen: the candidates are mainly young people who married in the year prior to election. These young people are the ones who carry out smaller auxiliary tasks in the municipal police station but they are very important because it is in this way that service to the town commences. There is a close relationship between rights and obligations in all the positions. Thus he who carries out a position in the community assumes it as an obligation to fulfil which is imposed by the town; simultaneously he acquires the rights that living in that town grants to him. These roles are discharged in civil life.

There are also other representative authorities such as the committees for ejidal and community property. These are also chosen democratically in exclusive assemblies of cooperative members or communalists. These authorities have the principal role of taking care of ejidal

and communal lands as well as the natural resources of the towns. These authorities are elected every three years. There are not usually any conflicts in the life of our communities and our organisational system enables a reasonable margin of regional governability. If the Nahua towns disappeared, flooded by the dam, all these age-old forms of organisation would surely be lost, because our people would disperse and would have to modify themselves to adapt to new realities, generating acute social conflict.

This balance sheet could go on forever, for in the vision and feeling of our peoples there existed many other reasons why construction of the dam should be resisted and no "civilised reason" with which to justify it. Enough pages do not exist here to describe the feelings of loss and expropriation we felt, faced with the threat of seeing our history and our future suffocated, and so we said NO to construction of the dam, either then or in the future.

The Council of Nahua Peoples of Alto Balsas, Guerrero: Indian resistance

The indigenous peoples established the Council of Nahua Peoples of Alto Balsas Guerrero (CPNAB) in order to defend themselves against the threat of the PHSJT and it was thus, from September 1990 onwards, that we fought tenaciously to get the project cancelled, presenting our main proposal direct to the President of the Republic, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, on 13th October 1992: total and definitive cancellation of the PHSJT. The President agreed to sign a document of cancellation of the project after a wide mobilisation and the "March for dignity and indigenous resistance" which left the city of Chilpancingo, Guerrero on 2nd October, headed for the main square of Mexico City, arriving there on 12th October 1992. The CPNAB participated decisively within the framework of the multiple mobilisations that occurred in celebration of the 500 years of Indigenous Resistance and we also rejected the celebrations of the "500 Years" of the " Encounter of Two Worlds" or the misnamed "discovery of America ".

When we Nahua found out about the threat of construction of the dam, the first idea we had in terms of organisation was to have one unified resistance fight against the dam and to demand the information that, hypocritically, was being refused us by claiming the project did not exist. We made numerous public denunciations around this single objective as a mechanism of pressure in the media to demand its cancellation. We called for - and received in abundance - the solidarity

of society. Both academic sectors and political groups joined our indignation and contributed ideas and information.

But this short vision of our fight was soon to be modified. The most important thing, and the thing that modified this short term perspective, was the discovery of the existence of a national indigenous movement which worked on the struggle for self-determination and autonomy. Almost naturally, our fight joined the national indigenous movement: with them we came to know and discover the existence of an international indigenous movement and came to know of the experience of other indigenous struggles in other countries which, before Chiapas in 1994, had achieved autonomous systems or were fighting for them.

One important fact was to help us enormously in reaching a successful outcome. In 1990, a new movement unique in its type was being generated: the Mexican 500 Years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance Council, which opened up to us the possibility of being able to extend our fight outside the national borders. Supported by the Council, from 17th to 21st December 1991 we attended the NGO World Conference Roots of the Future with a view to the Earth Summit, which was a privileged arena in which to make known our sufferings and to obtain the greatest solidarity. Some time later we also attended, from 21st to 30th May 1992, the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment and Development, in the Kari-Oca district of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with the aim of influencing the Earth Summit, to be held the following month in Rio de Janeiro.

From 1st to 16th June we also participated in the Global Forum of NGOs Rio 92, within the framework of the Earth Summit, where we contributed to diffusing our problem and obtained international solidarity against the San Juan Tetelcingo dam. In addition, from this Earth Summit, we launched a campaign of international pressure to stop this project. We also participated as speakers in various events and in a great number of press conferences on stage and with foreign correspondents. In between these successes, we managed to appear in the USA's LIFE Magazine which, of course, paid us 200 dollars in return for posing for photographs.

Within the framework of the work of the Earth Summit, we met other indigenous leaders whom we already knew from other events, or from correspondence, and they invited us to be a part of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, of which we have been a member ever since. Thus, after discovering the

Indian movement, we considered it important to break through the local frontiers that were being imposed as barriers against our struggle. In order to achieve this, we had the continual support of international NGOs and good-hearted people, among them we would particularly like to mention the International Rivers Network, an institution dedicated to the protection of the rivers and which disseminated information against the construction of the dam. These opportunities were a privileged sounding board which had a significant and favourable impact on our movement.

Thus it was that in the month of May 1992, within the framework of the previous work and parallel to the "Earth Summit", we launched an international campaign of pressure and protest through letters sent by NGOs of other countries to the president of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, to demand the cancellation of the PHSJT. We thus obtained considerable international support. Salinas received dozens of letters as a mechanism of pressure enforced by non-governmental organisations, big and small, known and unknown, individuals and institutions. Our international campaign was a big success. In addition, from that moment, we announced that we would set off on a march from our state of Guerrero to Mexico City, where we would arrive on 12th October 1992.

The cancellation of the San Juan Tetelcingo Dam

From 2nd to 13th October1992, we participated in the march organised by the "Mexican 500 Years of indigenous Resistance Council" called "For the dignity and resistance of indigenous peoples", which left Chilpancingo headed for the main square of Mexico City. We still remember those 73 Mixtec, Amuzgo, Tlapanec Indians and ourselves, the Nahua of Alto Balsas, who began that march, in the rain, towards Mexico City, our circumstances so precarious that 13 of the marchers started off barefoot, with no plastic or oilskin to protect themselves from the rain, all hungry and with no money. Days later we would number 400 Indians from Guerrero and then, at the doors of the capital, more than 1000 Indians from Guerrero entered, marching along the Tlalpan road towards Tlatelolco, already in Mexico City, to join up with the other march coming from Oaxaca, coordinated by Carlos Beas Torres of UCIZONI. There we joined up with dozens of others coming from different parts of the country and who were arriving at different points. Together we walked to the Guadalupe Cathedral where we slept, later to depart in the direction of the Cathedral of the Virgin of Guadalupe to participate in a mass celebrated by 35 priests, "liberation theology" activists, who supported the march. Later we set off towards

the main square of Mexico City, where we met more than 200,000 people from Mexico and other countries of the world who were waiting anxiously for the marchers.

The success of the march of the Mexican 500 Years Council pressed for, and obtained, a meeting with the President of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, on 13th October 1992. The President listened to the different demands of the dozens of organisations that participated in this event. The CPNAB complained about the construction of the dam to the President and put forward the need to cancel it. We also asked him for funds with which to finance our alternative development project. Finally we obtained it. We like to think that we won the battle with the President because we were more astute than he was and because we played him at his own game of double language. In the region we still celebrate, with great festivities, the way in which we extracted cancellation of the dam out of President Salinas. Although anecdotal, for us this event is historical. This is the story:

Previously, as a result of the mobilisations we had undertaken in the capital of the state of Guerrero and of the strong pressure, the then governor, Francisco Ruiz Massieu, gave a false promise of cancellation of the dam in order to get the CPNAB, which had been mobilised for several months and questioning the government of Guerrero, off his back. On 12th February 1992, tired of us, Governor Ruiz Massieu gave us a letter of doubtful legal value – as dams are constructed by a branch of the federal power – in which there was a commitment to cancel the dam. The text of the letter said:

> *" A seal with the national shield in the left upper end, with the inscription of the United States of Mexico below this shield, it states: the Government of the Free and Sovereign State of Guerrero. Executive Power. Office of the Governor. Chilpancingo Guerrero 12th February 1992. TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF NAHUA PEOPLES OF ALTO BALSAS. According to the meeting held last Monday 10th of this month, and to the official letter sent by the Secretary General of Government, Lic. Carlos Vega Memje, I confirm to you that the Federal Government has told the undersigned that the works of the hydroelectric project of the Federal Electricity Commission, known as San Juan Tetelcingo, have been totally cancelled. Yours truly, C. José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, Constitutional Governor of the State. And his signature."* [2]

It was obvious that it was a document of no legal value because the Federal Electricity Commission continued to construct the dam and

had no desire to cancel it. Although this letter was merely a dirty trick on the part of the Governor, for us it was nevertheless a weapon that would be used at the right time. With this "ace" up our sleeve, we representatives of the CPNAB participated in the interview with President Carlos Salinas de Gortari on 13th October 1992 and listened attentively to what he had to say. In front of the organisations of the Mexican 500 Years Council and in the spotlight, the President savoured his words and spoke of the actions his government were undertaking in favour of the indigenous population of the country. Marcelino Díaz de Jesús spoke, challenging the presidential speech, contradicting the President and explaining to him, in less than three minutes, the inconsistencies in his speech on supposed indigenous development and the insufficiencies of social welfare in the lands of the communities and, what was more, the opposing actions which members of his cabinet were carrying out against the interests of the Indian peoples. He gave as an example the case of Alto Balsas and the threat of construction of the dam and the disregard of the CFE towards the supposed will of the President to cancel the dam. At the same time, we showed him the letter that Governor Ruiz Massieu had given to us and which stated that President Salinas had ordered the cancellation of the dam. For the president's better comprehension, Marcelino Díaz read the official letter to him. In spite of the direct reference to his person, Salinas de Gortari said nothing and listened.

When he had finishing reading the letter out, given the President's silence, Marcelino Díaz went up to Salinas and asked him if it were true that he, personally, had ordered the Governor of Guerrero to communicate to us in writing the decision to cancel the dam in February 1992. The President, with a faint smile, affirmed with a slight movement of the head, giving to understand that indeed he had ordered it. Given this reaction and in an unusual and even audacious act, Marcelino Díaz approached him and said, "If this is so, Mr. President, then you won't mind putting your signature on this document as well, just to ratify it". And without giving him time to think, he put the letter in front of him with a pen and the President was forced to sign the document in front of all those present, thus ratifying the federal decision to cancel the dam, to the great jubilation of all present.

At the end of the event, in an informal talk, President Salinas approached us and told us that the commitment to cancel the dam would only remain in effect during the remainder of his term in government, i.e., only two more years from that date. Nevertheless, we believed then and we reconfirm now, that the signature does not lapse after any time period, for after that victory in which we snatched power

away from him and from the arrogant government, we will NEVER allow our towns to be permanently submerged.

For our part, since then we have been working on constructing our own "Alternative Plan for the Sustainable Development and Autonomy of the Nahua Peoples of the Region of Alto Balsas, Guerrero, Mexico", as part of our strategy of struggle to save our territory from possible future flooding by some other president who may try once again to reinstate this genocidal project.

The CPNAB struggle and ILO Convention No. 169

Along the way, another event has also had an impact on the Nahua's struggle against the construction of the San Juan Tetelcingo dam: it was the discovery of ILO Convention No. 169. Hardly had we initiated our fight of resistance against the dam than we discovered the existence of an international legal instrument for the protection of indigenous rights. On 28th November 1990, during a "sit-in" we had organised in front of the doors of the State Government Palace, the historian Renato Ravelo Lecuona gave us some copies of a document that contained the text of Convention No. 169, and he suggested we make a complaint to this institution in Geneva.

From these documents, we learned that Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) says in its article 15, point 2, that:

> "Governments must establish or maintain procedures with a view to consulting those interested peoples, in order to determine whether the interests of those peoples will be harmed and to what extent, before undertaking or authorising any programme of prospecting or exploitation of the resources existing in their lands".

With no legal validity in Mexico because the government itself ignores it and the authorities of the powers reject it, for us, with all the struggle and mobilisation we had undertaken, this instrument of international law became a very powerful instrument in our fight of indigenous resistance. It was simple: we demanded that the government comply with its own norms. Mexico had been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention and it had entered into full effect on 5th September 1991. In our country this Agreement has the status of a constitutional standard because Article 133 establishes that all international treaties signed by our country, and ratified by the Senate, will have the status

of constitutional law. On that legal basis, we knew that not only were we in the right, but we also had the law behind us.

Although the effect of the complaint we submitted to the ILO was not immediate, its political impact was. Our fight took on another meaning when its basis began to be the demand for protection of the indigenous rights stated in ILO Convention No. 169. The strength of the argument was such that even a sector of the Mexican State itself, the National Indigenist Institute (INI), when publishing the book, "Indigenous Rights. An Annotated Interpretation of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation" at the end of 1991, on pages 69 and 70 mentioned the CPNAB as an indigenous organisation which had made correct use of this instrument in the defence of our territory and that this was how the Convention was supposed to be used, i.e., hand in hand with political struggle.

It was in November 1995 - probably as an effect of the Zapatista rebellion, which brought out into the open the double standards of the Mexican government's discourse - that the International Labour Organisation responded to the complaint we had made and sent a message to us asking for more information on the "San Juan Tetelcingo" Hydroelectric Dam. The first letter we had sent making known these events had been in November 1990, i.e., four years previously! The text of the ILO's document stated the following on the subject:

"International Labour Organisation 82a, Geneva, 1995, Report 111 (Part 4 A).

Report of the Commission of Experts on application of Conventions and Recommendations. Observations on the ratified conventions. Convention 169 of the ILO. Mexico (ratification: 1990).

3. Articles 4 and 7 (environment and development). The commission notes with interest that the San Juan Tetelcingo hydroelectric project was cancelled on 13th October 1992 by the President of the Republic and the Governor of the State of Guerrero because it was not beneficial to the communities of the region, it notes that this action was taken due to a resolution adopted by the Council of Nahua Peoples of Alto Balsas, Guerrero." [3]

Although the answer was a long time coming, the most important thing is to emphasise the position of the ILO in recognising the protagonist of the decision to cancel the dam. As can be seen in the highlighted paragraph, there was express recognition of the CPNAB on the part of

the ILO, as the organisation that brought about the cancellation of the dam. We consider that, in this letter, the ILO recognises the autonomy that, as an organisation and as an Indian people, the Nahua of Alto Balsas have, to make our own decision to cancel this hydroelectric project and, at the same time, showing respect and responsibility for the decision of the state and federal governments to suspend the dam. It is probable that the ILO was unaware of the circumstances in which President Salinas "cancelled" the construction of the dam. Perhaps some day they will read this book and thus find out. But the most important thing now is to emphasise the exercise of the right of self-determination that the Nahua people of Alto Balsas enforced, since it was the Indians themselves who stopped construction of the dam and we defeated the arrogance and impunity of the government bureaucracy, which decided to ruin the lives of thousands of people and to destroy a people, in order to pay for the errors of inept bureaucrats.

Thus, with all this experience and with this wider vision, the fight of the Nahua of Guerrero modified and changed its perspective. After participating and incorporating ourselves into the national indigenous fight we no longer merely appealed to public pressure and solidarity to stop the dam, we discovered and demanded the exercise of our rights. The next stage was our involvement in the fight for autonomy.

The fight for autonomy in Alto Balsas

One of the more important impacts of the struggle for resistance against the dam was that we had built a regional collective identity as the Nahua of Alto Balsas. Prior to this experience, the indigenous Nahua considered themselves to be "peoples from Copalillo" or "natives of Huitzuco", among other restricted identities. The decision regarding the destiny of the Nahua peoples of Alto Balsas was not one decision alone but a number of decisions that were taken by seven different municipal authorities and not one of them pronounced in favour of our survival. These were the years of fidelity to the system. People were faithful and submissive to the State party. Despite this, and perhaps indeed because of it, the resistance movement arose once people had greater information on the government project. There were two groups promoting this resistance: one in Copalillo, a municipality governed by the Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRT) and effectively led by comrade Sabino Estrada Guadalupe[4], whose death in 1996 was an irretrievable loss. The other group of leaders was concentrated around Xalitla, which the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) influenced but did

not lead, each in the geographic extremes of the threatened region[5]. Encouraged by the triumph of cancellation of the dam and the mobilisation it had already unleashed, the Council of Nahua Peoples of Alto Balsas, Guerrero (CPNAB) could not stop in its tracks and return to its routine marginality. What followed was in fact precisely the opposite: they were to build an alternative development project and to aspire to becoming an ethnically integrated and politically united region. Thus was being born the idea of a new municipality, which would encompass some territorial sections of Nahua settlements forming part of other non-indigenous municipalities, as well as the integration of an autonomous indigenous region.

Slowly, the bases of the indigenous resistance movement discovered that to identify themselves as Nahua had several advantages. On the one hand, they were different from the municipal authorities, which were controlled by politicians and authorities indifferent or even opposed to Nahua interests and servile to the intentions of the State; at the same time they were united in the face of the six mestizo authorities which had not come out in defence of the threatened territory. Another question we were perceiving was that, for the first time, being indigenous was not detrimental but indeed could be beneficial since, as indigenous people, we could appeal to other international laws that granted us more prerogatives than the Mexican Constitution itself granted to other Mexicans. An additional advantage was that it allowed us to look once more to rescuing our culture, not only as a value of identity but as a productive tradition that could give sustainability to our life projects and production projects.

In this process of moving forward, the CPNAB almost naturally took up the banner of indigenous autonomy in order to, beneath it, attempt both to guarantee the exercise of our right of self-determination – which we had already won by the path of struggle, through autonomy – as well as to struggle for control of our territories and, on the basis of this, to plan and work for self-managed development, which would enable unification of the riverine peoples of Alto Balsas around a new municipality and to plan – together with Copalillo - the construction of an autonomous region, Chiapas style. This new strategy for struggle which the CPNAB had arrived at was the consensus of the Assembly of the 5th anniversary of the CPNAB, held in October 1995. Some of the points made were the following:

"On the occasion of our 5th Anniversary, we have decided to create the Autonomous Indigenous Municipality of Alto Balsas, and to create an Autonomous Region jointly with the Municipality of Copalillo, which

we are currently governing through the PRT. We are agreed on Autonomy. To arrive at this intention, we propose:

1. *A reform of articles 3, 4, 27, 43, 73, 115 and 116 of the Constitution, so that from the outset they explicitly take into account, within their text, the autonomy of indigenous peoples both in relation to territory and self-government and self-determination, for this reason we have been actively participating in the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA).*

2. *Respect for and complete fulfilment of ILO Convention No. 169, which already recognises our right to indigenous territory, and which is law in our country through that which is established in Art. 133 of the Constitution.*

3. *We urge the United Nations to proclaim the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples now, the final writing of which we participated in - through our brother Pedro de Jesús Alexander, current Finance Secretary of the CPNAB, who attended the Working Group on Indigenous Populations as member of ANIPA's National Follow-Up Commission, a WG created specifically by the United Nations for that aim - before the Declaration was passed on to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in the month of November 1996;*

4. *In the indigenous zones where indigenous self-government could already occur - because of the particular regional characteristics and in accordance with the specific conditions of each region - autonomy must be implemented now. Such is the case of Alto Balsas, where efforts are being made to create a New Municipality, as was unanimously agreed by the delegates attending the Annual Meeting for Evaluation and Analysis of One More Year of Work of the CPNAB, within the framework of its 5th Anniversary, held in San Miguel Tecuiciapan on 21st and 22nd October 1995.*

   We want to create a New Municipality in Alto Balsas so that we can govern ourselves by ourselves. This must be with financial participation, both federal, state and from other sources in order to maintain our government until gradually we can achieve self-sufficiency, without the State intervening politically in the public accounts, as a means of pressure, as is happening in the Municipality of Copalillo, governed by the PRT, in the region of Alto Balsas. In such a case, the audits and control of resources would be managed by our people and not central government, much less the granting of

resources in a discriminatory manner to our territories (Indigenous Municipalities, Nations or Territories).

5. *We want an Autonomous Indigenous Municipality with sufficient resources. If the Federal Government agrees to create these municipalities but without sufficient financial resources: we do not want them! For that reason, since we first put forward our proposal, we have refused autonomies of misery.*

6. *We propose laying solid foundations that enable the recovery of our ancestral territories and the modification of Art. 27 of the Constitution, second section of paragraph VII, which states, 'The law will protect the territories of the indigenous peoples'. With respect to this, we propose adding a paragraph in which it says, 'The territories of the indigenous peoples cannot be expropriated for reasons of public utility when these people are not in agreement'. We also propose they return to us our right to have a piece of land, especially for those requesting land who are indigenous in their own territories without a single such piece."*

De facto autonomy, or what amounts to the same thing, "At least we're getting somewhere."

The CPNAB's programme of autonomy is advancing little by little. We have assumed de facto autonomy, by declaring ourselves autonomous and contradicting the State in its decision to exterminate a people. We have exercised our territorial right as it stands within an international treaty accepted by Mexico, forcing its fulfilment by force. We are, then, in the process of building autonomy insofar as the needs of self-managed development give it the impetus. The people are not fighting for abstract rights but for those they need or are used to exercising and which they see as threatened.

What is new and unexpected in this situation is that a group of communities of Alto Balsas has moved from living passively, suffering in its marginalisation, with no regional organisation, divided by several levels from power, to a united and successful struggle against a federal project that threatened its existence as peoples, becoming active subjects in the management of their own life project, their own history, and furthermore uniting their destiny to the destiny of all the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

The sign of autonomy within the construction of the CPNAB is the same sign of democracy that must prevail within the nation which we

must construct in practice. This essay is a record of that desire, which gives it value and a point of departure for the systematised memory of these incipient actors, and for the new autonomous Mexico that is emerging.

In the face of this reality and the imminent advance of autonomy, the established governments are afraid that indigenous strength will be consolidated. But one thing is clear: autonomy is exerted with or without permission from power. One event is sufficient to illustrate these tendencies. On 27th May 1998, in the community of Xalitla, Guerrero, the governor of the state, Angel H. Aguirre Rivero, attended a civic ceremony in the community. Previously the governor had said that the indigenous struggle for autonomy was an attempt to construct "levels of power". In the public ceremony, using his own words pronounced days before and made known in the newspapers, we publicly affirmed to him, "We agree with you Mr. Governor, we do not want to create autonomous regions in order to generate new levels of power, we are fighting for the creation of the Autonomous Municipality of Alto Balsas, in order to be able to govern ourselves, and to decide amongst ourselves the course of our destiny as Nahua peoples of Alto Balsas." The Governor, in his speech, had no alternative other than to affirm that he was in agreement with us, and he committed himself to supporting us, albeit in a discursive manner.

In the State of Guerrero, our autonomous discourse on the creation of new autonomous municipalities and regions has been permeating into other indigenous and non-indigenous regions to such a degree that the same demand is now being made in at least ten regions, where they are endeavouring to create new municipalities. Some demands date back a long time, including: Hueycantenango and Marquelia; others are newer, such as Mixtecapa, Rancho Nuevo de la Democracia, Chilixtlahuaca, Potoichan, Alto Balsas, Coatepec de los Costales, Tepetixtla, and another six in the Sierra de Filo Mayor.

A Work Group has also been established on Indigenous Legislation in Guerrero, made up of several indigenous organisations who discuss different topics current to the Guerrero movement and to the national movement, with the aim of drawing up a proposal for an initiative of law to reform the Political Constitution of the Free and Sovereign State of Guerrero, incorporating a specific Chapter on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Guerrero.

One of the main achievements of this Work Group, in which we participate as the Guerrero Council and its regional member organisa-

tions, has been that of managing to interest the Deputies of the Guerrero Congress. Their motivation has now led them to begin to establish "Fora for Consultation on Autonomy and Municipalisation" both in indigenous and non-indigenous regions, which in itself already represents a step forward, above all if you consider that, in Guerrero, this subject has remained on the margins of the discussions of the social organisations, parties and governmental bodies, concretely the local Congress. Perhaps one factor that has had an influence on this is the fact that the local Constitutions of Oaxaca and Quintana Roo have been modified, in some respects opening up a path towards autonomy, albeitin a very limited manner, as well as the fact that there now exists the initiative of Law of the Commission of Concord and Pacification (Cocopa) on Indigenous Rights and Culture, the basis of which was originally the San Andrés Larrainzar Accords, in which, as members of the indigenous movement ANIPA, we tried to imprint our aspirations to self-determination and indigenous autonomy. With these advances, it is clear is that the fight for autonomy continues...

Notes

1 See La Jornada, 18th February 1991. Mexico D.F.

2 The highlighting is mine.

3 The highlighting is mine.

4 The influence of Sabino Estrada was fundamental in this process. See the collection *La autonomía y el movimiento indígena en Guerrero. Homenaje a Sabino Estrada Guadalupe 1955-1996*. Collection published by CPANAB, CG500RI, Convergencia Socialista, Altépetl Nahuas, Constitutional Town Hall of Copalillo

5 An extensive history of this struggle, with many opinions of the majority of protagonists, can be read in Marcelino Díaz de Jesús et.al. *Alto Balsas. Pueblos nahuas en lucha por la autonomía, desarrollo y defensa de nuestra cultura y territorio. testimonial de un pueblo en lucha*. Publication of the CPNAB and CG5500RI.

LESSONS OF CHIAPAS

TOJOLAB'AL AUTONOMY: THE GENESIS OF A PROCESS

Antonio Hernández Cruz

We understood the process of Tojolab'al autonomy that we implemented in the 1980s as a process of recovery of our people's power; not just any power but our own power, generated through our own means and from our own vision of the world. Tojolab'al autonomy was conceived largely as a mechanism for decision-making in order to solve our numerous daily problems by means of a broad Tojolab'al government that sought spiritual and political conciliation and consensus between the Tojolab'al communities.

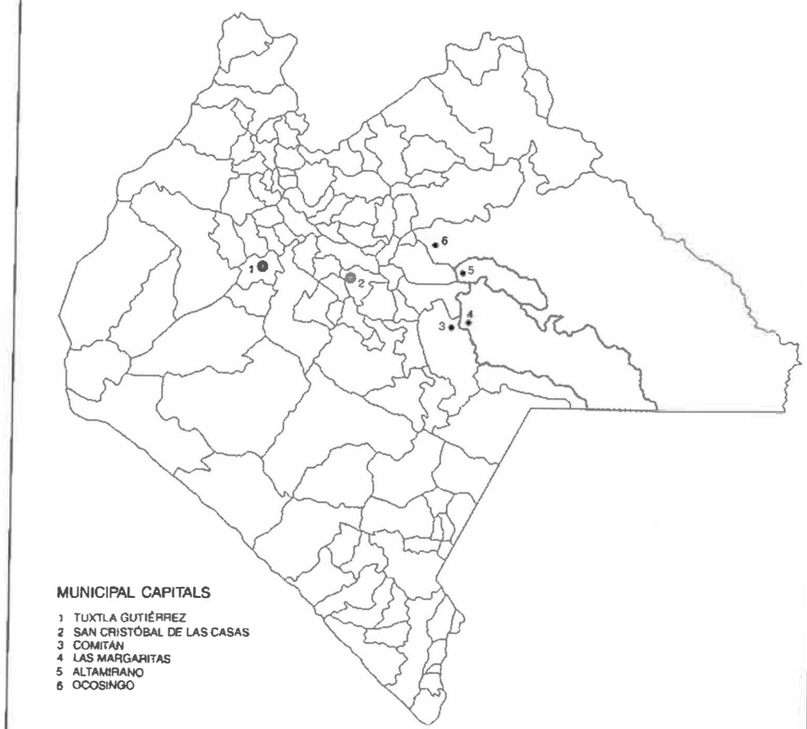
We understood this autonomy to be the capacity of the Tojolab'al people to exercise their right to make decisions on their current lives and to design their own future. Nevertheless, this process was not, nor ever has been, a linear one but a continual to and fro, of losses and gains, in which sometimes we won, sometimes we lost. The aim of this essay is to systematise the experience of Tojolab'al regional autonomy in the 1980s: a pioneering project in the fight for indigenous autonomy in Chiapas.

The darkness of the wasteland

Following the European invasion and the irruption of the conquerors and mestizos into the southern territory of Mexico, the Tojolab'al were enslaved within the "plantation" system. This specific form of estate was maintained through the strength of Tojolab'al labour and was known as „*baldio*", or work which was "*de balde*" (that is, free), which the young men or labourers had to provide for the benefit of the master so that he would „allow them" to live within the great expanse of the property of his estate.

This system of property, established from the 18th century onwards in the Tojolab'al region[1], came to an end in the 1930s and 40s as a result of the land distribution carried out by the government of General Lázaro Cárdenas which formed a number of *ejidos* or cooperatives in the region. The recovery of ancestral territory and freedom was directly associated with the reconstruction of communal life in the Tojolab'al

Figure showing the location of the Tojolab'al region



ejidos - and with a first step towards autonomy - more than fifty years ago. The experience of Tojolab'al autonomy in the 1980s was to be based on that initial territorial recovery, which was just one step in the long fight for the autonomy of our people.

Unions of *ejidos* begin to appear

The construction of Tojolab'al autonomy has not been without its risks, sometimes winning, sometimes losing. The basis for the organisational process can be traced back to different forms found in the 1970s, be they unions of *ejidos* or the Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasant Farmers (CIOAC).

This process of Tojolab'al organisation was taking place within a context of the expansion of new forms of association in different parts of the region, such as the unions of *ejidos*. "The Union of *Ejidos* for Peasant Struggle", located in the Tojolab'al valley, was supported by a group of activists and politicians identified with the ideological tendencies of the Maoist left, who were locally known as „the northerners" by virtue of the fact that a significant number of them came from the north of the country. This group acquired great political significance in the region because all of them were taken on and stayed as "advisers" to the communities, playing leading roles in the political life of the municipalities of Las Margaritas, Ocosingo and Altamirano for almost a decade.

More than twenty *ejidos* of the Tojolab'al valley became incorporated into this union of *ejidos*, thus becoming a great organisational force. This union of *ejidos* became linked to others that had been established in the municipality of Ocosingo, such as "*Kiptik Ta lecubtezel*" amongst others. Together they formed the ARIC Federation of Unions. As is now widely known, this was to become the underlying organisational structure supporting the forces that were later to form the armed Zapatista struggle.

In those same years, CIOAC was established in the Tojolab'al region. Unlike the other unions of *ejidos*, whose main programmes of struggle were oriented around issues of production and the communities' productive infrastructure - such as roads and transport, the introduction of fertilisers and technological packages, credits and marketing, among other things. CIOAC, on the contrary, focussed its action around agrarian demands and the fight for political power within the town councils. Like the other organisations, it established itself in the form of unions of *ejidos*. More than 30 *ejidos* were integrated into three unions: the Union of *Ejidos* for Land and Freedom, the *k'achil Yaj b'ej* (new way) Union of *Ejidos* and the Union of *Ejidos* of Tojolab'al Peoples, all of them located in the municipality of Las Margaritas.

The actions of the unions of *ejidos* contributed significantly to giving a sense of regional belonging to the Tojolab'al peoples, something which had been lost during the obscurity of life on the estates.

From peasant organisation to CIOAC's autonomous organisation of Indians

The majority of the Tojolab'al leaders of peasant organisations were trained - in the Seventies and Eighties - within the framework of an ideology that sought a complete change to everything in existence, including our own culture. CIOAC was founded in the border region by Margarito Ruiz Hernández, a Tojolab'al from the *Plan de Ayala ejido*, in 1977. From the moment of its emergence, CIOAC was linked to the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) and had as its main focus demands within the agrarian struggle. For a decade, between 1977 and 1987, the work of CIOAC was successful insofar as we obtained – through land seizures and agrarian negotiations – agrarian reform which meant access to land for a significant number of farmers.

Nevertheless, in the 1980s, winds of change were blowing and altering the perspective of the Tojolab'al leaders of CIOAC. At this time, other Tojolab'al ideas and actors were emerging in the region. CIOAC entered into an alliance with other Tojolab'al people who formed part of the Supreme Tojolab'al Council. This was a member of the National Council of Indigenous Peoples (CNPI), formed years back by President Luis Echeverría as a corporativist structure of indigenous representatives at national level.

Because the National Union of Peasant Farmers (CNC) lacked strength and presence in the region, the CNPI had initially constituted a base of prestigious native leaders in the Tojolab'al region. Nevertheless, the vices of the CNC soon corrupted its leaders. And so a group of young Tojolab'al - some of them bilingual promoters - who disagreed with the increasing corporativism of the PRI in the region, broke away. CIOAC's alliance with these young people sought to win the elections for municipal president in Las Margaritas. Candidates were thus provided by the young Tojolab'al people in alliance with the Communist Party, which had by then become the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), with the candidacy of Arnoldo Martínez Twig for presidency of the Republic, in 1982.[2]

The formation of a team of young Tojolab'al people who were looking to the future in their own way and via their own history thus began to be developed. By 1984, we Tojolab'al had a clearer idea of how to build our own way forward. This was concretely obtained when, in October 1986, we agreed to establish the Union of *Ejidos* of Tojolab'al Peoples (UEPT) and the Independent Front of Indian Peoples (FIPI) as part of CIOAC. Note how the name of the UEPT reflects our transition. We were halfway between the idea of a "union of *ejidos*" - which had a long tradition in the region - and one of "Tojolab'al peoples", which constituted a new reference point in the Indian fight, properly speaking.

This path within CIOAC was not easy. It required a fierce internal struggle within this peasant farmers' union. The class struggle ap-

proach predominated within this organisation and the national leaders challenged the pro-Indian position, considering it a deviation from the main problems. Pressures from other regions of the organisation and the national leadership, which worked in a pro-peasant direction, were a strong force that definitely contributed to debilitating the experience of autonomy and, in the long run, to its dissolution, as we shall see in the course of this brief essay.

Decreasing Tojolab'al autonomy

We Tojolab'al had sufficient reason to defend our autonomy. After the period of "free labour" and as soon as we obtained *ejidal* lands, from 1940 onwards, most Tojolab'al had little to do with the State and its institutions. Unlike the region of Los Altos, where indigenism had arrived early on in the Fifties, with a strong element of paternalism incorporated into the consciences of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal of that region, in the case of the Tojolab'al region indigenist coordination on the part of the State did not arrive in Las Margaritas until the 1970s, and there was no significant recorded presence of the corporativist institutions of the Mexican State in the Tojolab'al territory until then. This is a significant reason as to why we Tojolab'al have always been rebellious.

Prior to 1994, the presence of the State in the Tojolab'al region was quite weak. Before the State, others had come: the Catholic Church, the Communist Party, ideological organisations of different types – such as the Maoists - and also the evangelical Churches. A consequence of the indifference and apathy of the government to meet the needs of the Tojolab'al territory was that it was we Tojolab'al ourselves who continued solving our daily problems and searching for our own alternatives with our own resources. This was why it was possible for the Tojolab'al to establish early alliances with the new groups that arrived in the region, such as the churches, the opposition parties and the groups of political activists of all colours. This was unlike the region of Los Altos, where the State quickly became hegemonic and prevented the presence of those other agents of change. On the contrary, in the Tojolab'al region, options other than the State quickly gained ground and largely helped to consolidate Tojolab'al autonomy in the face of the State institutions.

Nevertheless, although these new actors were slowly consolidating in the region and in our lives, a certain expression of indigenous resistance against the increasing interference of these new agents was

forming in Tojolab'al thought because, in the name of change, they were trying to remove Tojolab'al forms of organisation, power and government.

In fact, from as early as the Fifties, but particularly in the Sixties and Seventies, the Tojolab'al had suffered the penetration of diverse institutions of a different nature, which had displaced or were displacing Tojolab'al forms of power and authority. At that time, the figure of *ejidal* commissioners had been introduced, competing in many cases with the authority of the "principals", who were elders who possessed a special wisdom enabling them to govern, consider and solve problems, as well as to communicate with the Gods to obtain from them rains, good harvests, health and well-being for the community.

At that time, the governmental institutions in charge of agrarian issues, along with the municipal presidents, began to demand and to introduce into our communities another type of representative who responded to their profile and interests. In many cases, these authorities did not substantially modify our ways of governing ourselves, but in some cases they did. The *ejidal* commissioners and municipal agents frequently corrupted civil employees of the governmental offices in order to give away our forests in exchange for scraps and to hand over control of our territories to municipal jurisdiction.

The imposition of the figure of the *ejidal* commissioner was the first institution that fundamentally modified Tojolab'al representation. Up until then we Tojolab'al had not had that type of representation and dialogue with the State. The same thing happened years later with the municipal agents; up until then Tojolab'al power had been exercised through action on the basis of the powers and abilities - inherited or learned - of important figures who had sufficient force and strength to protect the communities. They were people trained in the handling of non-worldly forces: the handling of good and bad, of health and sickness, of justice and injustice, and the handling of the balance of forces in general, the balance between good and bad. These balances were the main values that determined the leadership and powers that governed the Tojolab'al in the 1940s, and after the agrarian distribution, up until the 1970s.

Nevertheless, with the irruption of these new figures of government linked to the State, traditional values by which authorities were chosen became progressively displaced. The new profile of a leader was that of a young person who knew how to speak and write a little Spanish, to read a document and to sign it. Other values, associated almost

always with maturity of age or even, on many occasions, with the elderly, were slowly ignored, displaced and, eventually, even opposed and persecuted.

Although the Tojolab'al of the Fifties and Sixties began to accept the new figures of government and representation that the agrarian Law imposed on them, the other authorities did not disappear and thus they and their powers began to be feared. In our culture's understanding of this duality of good and bad, all those who do good are so powerful that they also have, at a given moment, the capacity to do bad. Thus, with the introduction of the new figures of control and government that were to replace the elders and principals, these latter were gradually displaced from the positions of respect and authority which they previously held to a dark place, where their powers and abilities no longer generated security for the population. With their powers they had previously been the ones who protected fertility, good health, peace and tranquillity in the communities, but now they began to be feared.

This change was decisive in Tojolab'al life and organisation. What it brought was division and internal confrontation, fear and trepidation. There were two answers in the face of these values: a) their total displacement, persecution and elimination; or b) their recovery as public forces of legitimate power which, by making public and removing them from secrecy would stop them from being feared and they would once again contribute to "good" and not to "evil". This latter was the path which the proposal for Tojolab'al autonomy chose, whose story now follows.

Other agents of change

The rejection of the Tojolab'al traditional authorities did not, however, end with the introduction of the State agents of change; there were also other agents who were gaining presence in the region, and against whom we fought forcefully.

The Catholic Church, in its version of liberation theology, had established a catechist training centre called "La Castalia" in the Sixties, located in Comitán, where brave young people were trained to carry forward the word of God. This religious centre recruited many Tojolab'al who were called "brothers" or "catechists". It was the centre's intention to train them to preach the word of God in the communities. Alongside religious training, the young people were trained in sewing, baking and carpentry workshops, among other things, transforming

them into true agents of change, competing with those the State was also training via indigenism.

The profile of these new leaders was one of youth, intelligence, leadership, mastery of the Spanish language, ability to read and write, and with an age-old conviction that they would save their people from chaos, that is, from "the devil" who, according to their Christian ideology, the Tojolab'al dined with by continuing to hold ceremonies in the caves and hills and by preserving their Mayan beliefs and Gods, associated with crops, fertility and life cycles.

Inevitably, this missionary ideology collided with the old Tojolab'al culture and identity. These young people began to question the powers of the elderly. Considering themselves saviours, they opposed Tojolab'al power, satanising it as "the devil's work". With the support of their religious institutions and the strength of their new faith, the catechists were gradually managing - by influencing an increasing number of young Tojolab'al – to get the old authorities that previously governed us satanised as "witches" and exiled into darkness and secrecy.

Obviously this process was not a peaceful one, nor without resistance on the part of the elders. In the Sixties and early Seventies, some internal revolts occurred in the communities because the catechists began to oppose the celebration of the agricultural ceremonies that our grandparents practised according to the cycles of life and the requirements of nature. The agricultural rituals, such as *lu'um Kinal* [3], which were celebrated in order to request water, abundance, health, happiness, continuity, contact with everything we see and feel in the natural world, these were activities associated with thunderbolts, caves and Mayan Gods. The new catechists prohibited these rituals.

With the establishment of these new agents began a rupture in the social tissue of the Tojolab'al communities, from which we have still not recovered. In the Sixties and Seventies, this conflict was expressed as a rupture of a generational nature. The young people began to doubt, to oppose and to satanise the Mayan Tojolab'al knowledge and to favour other religious, ideological and technical forms of knowledge that the mestizo culture offered.

From that point on, a serious spiritual division began amongst our peoples which formed the basis for internal weaknesses in our own thought and spirit. It was then that a great silence began and the secrets of our grandparents began to be guarded, for it was the beginning of a stage of persecution - similar to the time of the Inquisition – in which

the principal elders were accused of supping with the devil, of lying to our community, of being hand in hand with evil spirits, of maintaining beliefs of the past that symbolised the backwardness and ignorance of our people, to name but a few things.

Within this climate and with the leadership already trained, following the Indigenous Congress of 1974 the Church made a strategic alliance with a group of political organisers known as "the northerners". In effect, from the perspective of the Church's strategy, the phase that followed was to consolidate the worldly leadership of young catechists and to introduce social change. The strategic Church-Northerners fusion meant that both in the Tojolab'al area of Las Margaritas and in the area of the Selva Ocosingo and Altamirano, as already mentioned, several unions of *ejidos* were set up which quickly became successful. Encouraged by their new role, the young people became consolidated as the new power within the Tojolab'al area. The structures of the unions of *ejidos* were established and chosen from this seedbed of young people trained as new leaders, in order to dialogue with the State and to bring benefits for the Tojolab'al population.

The catechists were encouraged by the Catholic *maristas* to take the message of the need for organisation to the communities. In the Tojolab'al case, the catechists used the notions of "the spiritual fight and the worldly fight" which consisted of being a good believer, fulfilling the Laws of the Church and the orders of God but also of organising one's neighbours so that they opened up their eyes to worldly life. The work of "the northerners" was centred mainly around organising to obtain credits for agriculture and the introduction of transport cooperatives.

One of the most notable effects of social and political organisation in the Tojolab'al region was the strengthening of the construction of a regional identity. In fact, the recovery of Tojolab'al territory that occurred via the *ejidos* in the Forties and Fifties had not been a recovery without difficulties; on the contrary, it led to a rupture in our land and our identity. Years earlier, we Tojolab'al had been divided by the estates and it was they that gave the identity of "free labourers" on these estates to our grandparents. When forming *ejidos* and settlements, the estates were dissolved and, along with them, the identities that had been created around them.

With the *ejidos*, new referents of identity emerged but there was still a long way to go in the reconstruction of a global identity as Tojolab'al people. One advantage of the unions of *ejidos* was that they contributed to linking the Tojolab'al region through a unity caused by organisation.

The fight for roads and local transport contributed to giving a new sense of territorial integrity to the region which previously did not exist and which was possible as a result of the struggle of the unions of *ejidos*, such as the Ejido Union of Peasant Farmer Struggle, Land and Freedom, and the unions coordinated by CIOAC. Although it is not true to say that prior to this any notion of Tojolab'al cohesion was totally absent, such cohesion had only been expressed temporarily in activities linked to pilgrimages of request for rain and food to the main sanctuaries of distant regions of the country and even as far as San Mateo Ixtatán in Guatemala or small markets which make up a microregion.

And so between these losses and gains in identity, and as a result of the social struggle, a notion of regional territoriality as Tojolab'al people began to express itself in the first half of the Eighties, a notion which looked to regional Tojolab'al organisation to resolve the problems that were afflicting the Tojolab'al people. Certainly, other priorities continued to take precedence in our communities, relating to obtaining rains and food and ensuring the absence of disease. But in the Eighties no-one could ignore the fact that the times demanded much more than that, the times required new unified responses of regional cohesion that gave unified political answers stretching beyond community spaces.

This contradiction was unresolvable. It was not considered important within the approach of the leaders of the unions of *ejidos* to continue to maintain the other Tojolab'al powers, who were interlocutors with all those other forces with which the Tojolab'al coexist on a daily basis and which, on the contrary, were considered opponents or hindrances. The modernising vision of the external organisers took no account of the Tojolab'al vision. For our communities, abundance or drought, health or disease, peace or conflict continued in our communities as a result of the action of powers that continued to live, ignored by these new structures of representation and government. This was why conflicts and even murders were frequent in the communities. These were explained as conflicts of "witchcraft". Passions were aroused even more when the solution the catechists and the leadership of the new organisations offered was the expulsion and persecution of our elders.

Halfway through the 1980s, disintegration of the Tojolab'al communities increased. The evangelical Churches also made known their presence and increased their aggressiveness in order to gain followers. At the same time, other peasant farmers' organisations such as CIOAC competed with those already in existence, polarising the conflicts. Alongside this, political parties burst onto the scene in order to gain

supporters. With all these agents of change, the communities became divided between young and old, between families and between life projects, raising questions regarding the future of Tojolab'al life.

It was within this scenario of multiple confrontations between the Tojolab'al that some of us began to question our own role and mission as leaders of peasant farmers' organisations. After 1985, some organised Tojolab'al began to question the government mechanisms which the Church and social organisations, including CIOAC and the opposition parties, had introduced as innovative elements and which had contributed to damaging the legitimacy of the traditional Tojolab'al authorities. This was why the main intention behind the construction of the *Ejido* Union of Tojolab'al Peoples (UEPT) in 1985 was to create a structure of Tojolab'al government which sought to recover the presence and legitimacy of the elders so that they could return to exercise their functions as they did before they were displaced by the new institutions introduced by the State, churches, political parties and social organisations.

Autonomy and Tojolab'al government

The feeling of increasing weakness with regard to the capacity of our communities to make decisions to resolve our internal conflicts, the gradual invasion of our traditions and our culture as a result of the presence of the churches - Catholic and Evangelical - as well as an intensification in the poverty prevailing in our communities, were basic reference points that favoured the proposal for construction of a new system of organisation in the Tojolab'al region. This proposal was the initiative of a group of Tojolab'al who were active in CIOAC, others who were involved in the unions of *ejidos*, others in the Tojolab'al Council and other bilingual teachers, with whom we shared these concerns. Nevertheless, the *Ejido* Union of Tojolab'al Peoples (UEPT) had the greatest cohesion, formed as a split from the *Ejido* Union of Peasant Farmer Struggle, and incorporated into CIOAC.

The mission that the UEPT gave itself was declared to be that of the search for Tojolab'al autonomy. The concepts were still faltering. We knew that what we were seeking as a main principle was to stay in touch with Tojolab'al thinking. This was why the first political decision of the UEPT was the unanimous rejection of the figure of "advisers". Most of the members of the UEPT who came from the *Ejido* Union of Peasant Farmer Struggle had been born and grown up under the leadership of "northern advisers" and they were not happy with this.

When it was set up, a basic principle of the UEPT was a confidence in ourselves, even given the many errors we would surely commit. But the certainty that unified us was clearly that we ourselves wanted to be the builders of our own hope and the future of our peoples. These were the basic principles that united us. We later found out that this system of government to which our group of Tojolab'al aspired was called "autonomía" (autonomy) in Spanish but in our language we called it *Ja' yipa tojol-ab'aly"* which meant "Tojolab'al power" or "true power" or "power for ourselves, by true men".

The strategy of the UEPT was to seek alliances with other unions of *ejidos* within CIOAC that were more influenced by the pro-peasant perspective than pro-Indian. It was not without difficulty that it was immediately possible to weave a broad coordination with other unions of *ejidos* around the construction of "Tojolab'al power". The area of influence of what was to be the Tojolab'al experience of autonomy thus covered some thirty *ejidos*, that is: A) The *Ejido* Union of Tojolab'al Peoples, made up of members of Jotaná, Buena Vista B'ajwitz, El Rosario B'ajwitz; Napité'; Justo Sierra and San Francisco; Ignacio Zaragoza; Nuevo Mexico; Las Palmas; Vergelito; La Ilusión; 20 de Noviembre; Piedra Huixtla; San Caralampio; Santa Rita, Sonora. B) The *k'achil Yaj b'ej* (new way) Union of *Ejidos* was made up of the *ejidos* of: Veracruz; Jalisco, Mexiquito, Rafael Ramírez, Saltillo, La Libertad, San José, Yaxa, Agua Prieta, Barrios de las Margaritas (Los Pozos), Artículo 127, Francisco y Madero, Cuauhtémoc (with Chuj people) and Ampara Agua Tinta (with Tojolab'al and mestizo population). C) The Land and Freedom *Ejido* Union that reached as far as the forest, made up of La Soledad (Chiapas *ejido*), San Pedro Soledad, Aquiles Serdán, Graciano Sánchez, San Antonio, Buena Vista Pachán, Tabasco, Carrillo Puerto, Gabriel Leyva Velázquez, Nueva Revolución, Santuario, Vicente Guerrero, San Juan del Pozo, San Salvador and Monte Cristo Viejo. All these *ejidos* had representatives in the Tojolab'al government.

Making use of CIOAC's regional coordinating structures of unions of *ejidos*, such as the Union of *Ejidos* of the Tojolab'al People, *k'achil Yaj B'ej* Union of *Ejidos* and the Land and Freedom Union of *Ejidos*, all the communal and *ejidal* authorities were summoned, including the unions' own authorities, that is, the members of the Monitoring and Administration Councils of these unions. The intention was to achieve the great task of "Tojolab'al reunification" and for this, numerous assemblies and meetings were held. One of those many assemblies was held in the *Nuevo Mexico ejido*, the historic seat of the Tojolab'al authorities. There, *ejidal* commissioners and presidents of

communal property, municipal agents, presidents of monitoring councils and native leaders of more than 30 *ejidos* participated.

The most debated subject was a collective reflection regarding the main problems that afflicted us and the search for answers to the question of how to handle those problems as a Tojolab'al group. Regarding internal questions of the communities, it was observed that enormous internal divisions existed in almost all of them, caused by the presence of multiple external agents who operated in our communities. The authorities also said that a serious problem was the increase in drought and disease in the communities, as a result of the attitude of the young people, mainly the teachers and catechists, since - they said - the young people did not believe the messages of our parents and grandparents. The elders requested the Assembly to analyse this issue and to come to an agreement on this serious situation which had been detected.

Finally, it was recognised that we had serious and deep problems, both at community level and the level of the Tojolab'al people as a whole. For that reason, the establishment of this Assembly as a Permanent Assembly and collegiate organ of decision-making was proposed. This proposal was taken to the grass roots of the *ejidos* and the communities for consultation. The proposal was that the Permanent Assembly would work as the highest authority of Tojolab'al autonomy, that its purpose would be to evaluate, discuss and come to agreement on the situation of our people and our communities, to look for a solution to and conciliation of the problems, and to construct Tojolab'al unity for the recovery and exercise of what we, with much optimism and certainty, called the "great Tojolab'al power".

The way in which this "great Tojolab'al power" worked was through the holding of huge Assemblies that brought together different authorities - with the different levels that can be seen in the annexed figure of "the spider's web" - and which took decisions that would affect all Tojolab'al people or specific microregions. Throughout the whole of 1986 and more than half of 1987, a series of large assemblies was held in order to take collective decisions. An important item on the agenda was that of reconciliation, reunifying conflictive relationships between *ejidos* and unions of *ejidos*. Within this context, the idea of the need for a new agreement between the Tojolab'al was being built, an idea which sought their unity and strength.

This act of reunification and Tojolab'al pact could not pass unnoticed by our Gods, and for that reason it was agreed to hold a great

celebration, which would be the first great celebration of Tojolab'al reunification. The context was the first anniversary of the UEPT, in October 1987, in the *Justo Sierro ejido*. The second celebration of Tojolab'al reunification was celebrated in the *Plan de Ayala ejido* in April 1989. Both ceremonial celebrations had the basic aim of dignifying and strengthening the power of the elders and of obtaining Tojolab'al unity.

Similarly, within this context, the idea of creating a unified indigenous front that would bring together the strength of other organisations with whom historic alliances were already maintained and other younger organisations such as the growing Organisation of Indigenous Doctors of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, with whom alliances were being built. These alliances also included our Chuj brothers who were in resistance on the Mexico-Guatemala border, and other organisations of Tseltal and Tsotsil people that were organised in other municipalities of the region. These alliances, together with other relations that were being constructed at national level, were the foundations on which the idea of promoting a national indigenous front was based, whose main aim would be to promote a national indigenous project with the central objective of the recovery of indigenous autonomy, of which we had been stripped, and to work for the recovery of our right of self-determination. It was for this reason that the first great celebration of Tojolab'al reunification was also the scene in which, simultaneously, the proposal appeared for the building and promotion of the Independent Front of Indian Peoples (FIPI) whose slogan, from its founding in October 1987, was *"for the self-determination and autonomy of our peoples"*.

The idea of reunification in order to achieve an agreement around constructing the "great Tojolab'al power" was gaining consensus amongst the Tojolab'al. Antonio Hernández Cruz had been appointed in 1986 to promote this idea and to try to give form to the proposal. In October 1987, the Tojolab'al Council was established, which was to sit in Permanent Assembly made up of more than 300 members. This Tojolab'al independent government was called in our own language *Ja' yipa tojol-ab'aly* (the Tojolab'al power). The structure of this Council was the following:

The highest level of decision-making had always been our elders, sages and doctors who had historically led the Tojolab'al people, in recognition of their powers of communication with our Gods and nature.

In hierarchical order, representation took place in the following way:

- The *rezadores* of the hills, caves and thunderbolts (who have the power to communicate and to transform themselves into thunderbolts to look for food and to take care of the community and its well-being).
- The *pitachig* (they are the doctors or health providers of humans and all the community).
- The midwives (of empirical experience, whose knowledge and permission to exercise were obtained through dreams).
- The guardians of the heart of the maize, the pumpkin, beans, et cetera, and of the direct relation with the Mother Earth-Sky (*Lu'um K'inal*).
- The authorities of the unions of *ejidos*.
- The presidents of the *ejidal* Commissions and of community goods (regardless of whether they belong or not to the unions of *ejidos*).
- The municipal agents.
- The presidents of the Monitoring Councils of the communities and *ejidos*.
- The secretaries of each one of these.
- The catechists of each community or *ejido*.
- The midwives and nurses who gained knowledge in courses and health centres in order to deal with childbirth and first aid (that is, those trained in western medicine).
- The messengers. Appointed by each *ejido* and/or community to take and bring the agreements.
- The leaders of CIOAC in the region of Comitán, Chiapas.
  General coordinator, who fulfils a role of general logistic coordination.

Slowly, this Council was working, insofar as it was exercising its powers of decision-making. In 1989, the mechanism for decision-making was clearly identified. It is illustrative that in one of the meetings of the Permanent Assembly held in the *Veracruz ejido* of the municipality of Las Margaritas, it was unanimously resolved that the mechanism for decision-making was to be that of the "the spider's web", which was a mechanism that consisted of a round form of thinking and deciding rather than a vertical one (see annexed figure of "the spider's web").

In open rejection of the vertical structures that the different external agents had introduced (the classic pattern of the unions of *ejidos*, with vertical structures and the classic appendages that were "their advisers"), we Tojolab'al decided to recover our mechanisms of circular decision-making. In the manner of the spider's web, which spiders

weave from the outside in, the problems raised before the Council and their solutions came via that same mechanism. With constant references to "the spider's web", the principal elders who were at the centre had the power and responsibility to invoke the Gods and forces of nature to seek solution and conciliation to the contradictions and conflicts that were taken before the plenary.

In this structure, we all had a place and a responsibility to provide solutions. For example, "the messengers", who were the last circle of "the spider's web", were in charge of the communication between the Tojolab'al communities and fetched and carried the agreements.

The general logistics coordinator's job was to weave some of the political agreements - together with a numerous group of Tojolab'al leaders, among them the director of IOAC-Fronteriza - between the unions of *ejidos* and to help in the interaction between the Tojolab'al government and the government of the national State.

In the Permanent Assembly, numerous problems were solved. Of special importance were those which had to do with the imparting of justice, control of our natural resources and penetration of the actions of government institutions, the churches, political parties and social organisations. With regard to justice, the Council was involved as the decision-making body that could try to resolve problems before they were channelled to the municipal head. Thus, for example, the municipal agent, the *ejidal* commissioner and/or the president of the monitoring council, as well as the Assembly of the *ejidos* and communities, could solve issues that were within their competence. Nevertheless, when the point arrived at which these were no longer able to conciliate or reach a solution , the issue was taken to the Council for their decision. Before the existence of the Council, many of these cases were channelled to the municipal head of Las Margaritas so that they were resolved via the power of the State. What was new was the displacement of those external powers so that it was we Tojolab'al ourselves who resolved these issues.

Also, with this our own system of government, all issues related to agrarian issues, transport, exploitation of natural resources, works and services, and any other subject related to the presence of governmental agencies in the region, first had to gain validation from the Tojolab'al Council, which exerted territorial power. This control also affected other external agents, who saw their capacity for mobilisation in the region, and thus their influence, limited. The reaction of these actors against Tojolab'al power was forceful.

Tojolab'al power is weakened

The brief period of three years of Tojolab'al power from 1986-1989 was a time of spring for our people's elders and principals. In 1989, a strong offensive on the part of the Tojolab'al young people against the "the spider's web" scheme of government was organised. The structures of control of the catechists, with all their economic, political and moral power, burst in to satanise the structure of Tojolab'al power and to call our government the "rebirth of witchcraft". This attack coincided with another attack that came from the direction of CIOAC, which attacked Tojolab'al autonomy for betraying the class struggle and promoting the formation of new organisational structures such as FIPI. Some Tojolab'al leaders of CIOAC-Fronteriza agreed with this approach and questioned the existence of a "pro-autonomy pro-Indian CIOAC". This combination of factors, alongside a context of weakness, led the Council of Tojolab'al Government to disappear in a climate of generalised withdrawal.

When the "Tojolab'al power" disappeared, the elders were once again persecuted by obscurant intolerance. Again, our wise old people hid their knowledge, were sent into secrecy. It is paradoxical that the young catechists who fought autonomy in the Eighties have now, since 1994, become pro-autonomy. Today, the word autonomy is once again pronounced in the Tojolab'al region but it has been done by reproducing a scheme of vertical structures of control, as their "advisers" have suggested to them, forgetting the horizontal Tojolab'al power. It is deplorable that in the new proposal for autonomy in the Tojolab'al region, since 1994, the *rezadores* of the hills and caves and the guardians of the heart of the abundance (*olomalum*) have been displaced from their roles, and their direction has been replaced by other discourses and other explanations of the world, which are no longer theirs and where their good offices are no longer required.

In this new proposal, the elders are no longer the people in charge of alerting us to the time for sowing, or for cutting wood, the moment for harvesting, according to the signs sent by the grandmother moon (*ixaw*). They are no longer the voices that announce the first rains, according to the signs that the chief of thunderbolts sends, the great chief – the grandfather *Ichamm* - who shouts from the depths of the mountains to give the signal for the safety of the community and the direction of rains; of the oration in the depths of Mother Earth through its great sacred temples (the caves, the thunderbolts of abundance).

Our elders are no longer the vehicles through which - in ceremonies to the Mother Earth-Sky and with offerings (quantities of salt) submitted to the waters and the first mothers of the rivers (*shushepja'*) - we cry out to ask for abundance, health and happiness from the four cardinal points.

Our elders no longer figure in this new model of autonomy that the Tojolab'al catechists have adopted. Many of these elders are now dying and we do not know whether, in the Tojolab'al autonomy of the future, our elders and their powers will have a worthy place or whether - as happens now – they will be displaced and satanised by religious and political intolerance, which has imposed a model of autonomy that is not the autonomous project to which we Tojolab'al all aspire.

Las Margaritas, October 1998

Notes

1 See María Trinidad Pulido Solís "Haciendas de los siglos XVIII y XIX en Comitán" in ***Comitán, una puerta al sur***, ed. by Katyna de la Vega Grajales. Publication of the Government of the State of Chiapas. 1994.

2 We Tojolab'al have actively participated in electoral contests since the Seventies, challenging the mestizo government of the *kaxlanes* (mestizos or anyone not Tojolab'al) in the municipality of Las Margaritas. We consider that Las Margaritas constitutes the focus of regional Tojolab'al power and thus we have sought to govern there. And even if we have not yet managed this, we have always been close to winning. For example, in spite of the electoral fraud which has always robbed us of votes, in 1988 we "lost" the municipal elections by less than 50 votes. On that occasion, this author was candidate for the municipal presidency through an historic and extraordinary alliance which was formed with the Democratic Front of Las Margaritas, which brought together Tojolab'al and mestizos in an unprecedented manner in a fierce struggle for municipal democracy.

3 Ceremonies for the agricultural cycles and water, held in caves and in the fields so that our food may be abundant, and to ask Mother Earth for her forgiveness and generosity in sustaining our children.

AUTONOMOUS PLURIETHNIC REGIONS (RAP): THE MANY PATHS TO *DE FACTO* AUTONOMY

Marcelino Gómez Nuñez

The armed uprising of the EZLN on 1st January 1994 initially contributed to the peasant farmer and indigenous movement exploring unprecedented methods for unity. Prior to this date, the peasant farmer movement in Chiapas had had successful episodes that had allowed it to extract from the government a considerable number of lands for the organisation's different indigenous peoples. The peasant and indigenous fight had revolved mainly around the agrarian fight in the first place and the productive fight in the second.

Although the struggle for land and production was the main form in which the peasant and indigenous movement of the Seventies and Eighties expressed itself, other indigenous struggles had taken different paths, although at that time they were not yet called tendencies. In the Altos region, an indigenous movement was being established which was neither focussed principally around land nor production.

The town of San Cristóbal de las Casas became a place of refuge for more than ten thousand Tsotsil and Tseltal immigrants who had been expelled from their municipalities of origin for ideological reasons - generally for being involved in some organisational fight - or for religious reasons (because they had adopted the Catholic or evangelical religion). The combination of fervour in the communities in defence of their ancestral religion and the interests of the political *caciques* who manipulated the situation to their favour created a climate of intolerance and persecution that left many dead and several thousands more expelled.

Those that were expelled began a stage of resistance in *the city of refuge*. Numerous organisations were set up in the town of San Cristóbal de las Casas. They began by organising to demand their return to their municipalities of origin and for political and religious tolerance. This movement, which began in the Seventies, soon evolved in other directions in the 1980s. During this decade, the fight for immigrant rights in the town began to take on importance. The thousands

of expelled people had to look for somewhere to live and demanded land, services and also jobs. The organisations of those expelled soon incorporated the claims of the urban indigenous for housing, services and jobs into their list of demands.

The confrontation was no longer channelled only towards the municipal authorities and against the PRI (the party in power which was protecting and guaranteeing the actions of municipal leaders). The confrontation soon acquired an interethnic nuance with the city's *ladinos* or *kaxlanes*. Numerous organisations emerged centred around these struggles. Many of them began to articulate an Indianist discourse that was fiercely strengthened in the context of the climate of the 500 years of indigenous resistance. This was expressed through a massively attended march on 12th October 1992 that culminated in the overthrow of the statue of the *conquistador* Diego de Mazariegos.

Coordinating clandestinely, some of those organisations were prepared for the armed uprising; others were surprised by the irruption on 1st January. But after the surprise, dozens of already existing organisations and others that established themselves in the heat of the moment and the opportunity to organise, became united, thus achieving a federation of more than 200 indigenous and peasant organisations in the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations (CEOIC). This attempt at unity was certainly a challenge. Within CEOIC were the so-called historical organisations - old organisations of the agrarian struggle - together with those more recently constituted, who were fighting for agricultural credits for production, as well as the Indianist indigenous organisations that demanded indigenous rights, the urban organisations of San Cristóbal and many others. The ideological diversity was also notable.

Within CEOIC there were openly Zapatista organisations, openly governmental organisations and others who supported the causes of Zapatismo but who did not agree with the armed struggle. What united us all, however, was the certainty of the need for political action to bring about democratic change in the country, which was why we rapidly made the Zapatista cause our own and considered our armed brothers to be in the right. CEOIC was thus an attempt at unity, deeply organic to the EZLN, establishing a civil base that was very useful in preventing repression of the rebels, and which gave them great strength and, above all, great legitimacy.

Unfortunately, this extraordinary effort at unity was of short duration. CEOIC split, as a result of the State Governor's elections of July

1994. One section supported the proposed candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) whilst the other supported the candidate of the opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), thus dividing CEOIC in two. The indigenous Indianist and pro-autonomy organisations fell into the latter category and, months later, we would unite ourselves around another attempt at unity, the Democratic State Assembly of the Chiapas People (AEDPCH).

The building of a proposal for indigenous autonomy within the amalgam that formed the national Zapatista movement was slow and had to confront many difficulties. The first of these was to overcome anti-Indianist resistance within CEOIC. In fact, in January 1994, Indianism was not the main current of political struggle within CEOIC. The People's Independent Front (FIPI), which was the main leader of this trend, was but one voice which, slowly and with patient effort, was gaining allies around its proposals for constitutional reform, for the recognition of the right of self-determination and autonomy of the indigenous peoples. The San Cristóbal organisations were initially the most receptive.

The Indianist proposal was slowly gaining ground by rallying to its cause other organisations of historical weight within CEOIC, such as CIOAC, ARIC-*Independiente* and ORCAO, amongst others. During the short life of CEOIC, the Indianist current managed to get its proposal on the agenda of priorities of this institution. The greatest triumph and the deciding point which turned the balance of the correlation of forces in our favour, was the decision taken - not without different tensions being caused by the CEOIC leadership - on 12th October 1994, to call on the Indian peoples of Chiapas to declare and establish *de facto* Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions.

However, the conviction obtained within CEOIC in favour of the Indianist cause was not reflected within the national Zapatista movement. The EZLN frequently called on national civil society to undertake different actions and mobilisations and we indigenous peoples were always there, demanding recognition of our right of free determination. It has to be said that our proposals did not always gain much space within the priorities of civil society organised around the EZLN struggle. The "indigenous" issue was generally just one more within the tight agenda of the Zapatista movement, which had other priorities.

In spite of these limitations, the Indianist efforts that were made at national level, and in particular the struggle of other indigenous brothers around the country to obtain the establishment of a system of

regional autonomy, strengthened us as a Chiapas indigenous movement and also as a national indigenous movement. After the declaration of autonomy on 12th October, many organisations, communities and towns now looked to us to implement this.[4]

Within this climate, indigenous struggles for autonomy found a strong correspondence in the feelings of Chiapas society, which was also being overwhelmed by feelings of autonomy. On 20th November 1994, the indigenous organisations took over the facilities which had been used until then by the National Indigenous Institute, and we there established – and it remains to this very day - the seat of government of the Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions. In time, the offices of the journalist Amado Avendaño, who had been declared "rebel governor", were also established there. The organisations which joined us to form the Autonomous Regions were: from the region of the Selva Ocosingo ARIC-*independiente y democrática* and the Regional Organisation of Ocosingo Coffee Growers (ORCAO). From the Norte region, this fight was largely led by the Independent Coordinating Body of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), in the Selva Fronteriza region, by CIOAC and the *Toj Tzotze Li Maya*-FIPI, whilst in the region of Valles Centrales, it was the Indigenous and Peasant Popular Council of Chiapas (CIPCCH). Other autonomous processes with which we were in coordination were that of the Marqués de Comillas region (MOCRI), the region of Soconusco, that of Tazas Selva and that of Nicolás Ruiz, amongst other experiences of civil autonomy that appeared in different indigenous regions of the country. [5]

In the Altos region, the declaration of autonomy was taken on board by more than a dozen organisations with a presence in the 17 municipalities that form this region. These organisations were: the Indigenous Organisation of the Altos de Chiapas (ORIACH), the Coordinating Body of Organisations in the Struggle of the Mayan People's Liberation (COLPUMALI), the Convergence of Peasant and Indigenous Organisations of Chiapas (COCICH), the Cooperative Society for the Improvement of our Race (SCOPNUR), the Organisation of Traditional Doctors and Midwives of the Altos de Chiapas (OMPTACH), the Organisation of Indigenous Doctors of the State of Chiapas (OMIECH), the Democratic Movement of Chalchihuitán (MODECH), the Indigenous and Peasant Popular Council of Chiapas (CIPCCH), *Tres Nudos* (OXCHUC), the Independent Organisation of Indigenous Women (OIMI), the Indigenous Organisation of Cancuc (OIC), the *Sjamel Sitik* Organisation (OISS), the Independent Front of Indian peoples (FIPI), the Assembly of Zoque de Amatán (AZA), the Women's Struggle of Tenejapa, the *Muktavinik* Cooperative Society, the *Despertar Maya* Or-

ganisation, the State Coordinating Body of Indigenous Producers of Chiapas (CEPICH), the Cooperative Society for Indigenous Struggle in Chiapas (SOCLICH), Tzoman de Altamirano and the Union of Guadalupe Floriculturists of Zinacantán.

All these organisations constituted and formed the Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions (RAP), which was the first effort at indigenous unity in the strict sense (CEOIC, which held its first Assembly in January 1994, was an expression of the peasant-indigenous movement, whereas AEDPCH coordinated the peasant-indigenous and popular movement), and it achieved this around a programme of autonomy and not the fight for land and production, as had previously occurred in CEOIC and AEDPCH. After CEOIC's declaration of 2nd October 1994 and its proclamation of 20th November 1994, the RAP were formed on 26th February 1995, and the members of the Executive Council appointed in a First Congress held in the *Primero de Enero* community of the town of San Cristóbal de las Casas, with the participation of more than 600 "community parliamentarians".

The conviction that autonomy should be the main demand of the indigenous movement had gained hegemony. This proposal manifested itself in the strength that the 24 indigenous organisations which made up the RAP in February 1995 had accumulated. The "community parliamentarians" were thus named because their main mission was to legislate and to build a proposal for constitutional reform in Chiapas and Mexico. More than 600 parliamentarians were appointed by more than 300 communities making up this autonomous movement.

The appointment of the "parliamentarians" also constituted a break with the established order. Autonomy was interpreted as a rupture with the old order and the establishment of a new one. This meant ignoring the existing authorities – those linked to the State, to power and the establishment - and naming new ones. Their hierarchy was synthesised in the word "parliamentarian", whose mission was to create everything new. In many communities and municipalities that declared themselves autonomous - except in the Norte region – and several "parliamentarians" were appointed to fulfil the different tasks of government which the organisations were to establish. New structures of government were established around the figure of the parliamentarian: community parliaments, municipal and regional parliaments.

On the basis of the community, municipal and regional structures, the Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions (RAP) gave us a structure not unlike the character of a state. The 600 parliamentarians participating

in the Constituent Congress of the RAP, members of the twenty-four organisations who had joined together in this united effort, each appointed a representative of their organisation to form the Executive Council. The twenty-four members of this Executive Council became the coordinators of the twelve committees that were formed.

These committees were: the political and legislative committee, the committee for economic and social development, the committee for justice and human rights, the committee for education and culture, the committee for ecotourism, the committee for transport, the committee for security, the committee for the elderly, the Treasury committee, the Women's committee, the land and territory committee and the committee for natural resources and environment. Since then, and to this very day, the heart of the RAP has been the struggle for recognition of the right to self-determination and the establishment of a system of regional autonomy. The RAP have elaborated their own proposal around this struggle[5]

The autonomist vocation of the members and executive of the RAP was frequently questioned by members of the popular and peasant organisations. Unlike them, the RAP questioned the figure of "advisers" and did not permit their presence at the level of leadership. Examples occurred on a daily basis of how we indigenous had been sidelined in decision-making because others had taken the decisions for us. This situation was causing tensions in our relationships with the other organisations alongside whom we coexisted within AEDPCH, and which had monopolised representation of the Zapatista civil movement. In fact, within this institution, things were by no means monolithic and there was diversity even within the programme of struggle. Since the birth of AEDPCH, the peasant and indigenous organisations had had a different dynamic to that of the popular urban movement. These latter put demands for political and electoral democracy first, whereas the indigenous and peasant organisations had, in addition to this, the demand of the grassroots for improvements in their living conditions, roads, transport, electrification, schools, housing, credits, land and prisoners in the jails.

These differences caused us to see things differently. The urban-popular organisations and the so-called movement of "civil society" of the middle and intellectual classes rejected - out of principle - all relations with the State. For the indigenous and peasant organisations who made up AEDPCH, the demands of the base required the resolution of concrete problems, from providing continuity to the agrarian process, to releasing a prisoner from jail, to questions regarding roads, schools, scholarships and other felt needs of the people. This difference

of approach was generating an internal fracture with regard to what should be understood by autonomy. For the popular sector and the intellectual middle classes - the so-called NGOs - being "autonomous" meant having no relation whatsoever with the government, although many of them were professors or teachers in the university or research centres and had their wages paid by a governmental institution. But they did not question this. In a tendency to radicalise their position, they more strongly questioned the decision of the indigenous and peasant organisations to establish negotiations with the federal government. These negotiations sought to solve the several hundred requests that the "transitional government" had accumulated, historical and unsatisfied needs of peoples and communities that looked with great hope to their new government. Nevertheless, a "rebel government" does not have the capacity to resolve such demands, since, obviously, it is not a government with financial resources, but a symbolic government. The task of taking on the demands of the people and of resolving them had to be assumed by the organisations, and for that reason we were satanised, condemned and isolated.

The most significant condemnation came from the EZLN command. As will be recalled, in an open letter Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos accused the AEDPCH leadership of being "a group of capitulators" and of perpetrating treason, accusing us of "negotiating" with the government[7]. Such a communication was decisive in distancing the relations between the EZLN and the indigenous and peasant movement of Chiapas, and this was the origin of our exclusion from the dialogue process the EZLN was to hold with the government. It was, furthermore, an inexplicable condemnation, since the EZLN itself had established a negotiating table with the government, from February to March 1994, in the so-called "Cathedral Dialogues", which is why this condemnation of all acts of "negotiation" was so unclear. Apparently, what annoyed the EZLN command and their advisers was that we autonomist organisations had had our own will and established our own agenda from the very start. The great paradox of this is thus that whilst some people claim to demand indigenous autonomy, they do so in a limited way, for when we Indians actually demand and take on autonomy, this autonomy is questioned.

The path to autonomy that the RAP constructed has a long history of experience in Chiapas. Dating from our people's struggles to maintain their autonomy, such as the many indigenous rebellions that were experienced - the most significant being the 1712 Tsetsal rebellion and the Chamula rebellion of 1869 – up to the proposals for political autonomy that FIPI promoted in the Tojolab'al region. This is why the

paths to the autonomous declaration of 12th October 1994 were very different and both the protagonists and the processes took unprecedented courses. For example, in Ocosingo, whose autonomous process was promoted by ARIC-*Independiente y Democrática* and ORCAO, this was firstly done through autonomous communities with the appointment and establishment of "community parliamentarians". Once this was consolidated, they began experimenting with municipal autonomies - as, for example, the fight for the Plural Extended Municipal Council - and then regional autonomy. During this process they formed the Coalition of Autonomous Organisations of Ocosingo (COAO) and made alliances with other sister organisations such as the Regional Independent Peasant Movement (MOCRI), the National Coordinating Body of Indigenous Peoples (CNPI) from the forest and other urban-popular organisations of Ocosingo and Altamirano.

In the Norte region, on the other hand, CIOAC headed the overthrow of more than seven town councils, and members established municipal governments and organised around a regional autonomous government. In the municipality of Las Margaritas, members of CIOAC - in alliance with the *Toj Tzotze Li Maya*-FIPI - took possession of the municipal headquarters, overthrew the existing town council and appointed a plural Municipal Council.

It is important to note that, unlike the municipalist movements in mestizo regions, in all cases in which autonomy has been declared in indigenous regions this struggle has had at least three aspects to it: the agrarian struggle, the struggle for municipal power and the struggle to democratise relations between the municipality and the communities. In the Altos region, the blend of these three components caused the whole of this region to undergo a total popular rebellion. Practically all the town councils of Los Altos were challenged and, in some places, replaced by Municipal Councils. In Chalchihuitán, the member organisations of the RAP - such as ORIACH and MODECH - established an Autonomous Municipal Council. In Oxchuc, too, - promoted by the organisations *Tres Nudos* and ORCAO - they changed the council and in Chamula alone, there were two successive changes. This atmosphere of autonomy also flooded the communities, which made efforts to rid themselves of the intolerant and authoritarian practices of previous councils that had prevented free organisation and freedom of thought.

This meant that the RAP could establish more or less fluid mechanisms of negotiation with those town halls that agreed to negotiate with the indigenous organisations, as was the case of the town council of Cancuc, amongst others. This process of internal dialogue which the

RAP has promoted between indigenous peoples has meant these local councils have become plural spaces. Within the RAP, indigenous organisations coexist, whether evangelical, Catholic or traditionalist. We also share this space with the organisations and grassroots bodies of the EZLN, with groups attached to the PRI and the PRD and with communities and organisations which have no party. The RAP are very clear that regardless of any other divisions or differences, our unity as indigenous peoples must come first, and so for us this so-called "reconciliation" is nothing new but is a practice that has been built through daily dialogue between ourselves, in the development of an Indian pact.

In each community and municipality, the way in which autonomy was exercised was manifested in different ways. However, all of them had as their central focus the rejection of the previously existing authorities and the appointment and recognition of new ones. This procedure even worked in those places where the autonomous organisations had not managed to form themselves into a Municipal Council and take over government, for example, in the municipality of Cancuc. In practice, autonomy required the demarcation of a constituency. Within this demarcated area - which was sometimes geographical but sometimes not - individuals and groups were assigned to the constituted government. Committees were set up according to the needs of the autonomous group and the scale of influence of its government. However, the main committees that functioned in almost all the communities and autonomous municipalities were those of justice, land-territory and development, these being the most felt needs of the people.

After 1995, the Fronteriza, Ocosingo and Norte regions became involved in their own processes and gradually they separated. This was quite natural and without conflict. In Los Altos being the original seat of the RAP, the majority of the organisations which were included in the initial formation remained. In this way, and responding to the regional specificity of Los Altos, the RAP have remained established from 1996 to this present day, largely drawing together the organisations of Los Altos and Centro, coordinated with the other autonomous regions through COAECH[8].

In 1996, the General Assembly of the General Council of Parliamentarians, which is the highest authority of the RAP, appointed a new Executive Council to work through the Committees. In 1997 there was a change of leadership[9] and another change on 12th October 1998. Since this date, the author of this chapter has been General Coordinator of the Executive Council of the RAP[10].

The life of the RAP has had its ups and downs. In spite of everything, we are the only federation of organisations that has remained in coordination to date, whilst other initiatives have folded. Indigenous unity is the main cement which keeps this effort together. Some organisations have withdrawn from the RAP and others have joined[11]. Up to 1997, the RAP functioned through committees. In 1998 we changed the system of operation and we now work around "focal work points", of which there are principally two: political issues and self-development. Within the first area, which is organised as a collective, all issues dealing with the administration of justice, constitutional reforms, indigenous unity, the policy of alliances, prisoners' defence and structures of community, municipal and regional autonomy, and others, are resolved. The area of self-development is also organised as a collective, dealing with issues relating to development management, well-being, culture, services and training, among other things.

Of all these issues, there are some which are more dynamic than others. The area of administration of justice usually takes up a substantial amount of time. We have to impart justice quite frequently within the RAP. We operate as a collegiate group, solving problems between the organisations and people attached to the RAP, but also taking on the defence of members of the RAP who are in conflict with other political forces or authorities of the communities and/or municipalities. When dealing with issues, we initially seek reconciliation between those involved. We impart justice in the traditional way of our peoples, applying our own laws, traditional laws, laws that are not written down but which have been traditionally applied and where there is an accepted way of carrying out justice. We try to prevent problems from being channelled to the agencies of the Public Ministries, or to the courts. People prefer this because they want to avoid contact with *ladino* justice, which always mistreats them and leaves them worse off than when they started.

In our law, no-one is sentenced, nor are families deserted. We seek the repair of damages, but without injury to others; wrongs are resolved objectively. For example, if there is a problem of injury, we aim firstly for the person who injured someone to repair that damage; secondly, we insist that there should be mutual respect from that moment on, and finally that there is conciliation or reconciliation between the parties so that nobody is unhappy. We know that if somebody is sent to jail this would be committing a double injustice because he would be abandoning his family and his responsibilities, creating twice the damage because he is going to be deprived of his freedom and the possibility of working for a certain period of time. This is how *ladino* justice is applied. For that reason, people prefer to come

to us. We are the government and they recognise us as such because we know how to solve problems. This is very important for people when accepting somebody in government.

In the RAP, we believe that problems must be solved by the heart and through reason, not by means of unilateral decisions. The hearts of those involved should not be damaged, because this sows nothing but hatred. At the moment, many of the conflicts which are currently crushing the communities are due to the fact that our capacity to negotiate and reconcile has been lost. Many brothers are abandoning indigenous practices of conciliation and have become intolerant because they believe themselves to be the sole owners of truth. This position has increased the problems in our communities and divides us ever more on a daily basis.

In order to defend the interests of our people, we have the obligation to negotiate, that is our task. Without negotiation, we resolve nothing; if we do not dialogue, we cannot put right. Sometimes the RAP, in plenary session, has had to negotiate government to government with the town councils of other municipalities, regardless of whether they are PRI or not. We are not scared of negotiating with the PRI, we think that those who do not negotiate are intolerant and that they want everything for themselves and do not seek conciliation. Our government, as the RAP, is sustained by the indigenous practices of negotiation and conciliation. The idea is to conciliate and for members of the RAP to gain recognition of their existence. Sometimes this recognition is possible, and on other occasions the town councils refuse to admit this diversity. However, in general we have made progress and now the town councils are more sensitive to tolerance and differences.

For us, being an autonomous government means having the capacity to solve problems and to provide solutions to people's needs. In the autonomous communities and municipalities of the RAP, it is the leaders of the organisations who have to provide solutions, resolve problems, organise people to govern themselves. This government has its source at the level of the community. It sets out to ignore the established governments, such as the municipal agents or judges. The community parliamentarians replace them in their functions of justice and negotiation and fulfil the role of communal government, projecting their government as negotiators at municipal level; in all cases they are the representatives of member organisations of the RAP. They must obviously work in coordination with the autonomous regional government, which is the General Council of the RAP and which works through its Executive Council.

The task of the autonomous communities and municipalities of the RAP is complex because it challenges the power and territory of other institutions and organisations coexisting in the same space. Firstly, it challenges the recognition, authority and power of the constitutional or established governments (the declaration of autonomy begins as an act of civil disobedience against the established governments); secondly, the governments of the RAP establish their jurisdiction in accordance with their social base. Within this space, they are generally not alone but coexist with other organisations whom they may challenge or, alternatively, ally themselves with.

This is what happened with our brothers in the EZLN. In some municipalities, such as in Pantelhó, the RAP organisations formed an alliance with the Zapatistas in order to create the autonomous municipality of Santa Catarina. But in the majority of cases, this has not been so. The relationships between the autonomous regions of the north of Ocosingo, Fronteriza and Los Altos and the autonomous communities and municipalities of the EZLN have been fraught with frequent tensions and we have not managed to organise any kind of solid unified movement for autonomy.

We have several differences but essentially it seems to me that there are three main ones:

a) The relationship with indigenous supporters of the PRI. Unlike our brothers in the EZLN, for whom the PRI is the military enemy, for us PRI supporters are indigenous brothers who have a different way of thinking from ourselves and with whom we have to conciliate, accord mutual respect and thus deactivate the effect of the policy of confrontation which the government is encouraging in order to weaken the EZLN.
b) The position with regard to elections. For us, the struggle for power is an electoral one. Unlike our brothers in the EZLN, the RAP believe that the electoral path is a path towards democracy which must be explored; furthermore, unlike the EZLN, the RAP consider that the indigenous struggle is one of achieving political spaces within the structures of the State, both within judicial and legislative powers as well as the executive. In other words, for us autonomy means being a part of government and not being marginalised, as we have been for more than 500 years. We do not want another 500 years of marginalisation, nor of self-marginalisation.
c) Negotiation as a policy. For the RAP, being a government means having the capacity to govern. For the RAP, unlike the EZLN, State resources belong to the people and it is for us to demand that the government fulfils its obligations to Mexican citizens, in particular

the indigenous, who have been historically marginalised. The policy of the RAP is not to ask for resources, gifts and charity from abroad but to negotiate and demand from the government fulfilment of its obligations to our peoples. For us, negotiation is not capitulation, nor a loss but a gain. The struggle of the RAP is not to continue marginalised from the social benefits which the State is obliged to provide, but to achieve a new national social pact which includes us and in which we are able to take decisions.

In spite of these differences, we have many other points in common in the struggle for autonomy. In fact, following the signing of the San Andrés Accords, our Zapatista brothers have largely taken up the struggle for autonomy. This demand has led to stronger unity between the RAP and the EZLN. For the RAP, it is fundamental to achieve an accumulation of political strength which will enable us, together, to extract from the government the fulfilment and complete validation of the San Andrés Accords. In addition, the RAP totally support the EZLN in its position to defend to the last the recognition of our people's right of self-determination and autonomy.

In addition to the actions of community and municipal self-government, the RAP carry out other activities as a regional government. The most notable are those relating to the issue of development, which constitutes one of the main priorities of the RAP; another is the application of already existing international instruments, in order to strengthen our rights. In the exercise of our right to self-development, the RAP appealed to the international agreement of the Indigenous Fund, which Mexico has signed, and the RAP thus benefited from a self-development fund (FAPICH) of 1.5 million Pesos which we could use according to our priorities and interests[12]. Most of the funding was channelled through individual organisations whilst part was used for technical assistance to the projects.

The implementation of this fund faced several problems. Most significant was a resistance on the part of the communities and beneficiaries to pay back the assigned credit. A logic of paternalism and the fact that the money had "come from the government" meant that a significant number of beneficiaries were behind in their repayments. The FAPICH had been conceived as a revolving or seed fund, which would be paid back and thus grow. To date we have not obtained full repayment, which has ruled out the possibility of renewing the fund. Additionally, another significant problem was a lack of technicians and the cost of employing them. This is why a central concern in the RAP is the training of indigenous human resources. Within this area of

concern, two programmes have been established: a) a scholarships programme for indigenous students and b) a Centre of Training for the Self-Development of Indigenous Peoples (CECADEPI).

The Scholarships Programme was obtained as a result of political action which the RAP took as a mechanism of pressure and in an act of civil resistance. We members of the RAP took up position outside the administrative buildings of the State government until they agreed to engage in a dialogue with us. At the negotiating table we managed to get a substantial amount of money granted for a programme of scholarships for indigenous students at secondary, university preparatory, professional and post-graduate levels. This programme did not exist before. In an act of good faith and accepting that the aim of the programme was not to benefit members of the RAP only, we agreed to administer the programme jointly with the Secretariat for Care of Indigenous Peoples (SEAPI). This programme has been in place since 1996 and has increased its funding and diversified. Transparency in its allocation is guaranteed because there is a public call for applicants and different representatives participate in the selection, both from the governmental institution and from the RAP and the society of heads of family of the different ethnic regions of the area. For the running of this programme, these three bodies form two authorities of decision-making: a) the Consultative Council and b) the Autonomous Selection Committee.

Secondly, the concern regarding human resource training led us to hold a consultation with the communities to find out if it was advisable to set up an indigenous training centre within the RAP buildings (which also had function rooms, conference halls and dormitories) and, if so, what sort of profile it should have. The results of the consultation led us to establish the Training Centre for Self-Development of the Indian Peoples (CECADEPI). This centre commenced operating in 1997 and has developed largely around four thematic issues: indigenous autonomy and rights, women's rights, self-development and agroecology. CECADEPI holds workshops and training where an exchange of experiences and the training of promoters constitute the main resources for the training and education of human resources for government.

Other activities of development and training which are implemented by the RAP are related to the interests of the different organisations of which it is composed. The area of craft work is a basic concern of the women's organisations that are members of the RAP. Two organisations have established shops for the sale of their products and frequently make group trips for the sale of their crafts. Another concern is tourism as an economic activity. The organisation FIPI-*Maya Ik* has

established an ecotourism trail. *Maya Ik* is a small business of self-employed indigenous people from the different regions of the area, which has 13 concessions and a microbus with regional routes.

In summary, the struggle to obtain a better standard of living for RAP members does not divert us from our intention to obtain the self-determination of our peoples. It is for this reason that the greatest energy continues to be channelled into training and the building of our own path to autonomy. The RAP participate in the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA) and support and take on board the struggle to get this body accepted as a National Political Grouping (*Agrupación Política Nacional*).

For the RAP, there is not one single path to autonomy, it is a convergence of many paths, constructed by many voices and where our main principle is the capacity for dialogue, negotiation and tolerance. Principles such as these are not alien to our peoples but are, on the contrary, age-old practices.

Notes

1 See María Trinidad Pulido Solís „Haciendas de los siglos XVIII y XIX en Comitán" in *Comitán, una puerta al sur*, by Katyna de la Vega Grajales (Editor). Publication of the Government of the State of Chiapas. 1994.

2 We Tojolab'al have actively participated in electoral contests since the Seventies, challenging the mestizo government of the *kaxlanes* (mestizos or anyone not Tojolab'al) in the municipality of Las Margaritas. We consider that Las Margaritas constitutes the focus of regional Tojolab'al power and thus we have sought to govern there. And even if we have not yet managed this, we have always been close to winning. For example, in spite of the electoral fraud which has always robbed us of votes, in 1988 we "lost" the municipal elections by less than 50 votes. On that occasion, this author was candidate for the municipal presidency through an historic and extraordinary alliance formed with the Democratic Front of Las Margaritas, which brought together Tojolab'al and mestizos in an unprecedented manner in a fierce struggle for municipal democracy.

3 Ceremonies for the agricultural cycles and water, held in caves and in the fields so that our food may be abundant, and to ask Mother Earth for her forgiveness and generosity in sustaining our children.

4 An initial systematisation of the process towards autonomy in Chiapas, both civil autonomy and Zapatista autonomy, can be found in Araceli Burguete "Chiapas: autonomías indígenas. La construcción de los sujetos autonómicos", in *Revista Quórum* N.60. Year VII, May-June 1998. Publication of the Institute of Legislative Investigations of the Chamber of Deputies. Congress of the Union, LVII Legislature. Mexico D.F.

5 See the map which shows these processes of autonomy in the article by Arturo Lomelí in this volume. Note by Aracely Burguete.

6 The RAPs' proposal for autonomy, called "Regiones autónomas pluriétnicas. Una propuesta hacia la autonomía indígena" is published in the collection *La autonomía de los pueblos indios*. Chamber of Deputies. LVI Legislature. Parliamentary Group of the PRD. Mexico D.F, 1996. This document was written for the first executive of the RAP composed of: Agustín Díaz Gómez, Javier García, Marcelino Gómez Nuñez, Agustín Gómez Patishtán, Amado Hernández Jiménez, Juana Hernández Sánchez, Manuel Hernández Santís, Juan López Lunez, Matero Méndez López, Mateo Méndez Santís, Delmar Aly Morales, Fernando Nájera Pérez, Marcos Pérez Gómez, Margarito Ruiz Hernández and Juan Vázquez López.

7 See: CCRI-EZLN General Command. *"Comunicado a la AEDPCH"*., 20th May 1995; *La Jornada* newspaper. Mexico D.F.

8 COAECH is the most recent attempt at unity which different networks of indigenous and peasant organisations have achieved. The main aim of COAECH is the defence of organisations in the face of repression and the joint struggle to gain the validity and fulfilment of the San Andrés Larrainzar Accords, particularly with regard to the right of free determination and indigenous autonomy. The eight large blocks which make up COAECH are: COAO (the Coalition of Autonomous Organisations of Ocosingo), RAP (Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions), CIOAC (Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasants); OCEZ-CNPA (Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organisation-National Coordinating Body Ayala National Plan); UEC (Union of Organisations, *Ejidos* and Communities); FAC-MLN (Extended Front for the Reconstruction of the National Liberation Movement; UMOI (Unity of the Movement of Independent Organisations); and OPEZ (Emiliano Zapata Proletarian Organisation).

9 In 1997, Manuel Díaz Gómez and Roberto Díaz Jiménez were elected to the Executive Council, as coordinator and deputy coordinator respectively.

10 The members of the Executive Council of the RAP appointed for the period October 1998 to October 1999 are: Marcelino Gómez Nuñez and Domingo Gómez Patishtan, coordinator and deputy coordinator respectively. The other members are: Agustín Gómez Patishtán, Fernando Nájera Pérez, Margarito Ruiz Hernández, Manuel Díaz Gómez, Juan López Lunez, Mariano Hernández Pérez, Juana Hernández Pérez, Santos Santís López, Aureliano López López, Martín López Gómez, Cirio Vázquez López, Amelia Pérez Sánchez, Santos Pérez Díaz, Manuel Gómez Girón and Pablo Hernández Hernández.

11 The RAP are currently composed of 16 organisations: the Popular Indigenous Peasant Council of Chiapas (CIPCCH); the Federation of Peasant and Indigenous Organisations of Chiapas (COCICH); the Muktavinik Cooperative Society (SOCOMU); the Independent Front of Indian Peoples (FIPI); *Maya Ik'* (Mayan Wind); the Indigenous Organisation of Cancuc (OIC); the Democratic Movement of Chalchihuitán (MODECH); the Independent Organisation of Indigenous Women (OIMI); the *Sjamel Sitik* Indigenous Organisation (OISS); the Indigenous Organisation of los Altos de Chiapas (ORIACH); the Organisation of Indigenous Producers of the State of Chiapas (OPIECH); the Council of Indigenous Representatives of los Altos de Chiapas (CRIACH); the Organisation of Traditional Doctors and Midwives of los Altos de Chiapas (OMPTACH); the State Union of Indigenous Producers of Chiapas (CEPICH); the Popular Peasant and Worker Organisation of Chalchihuitán (OCOPECH) and the Organised Women's Struggle of Tenejapa.

12 The fund was called "Fund for the Self-Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas (FAPICH)".

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE AUTONOMOUS NORTH REGION AND THE EXERCISE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT[1]

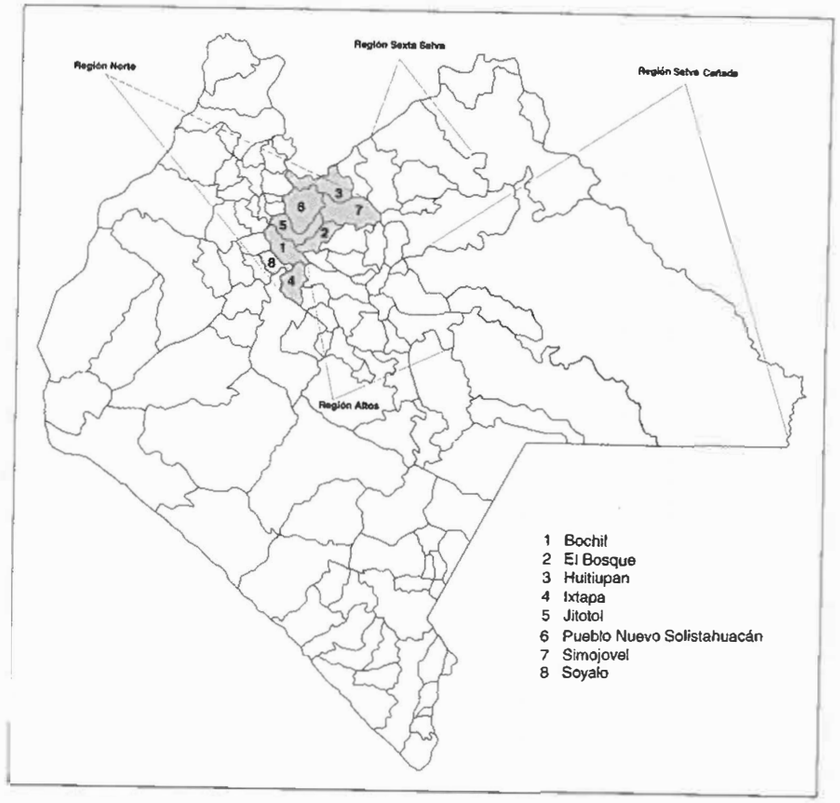
Miguel Gonzáles Hernández
Elvia Quintanar Quintanar

The Indian peoples of Chiapas are today making huge efforts to defend their identity. At the same time, they are demanding their right to form part of the Mexican nation, but without detriment to their condition as specific peoples. The Zapatista uprising of 1st January 1994 reinforced the struggle of the indigenous peoples of the country, and in particular the peoples of Chiapas, to be recognised as peoples with their own territory, identity, culture and rights, and not as marginalised Mexicans.

Since then, different experiences of autonomy have been developed in the Chiapas region, which have simultaneously meant: the reaffirmation of our identity as peoples; a symbol of struggle against a system that has condemned the country's indigenous population to misery, marginalisation and obscurity, and the demand for respect of our rights.

Neither the dirty war, nor the strategies of counterinsurgency unleashed against the people of Chiapas by the federal and state governments - the extreme militarisation of the Indian regions, the lack of fulfilment of the San Andrés Accords, imprisonment of the Zapatista grassroots and members of the popular organisations, the dismantling of the autonomous municipalities, persecution of the constitutional town councils which had been won by the opposition, and direct attacks against the population at the hands of security, and paramilitary forces - have managed to break the will of the people and organisations in our search, by different means, for a right and worthy life for everyone. In this search the demand for, and construction of, the autonomy of our people has remained one of the main underlying political ideologies.

The history of Chiapas, from the Spanish invasion to the present day, tells of different episodes in the struggle of the Indian peoples to reaffirm our right to continue to survive. Most significant was the 1712



Map of the North region

Tseltal rebellion and the so-called "caste war" of 1867. The current process of building the autonomy of the Indian peoples of Chiapas has continued over the last 24 years. From the Indigenous Congress of 1974 onwards, organised by the Diocese of San Cristóbal, the struggle for the identity of our people has been reconstructed, including our right to be taken into account, coordinating between the different communities of each region and between regions in order to resolve the numerous weaknesses and abuses to which we have historically been subjected. From that first rupture with the established colonial order arose the main indigenous peasant organisations in the state; the same as those which were built around the struggle for land (which was heavily monopolised by a small number of landowner families), for marketing products under fairer conditions, and for respect of human rights.

During the period from 1990 to 1992 the "Call for ethnic demands" took place within the framework of the commemoration of the 500 years of indigenous resistance, which for Chiapas meant a process of awareness raising regarding the rights of Indian peoples, and which reached its climax in the march of 12th October 1992 in San Cristóbal de las Casas, with the participation of more than 10,000 indigenous people from the different organisations and regions of the state, and the symbolic demolition of the statue of the conqueror, Diego de Mazariegos.

It could be said that, over the last 24 years, the Indian peoples of Chiapas have been constructing ourselves as autonomous political subjects on the basis of three processes: a) the reaffirmation of our cultural identity, the recovery of our territories and the reestablishment of our customs; b) the struggle for the exercise of power, both in the communities, the municipalities and - with broader alliances - in the state government; and c) the desire to be seen as regional subjects, whilst also maintaining a clear sense of belonging to the Mexican nation.

This new stage in our struggle for the construction of regional autonomy is the tiny grain of sand that we Tsotsil, Zoque and Chole from the North region of Chiapas have contributed to the construction of democracy in our country.

The construction of autonomy in the North Tsotsil region

The autonomous North region is made up of the municipalities of Ixtapa, Soyaló, Bochil, Huitiupán, Simojovel, Jitotol, El Bosque and Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán, located in the central zone of the state of Chiapas, covering a surface area of 2,252 square kms (see map). The indigenous population of the region constitutes more than 80% of the total and is composed of Tsotsil (60%), Zoque (12%) and Chole (8%).

The struggle of the Indian peoples of the North region of the state has been a successful movement: we have obtained, over the last 20 years, the recovery of our territory after several centuries of dispossession, subordination and exploitation - mainly *encomiendas* and large estates. The contemporary stage of this struggle had its roots in the 1970s, when the movement of agricultural workers and peasants obtained recovery of our territories and managed to get almost a third of the region, approximately 22% of the total area of the municipalities of the North region, transferred into our hands. The struggle continued, in a second phase, with the transformation of agriculture in the region on the basis of a peasant economy, reincorporating and developing

traditional techniques that corresponded to our people's true needs and ways of seeing life. We soon moved on to building different forms of economic organisation that enabled access to funding and retention of the small surpluses generated by the peasant economy.

From 1994 onwards, and within the framework of the Zapatista uprising, we indigenous peoples of the North moved on to another stage in the struggle. The strengthening of Indian identity and the demand for our autonomy as peoples has been stronger since then. Its expression took shape in the regional desire to form a government and this was accomplished by the taking of the municipal buildings and the establishment and exercise of new municipal governments from 1995 onwards. This was all within the framework of a strategy of regional cohesion as stated in the Declaration of Autonomy of the North Tsotsil region, issued on 12th October 1994, and its consequent construction.

This complex process, which began with the recovery of territory and moved on, from this basis, to the construction of the region in its different aspects: economic, social, cultural and political, constitutes the mechanism by which we peoples have defined our development, as well as representing the organisational continuum of popular struggle in the region.

In all, we identified three processes that were essential to the fabric of the autonomous experience of the region: a) the recovery of territory on the part of the Indian communities; b) the fight for municipal government as the exercise of local power; and c) the construction of regional autonomy.

Although in this brief essay, for reasons of presentation, we will present these three aspects separately, it is nevertheless important to note that in the overall analysis such processes must be understood as components of a single process of autonomous reconstruction of the life of the Indian peoples, Tsotsil, Zoque and Chole, from the North region of Chiapas.

On the basis of the autonomous experience of the North region, we have understood that autonomy is made up of 4 basic components: territory, jurisdiction, self-government and our own legal competence. The first three correspond to the 3 processes that make up our experience of autonomy. The component relating to our own autonomous competence is the least developed component. Up to now, the Mexican State has not had the political will to establish the mechanisms that make possible the accomplishment and application of autonomy which the federal government accepted in the legal document of the San Andrés Accords. The opportunity that the Mexican government had at

San Andrés to agree to a new relationship with the Indian peoples based on recognition of our specificity as peoples and, on the basis of that, to reconstruct a political consensus and social fabric which would enable the transformation of the armed struggle into a democratic exercise of government, was criminally wasted.

Unfortunately, there is currently not much strength with which to advance in this direction. There is currently no space for negotiation in which State decentralisation and recognition of autonomous regions and municipalities could be agreed. In the face of this deficiency, most of the organisations and towns have looked inwards and, in that way certain advances in internal consensus and in the practices of self-government of the Indian peoples have been achieved, which are being strengthened in the region. In the case of the North region, we are trying to stretch current laws to make a worthwhile autonomy through municipal management. Our experience has taught us that there are many limitations to obtaining this. In any case, the financial and administrative policy of decentralisation of roles and resources towards the municipalities constitutes a small crack, a ray of light, through which the people are beginning to gain some powers in the municipal sphere.

In the following pages, we will briefly spend some time in the analysis of the different components that make up the autonomous process of the indigenous peoples of the North region of the state of Chiapas.

The recovery of territory

The struggle of the Indian peoples of the North Tsotsil region for the recovery of their lands is a continual process dating from the times of the Colony and which manifests itself at different times in our history. This struggle has its origins in the almost absolute concentration of land into the hands of the estate owners, who accumulated it over a long period of time.

It was in the 16th century that estates began to appear in the State - based on a process of dispossession of territories and relocation of indigenous communities through a system of *encomienda* and agrarian servitude. There then followed a period of stagnation. Nevertheless, during the 19th century, this model of estates gained a new lease of life, through plantations of a capitalist nature, coffee producers and cattle ranchers. Within this model of estates it was possible to revive relations of production based largely on the particular system of agrarian servitude which was naturally inherited from the *encomienda,* and on the exploitation of the indigenous population in order to satisfy the need

for manual labour, imposing a culture of domination, of contempt and subordination of the indigenous, whose lives were tied - like bonded labourers - to the property, through relations of servitude.

To counter this process, the region participated in the different moments of Indian resistance such as the Tseltal rebellion of 1712, which extended from Cancuc to Guardianía de Huitiupán and Simojovel. The repression that so harshly followed this rebellion, as with the caste war of 1867, was the cause of large Tsotsil migrations from the Altos region, which led to a reduced number of communities (the existence of only two communities in Simojovel is recorded: Pueblo Nuevo Sitalá and Santa Catarina), and an enormous army of manual labour made up of the bonded labourers on the estates.

The expansion of the coffee plantations at the end of the last century was shaping both the work processes and the human concentrations. The estates were made up of landowners emigrating from San Cristóbal de las Casas and Comitán, as well as of indigenous people coming from the municipalities of San Andrés Larrainzar and San Juan Chamula, who initially came to sell their labour; they subsequently remained as bonded labourers on the estates.

It was not until the 20th century that we began to see a reversal in these tendencies. During this century there were two moments in the struggle for land in the region which had positive results. First was the demand for lands upheld in the Law of Agrarian Reform during the first decades of this century and which, within the framework of the Cardeno government (1934-1940), led to the first *ejidos.* Around 35 *ejidos* were set up in this period, twenty-five of them in Simojovel and Huitiupán and the rest in other municipalities of the North region. It is worth noting the case of El Bosque, which was the only settlement – and which remains in existence to this day - under a system of communal property. This town was the product of a Chamula migration following the Tseltal rebellion of 1712.

The scarce number of *ejidos* shows the great political strength of the region's estate owners in avoiding application of the agrarian reform. In spite of their small number, however, these *ejidos* formed an important focus of support for the agrarian struggle of the Seventies and they enabled the economic and cultural reproduction of the peasant groups.

Secondly, at the beginnings of the 1970s, various processes came together to determine a wider mobilisation in the population of the region's struggle for land. These had the result of rupturing the

economic and political structures of the estates: the agrarian crisis that faced the country as a whole; the increasing cattle ranching that was translated into dismissal of labourers and a strong displacement of the areas destined for maize by pasture, as well as the different hydraulic works in Chiapas. These all shook the foundations of the old-fashioned balances that maintained the traditional estate. An additional component, in the case of this region, was the presence of liberation theology as the ideological ingredient which enabled a break with old and strong atavisms of subordination. Another explosive element was the threat of lands being flooded through the planned building of the Itzantúm reservoir which, if constructed, would mean the flooding of 11,000 hectares of the best agricultural territories of Simojovel and Huitiupán. This combination of determining factors created the conditions for the agrarian rebellion in the region during the Seventies.

Grouped around the Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), a strong process of territorial recovery began. The starting point had been the takeover of the first estates in Huitiupán in 1969, which was followed by a broad process of regional organisation in the defence both of their rights as agricultural labourers (being formed as a union of agricultural workers) and for possession of land. The magnitude of the land grabs and take-overs was so great that, by 1985, 13,355 hectares of 102 estates in the municipality of Simojovel had been invaded, representing 28% of the area of the municipality. The result was a deep change in the regional situation. Whereas in 1980 there were 720 estates in Simojovel and Huitiupán and only 25 *ejidos*, by1990, this relationship had been completely reversed and only 2 estates remained, whilst 207 *ejidos* had been established.

This wave of land grabs was not limited to those municipalities, but soon took on an expansive form and extended to other municipalities. Although Simojovel and Huitiupán were the epicentres of the outburst, it advanced towards the surrounding municipalities at different moments: it arrived in El Bosque in 1981; Bochil in 1983; Jitotol and Nuevo Pueblo in 1986. This characteristic of staggered expansion made possible the support that was necessary for the resistance. A regional network, centred to a great extent around the members of CIOAC in the different municipalities, made possible the existence of a regional support and solidarity network for the communities and municipalities that were fighting for land.

This stage developed as a regional process but maintained networks of coordination and a sense of belonging within the agrarian struggle

of the state of Chiapas as a whole, as well as on a national level. Through joint operations, we coordinated with other organisations such as the Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organisation (OCEZ) and, to a lesser extent, the Rural Association of Collective Interest (ARIC). We also coordinated with other regions organised around CIOAC, such as the border and Soconusco. The national impact of the struggle was a great support, which was obtained in coordination with the national CIOAC. At this stage of the struggle, huge mobilisations of peasants were taking place, and it was the Tsotsil communities of the region (mainly from the municipality of Simojovel) that in October 1983 made the first great march to Mexico City, as part of a strategy of strong mobilisation, combined with different spaces for negotiation.

In synthesis, as can be seen, from 1994 onwards, the indigenous struggle for recovery of land in the north of the state was a successful process. A total of 40,000 hectares were recovered, representing a large proportion of the arable land of the region.

Nevertheless, from 1994 onwards, within the framework of the Zapatista uprising, a new stage of land recoveries - which put an end to the system of estates and even of private property in the municipalities of Simojovel, Bochil and Huitiupán - took place and significantly strengthened social ownership in Ixtapa, Jitotol and Nuevo Pueblo, as well as making progress in the adjacent municipalities to the north of the region, such as Rayón, Solosuchiapa, Tapilula and Reforma. During this last stage, the Tsotsil of the North region managed to recover another 10,000 hectares of land.

It is important to note that, although as a result of these waves of land appropriations, the physical process of land recovery is now practically concluded with regard to the North region, the aspect of legal recognition of its ownership is still far from fully obtained. The mechanisms that the Mexican government has created to solve the agrarian conflicts - such as trusts to buy land from the owners and give it to the peasants, agrarian agreements with the peasant organisations, mechanisms of land valuation, among other concepts for the negotiation of appropriated lands - have invariably been applied partially, privileging pro-official peasant groups and involving intense confrontation with the independent organisations. The last stage in this struggle for land - since 1994 - has been particularly delicate, as the government has frequently tried to use agrarian negotiations as a counterinsurgency strategy against the Zapatistas.

In summary, with the last push after 1994, we indigenous peoples of the North region of Chiapas found ourselves arriving at the end of the millennium with most of our territories recovered. The long process of recovery of land was to lay the material foundations for the region's autonomy, given that wide extensions of land now lay in the hands of peasants and indigenous people, constituting the territorial space and basis of material resources for the reproduction and development of the communities and peoples. What was to follow was the struggle for political power, for control of regional jurisdiction.

Construction of the autonomous region

a) The declaration of autonomy

On 12th October 1994 the Declaration of Autonomous Regions was issued by the different indigenous organisations of Chiapas, during the commemorative march of the 502nd anniversary of the Spanish conquest, and within the framework of the electoral struggle for the Democratic State Assembly of the People of Chiapas (AEDPCH).

This declaration signified the synthesis of two important processes that the indigenous organisations of Chiapas were building: the strengthening of our identity as Indian peoples, developed during the "Call for ethnic demands" which was held within the framework of the 500 years of Indian resistance in October 1992 and which caused the reassessment both of our cultural identity and of the forms of government that we indigenous peoples had developed over the centuries and which is now underlying our current demands for autonomy. The second process was the people's demand to exercise the right to self-government, within the framework of the Zapatista uprising and in condemnation of the electoral fraud that Amado Avendaño Figueroa had suffered. Avendaño Figueroa had been chosen as Governor elect by the popular and democratic forces within AEDPCH as a whole; this demand for self-government crystallised in the unanimous civil resistance aimed at rejecting the fraud he suffered.

The Indian peoples thus vindicated their right to govern themselves within a framework of civil resistance organised against the imposition of government.

In the case of the North Tsotsil region, the decision to declare itself an autonomous region was taken in the "First Regional Encounter of the Communities of the North of Chiapas", held in the Lagunita *ejido*

in Bochil on 29th and 30th September 1994, organised by CIOAC. 100 delegates participated in this encounter, from 54 communities of the municipalities of Huitiupán, Simojovel, Bochil, Ixtapa, Jitotol, Nuevo Pueblo, Rayón and Solosuchiapa.

This decision was taken within the framework of the reflection on the continuation of our struggle, at a moment which was strongly affected by other processes that were developing in the region, such as the Zapatista war, the fight for a transitional government and control of a number of municipalities, as well as civil resistance.

Initially, the encounter's proposal was to declare itself a "liberated region" in which the people and their *rebel governor*, Amado Avendaño, would govern. The decision was finally agreed upon and, in coordination with the rest of the organisations of CEOIC, it was decided to issue the declaration of autonomy in San Cristóbal de las Casas on 12th October 1994.

b) Autonomy and the exercise of municipal government

After this declaration, a "2nd Encounter of the Autonomous North Region" was held on 17th October in Soyaló, where the decision to constitute an autonomous region was ratified. This meant, on the one hand, a rupture with all negotiations with the federal and state governments, until the triumph of Amado Avendaño as governor of the state was recognised; and on the other, the exercise of municipal government from a perspective of autonomy, in the seven municipalities which we had won.

In order to discuss and define how to govern our municipalities in an autonomous manner and how to construct our regional autonomy, 2 massive encounters, along with workshops for reflection, assemblies and meetings were held. The encounter had several purposes: to support the recently formed Municipal Councils and, therefore, show the commitment of the region as a whole to the specific struggles of each municipality. We are a region because we provide mutual support to the struggles of each individual component and to joint struggles and we are building ourselves as a region through joint mobilisations – first to obtain land and later to take over the municipalities. In this way, the demand for autonomy, as the right to govern ourselves, to decide within our home territory, was being addressed in the way we wanted this to take shape. Our whole reality was full of questions: how do we want to live? How do we want to work our lands? How are we going to govern our region? What will our government be like?

How will we relate to the federal and state governments and *kaxlanes?* How will we govern our municipalities? These were only some of the questions we were asking ourselves and to which we were seeking collective answers through these events.

We have had to look for many answers to these questions, with much imagination, creativity and, above all, a spirit of unity. The process has been a slow and difficult one, but the definition of our programme of struggle for autonomy is becoming increasingly clear, obtained through internal debate. The issues that were clarified from 1994 onwards were: the concretion of regional autonomy and the exercise of municipal government. The idea that has predominated in the internal debate has been the following one:

> *"We are going to govern our autonomous region by reaching agreements between all the municipalities and all the communities, in an organised way the whole town will work for our Municipal Councils. We are going to make our own laws."*

Within the collective will there was a demand for democracy, for a new way of relating to the authorities. The participants spoke thus in the meetings:

> *"[This municipal government must be] ... a democratic, honest, autonomous government, made up of indigenous people of each community who keep the whole people informed... it is going to be a transitional government to build our own laws together with the people. "*

The new municipal autonomous government was conceived as democratic, transitory, participative, not isolated from other levels of government but coordinated with them. However this would be a coordination *"based on respect for our municipal and regional autonomy. Within this respect, the federal and state governments must withdraw all the public security and judicial police from our municipalities; the offices in the region must be administered by the people and not by those who do not know our communities and our language. Budgetary resources must be provided with which to commence work within the different communities".*

As can be seen, autonomy was initially understood as the process by which local government could be exercised in a democratic manner, laying the foundations for a greater democratising transformation, and coordinated with the federal and state governments in a real process of decentralisation, from an attitude of respect for regional and municipal autonomy, where the region, the municipality and the peoples gain their own competencies.

c) Strategies of regional coordination

During 1994, the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations (CEOIC) was formed, initially called for by the governmental institutions and immediately taken up by the more than 280 organisations of which it was to be composed. This expression of state coordination of organisations had its regional equivalents. Concretely, in the North Tsotsil region, the Regional Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations (CROIC) was formed, bringing together the 8 autonomous Municipal Councils with around 20 social and economic organisations of the region in a strategy of political coordination and joint management for solutions to their demands.

The CROIC constituted an expression of regional coordination on the part of the different organisations of which it was composed, obtaining important advances in the democratic management of resources, discussion with the development projects' offices, in the electoral political struggle and the consequent defence of Amado Avendaño's transitional government. As noted above, the decision to declare itself an autonomous region was the initial motivation behind CIOAC. Nevertheless, already partly a reality, this proposal was gradually being consolidated with other organisations - within the framework of the CROIC - and they arrived at the moment of civil resistance which was carried out jointly with the rest of the social organisations with presence in the region.

And so the autonomous North region was formed, expressed through the coordination of a series of relationships between the different organisations which constituted it; relationships which, in addition to joint management, enabled the construction of a permanent space for discussion on the situation of the armed conflict in the state and, above all, the process of dialogue, the agreement of joint operations against the militarisation of the region and the defence of the right of the Chiapas population to refuse to pay electricity tariffs and to claim preferential tariffs in relation to those of the rest of the country.

However, things were neither stable nor monolithic. From the second half of 1995 onwards, and as a result of the decision of the EZLN to maintain civil resistance indefinitely and to refuse to participate in the electoral process for the municipal town councils, the North region was experiencing two perspectives on autonomy: a) that proposed by the EZLN, which implied a permanent rupture in their relations with the different governmental offices, the declaration of *the autonomous municipality* of El Bosque and the loss of the constitutional governments

of Simojovel and El Bosque itself; b) secondly, the other vision, the perspective promoted by the CIOAC and the PRD to participate in the electoral processes and to concentrate on the search to win the municipal town councils by way of elections and to restore negotiations with the other levels of government, fighting for a respectful relationship with municipal and regional autonomy.

The Struggle for Municipal Power and the Exercise of Government

a) The struggle for municipal power

The struggle for the democratic exercise of municipal government, which includes the participation of all (and within this concept of all, the indigenous population of the region form an absolute majority) in the decisions and the execution of government actions, is an old path in the people's task of rebuilding a life of autonomy in the region.

Unlike the other main organisations which arose in Chiapas during this stage of the agrarian struggle (OCEZ and ARIC being the most representative), from the start CIOAC represented the struggle for public power and one of its tasks was to participate in the electoral processes.

Almost from the start, the region's communities' struggle for land took place with support from CIOAC and this organisation's links with the different parties of the Left as this latter evolved (the Mexican Communist Party, PCM; the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico, PSUM, and the Party of the Democratic Revolution, PRD). This contributed to the fact that the political consciousness of the population was expressed not only through its immediate demands but also through the need to accede to the spaces of power and popular representation, such as town and municipal councils.

Participation in the elections, through the political parties, was a constant from 1985 onwards, motivated to a large extent by the social organisations which were strengthened by the land conquests. There was systematic participation in the electoral processes, although with no significant advances being achieved. Nevertheless, things changed in the 1990s. From 1992 onwards, the outlook changed drastically, with a process of municipalist insurgency commencing in the region. For example, over the Easter of 1992, and because of the burning, on the part of pro-PRI groups, of the regional office of CIOAC (a small building in an urban quarter of Simojovel, obtained through the contributions of the communities and which at that moment represented the bastion of the Indian communities in a town dominated by *kaxlanes*[2] and from which the Indians had been systematic and violently excluded) one of the most significant movements of popular and peasant struggle in the history of Chiapas prior to the Zapatista uprising was triggered, known as the "*Simojovelazo*". On 12th April 1992, virtually all the communities of the municipality of Simojovel that belonged to the different organisations were unified in a struggle against the pro-PRI and mestizo municipal government. They took possession of the building of the municipal presidency, and the communities took into their own hands the running of the municipality for more than 60 days, under the banner of a clear demand for indigenous self-government.

During this time, the communities organised themselves into committees: to protect the municipal buildings, to block the access roads to the town and the communities, to distribute services and basic foods - water, light, gas, tortillas. Alongside, they entered into long negotiations with the state government, headed by González Garrido. These negotiations obtained the removal from office of the town council and the formation of the first plural Municipal Council of the region, which was nevertheless still headed by a pro-PRI *kaxlan*.

An analysis of this brief "*Simojovel commune*" has yet to be made but we can confirm that it caused significant reactions: a reaffirmation in the consciousness of the communities of their right and possibility of governing themselves, which motivated others to channel their struggle towards taking new municipal presidencies. It should also be noted that greater attention on the part of the state government towards the communities was gained, so that they benefited from social works such as schools, water, housing etc., in *de facto* recognition of their ownership of the land. This recognition had yet to be achieved in most of the communities because the agrarian formalities had not been completed.

There was also another unanticipated effect: from then on, there was an increasingly defensive position on the part of the rich *kaxlanes* and the beginning of military preparation on the part of groups of cattle ranchers from different parts of the state – the most well-known being the case of the cattle dealers of Ocosingo - who interpreted the struggles of the early Nineties as a warning of a presumed onslaught by the Indians against the interests of the *caciques*. From then on, the traditional *white guards* or gunmen of the large estate owners began to change, their profile becoming increasingly that of paramilitary groups, which is precisely what they have become in recent years.

From this second phase of the movement onwards, the North region underwent a strong political-administrative reconstruction. The government was scared and decided to transfer the offices of judicial power and the executive representatives (different offices) that had been based in Simojovel to the neighbouring municipality of Bochil, claiming "a lack of conditions enabling them to remain in that municipality."

Following the same model of the staggered phase that was applied during the stage of land grabs, and motivated by the example of Simojovel, two other attempts at recovery of the municipal government on the part of the indigenous communities of the region took place during 1992: in Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan and Huitiupán. In December 1993, in the lead up to the Zapatista uprising, the peasant and indigenous organisations of the North region led a strong community movement to take over the presidency. But this was crushed by elements of the Public Security Police without removal of the town council being obtained. Within this community uprising the valiant participation of the missionaries of the convent of Huitiupán must be mentioned, who by their courage and presence managed to prevent the repression from being more brutal.

The struggle entered another stage after the Zapatista uprising of 1st January 1994, which gave a significant boost to the struggle of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas.

In the case of the North region, the turmoil increased. In the first days of June, and as a result of the death of a Tsotsil from one of the communities at the hands of the officers of the court, virtually all of the communities of Bochil initiated a mobilisation of more than 40 days, during which the offices of the municipal presidency were seized, public blockades of highways were undertaken and marches were held. By 7th and 8th July, the situation had reached levels of extreme tension, two warehouses of the main *caciques* of Bochil, who were identified by the population as the most recalcitrant enemies of the communities and who had refused to cooperate during the whole time of the mobilisation, were looted. The strength acquired achieved the dismissal of the town council, which was made up of *kaxlanes* from the municipal authority. This action constituted a turning point in the region since this was the beginning of the formation of the first Municipal Council made up of indigenous people from the communities that belonged to the different social organisations.

In Ixtapa, in August, and as a result of the struggle to obtain resources from the official PROCAMPA programme without political

conditions, the Francisco Villa Peasant Committee was established within the framework of the elections of 21st August, and this undertook different mobilisations prior to the electoral period until delivery of the PROCAMPO programme was achieved.

Following fraudulent elections, and as a result of a vote which had been mainly in favour of the PRD, the municipal president threatened the communities with the withdrawal of government support. Prior to this threat, on 28th, those in disagreement took over the offices of the municipal presidency, demanding dismissal of the town council and the appointment of a Municipal Council made up of members of the communities. Recognition of this was finally obtained after more than 20 days of intense mobilisations, mainly seizures and closures of highways.

During the months of October and November of that same year, and in order to complete the organisation of regional power, the presidencies of Huitiupán, Simojovel and Soyaló were simultaneously taken in a regional strategy of struggle for local power, in which there was a joint defence based on the clear definition of the recovery of the North region by the Indian peoples. The whole region supported the struggle of these three municipalities and negotiations with the State Congress were established with an agreement not to curtail any uprising until the three cases were resolved. Finally, on 10th November, the Municipal Councils of Soyaló, Huitiupán and Simojovel were taken.

In November 1994, and in the certainty that "the municipality belongs to us" through having won the August elections, the communities and some sectors of the town of Jitotol, took over the building of the municipal presidency, establishing the respective Municipal Council there.

This massive seizure of municipal presidencies in the region (as in other municipalities of the state) was always against the backdrop of the elections of 21st August when, through the PRD, Amado Avendaño contested the government of the state and obtained a majority vote in a large number of municipalities, including all those of the North Tsotsil region. These results gave the communities the certainty of majority and hence legitimacy as those who should exercise the power of government in their municipalities.

And so, by the end of 1995, government by indigenous people from the different organised political and social expressions of the whole of the region had been achieved, thus commencing the first exercise of municipal power on the part of the indigenous communities of the region.

The construction of regional autonomy began from the level of the municipal authorities, given that the region existed neither as a government body nor as a body of local identity recognised by all sectors of society but as a political body which was organising through the links of solidarity and common struggle of the indigenous peoples, who stated that to continue building regional autonomy they would progress by:

> *"coming to agreements between all the municipalities and all the communities to draw up our own laws, our own regulations for each municipality, and to make the most of our forests, our waters and all our resources, looking after nature."* [3]

b) The exercise of Government

The exercise of government on the part of the Indian peoples of the North region started with the establishment of the municipal Councils that were won in 1995. During this year, a very intensive learning curve was experienced regarding what the task of governing from institutional spaces and in a context wider than that of the community really meant.

For groups and organisations established within the context of a generally confrontational struggle in opposition – albeit with concrete negotiational tactics – the experience was a hard and instructive one: to recognise that demanding that things be done is not the same as having to do them yourself; to know and to suffer the limitations that administrative policies and fiscal requirements impose on the use of resources; to avoid the traps and seductions of the state and central governments; to face up to a new relationship with the communities and the organisations to which they belong, for whom the authorities of the town council were no longer the leaders who headed and accompanied the fight but the ruling class of whom demands had to be made and support given. This new relationship meant confronting new challenges and new searches in the construction of the processes of citizen participation and in the concrete exercise of autonomous democracy.

In October 1995, elections were held for the municipal town councils and the local Congress in Chiapas. Of the municipalities making up the North Tsotsil region only four municipalities were won: Bochil, Jitotol, Ixtapa and Huitiupán. Unfortunately, Simojovel and El Bosque were lost. There, the Zapatista grassroots of the communities decided not to participate in the electoral process, and so the former was won by candidates of the PT and the latter by those of the official party, the PRI. However, the social force persisted, to such a degree that although the

elected government was from the PRI, the Zapatista grassroots nevertheless established an autonomous – and parallel - municipal government that even managed to sit in session in the municipal palace, although without maintaining any relationship with the state government or the local Congress. This autonomous Zapatista municipality was brutally destroyed on 10th June 1998 by Governor Roberto Albores Guillen.

In the case of Soyaló, after fiercely challenging the electoral fraud, the establishment of a plural Municipal Council was achieved. In Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan, the municipality was lost due to the decision, of indigenous sectors not to vote through distrust of the appointed candidate, due to his unclear commitment to the indigenous communities.

In spite of these ups and downs, the autonomous North region remained in effect from 1996 to 1998, organised around solidarity and government actions. During this period, the exercise of municipal government in five of the town councils of the region, and of autonomous government in El Bosque, had been developing. This exercise of government was based on the objective image of the municipality, which is conceived as a government that must be: democratic, participative, organised, developed, egalitarian, self-sufficient and inclusive; it must make democratic, equitable and transparent use of resources, undertake public works and spearhead the demands of the population by means of clear strategies to strengthen community participation, alongside creating a new culture of government and constructing regional autonomy.

The main actions of municipal government have been directed at answering, by means of the accomplishment of public works and support to productive projects, the ancestral demand of the peoples for attention to their basic needs, as well as the management of financial resources, while demanding other levels of government that they participate with the municipality in responding to these needs. For this, greater participation both on the part of the communities and the districts which make up the municipal councils has been generated in an effort to justly meet the needs of the different sectors of the population.

To govern autonomously is a challenge because it requires concerted efforts at tolerance and the inclusion of the greatest number of protagonists possible. The strengthening of the formal bodies of citizen participation, such as the Municipal Development Planning Committee (COPLADEM) and the town council, has created spaces for government. Through the logic of the community assembly, holding broad municipal assemblies and a practice of open meetings of the council,

and the taking of decisions important to the town council (negotiations, political definitions, appointment of civil employees, etc.) through this type of extended assembly, was the new way of governing.

The community practice of the assembly as the highest body of decision-making has significantly permeated the practices of the municipal government. The daily use of the predominant language of the region (Tsotsil mainly, and in some cases also Zoque and Chol) in the offices of the municipality, that is in public affairs beyond the mere scope of the community, has allowed a greater ownership of the processes of exercise of institutional government on the part of the indigenous communities, at the same time emphasising their ethnic nature, among many other things that have been changing.

There is still much lacking for us to be able to evaluate this exercise of government. Without a doubt, the election of the next town councils will be the precise moment to make this thorough evaluation and it will have to be done.

The conclusions so far are not good. The government response to the autonomy of the North region was violent and it tried to annihilate it completely. 1998 was a year of particular violence against the municipal authorities of the region. In the run up to the elections for renewal of the town councils in the region, repression of the municipal authorities of the North region has intensified, and a real persecution against the leaders and even against the municipal authorities of the region has been unleashed. Thus, on 8th May, the Congress of the State arbitrarily withdrew the privileges of the municipal president of Ixtapa, under the accusation of "intellectual responsibility" for the murder of the peasants who died in a confrontation between two communities over a disputed water well. Months later, the municipal president – this author - and 4th alderman of Jitotol had their privileges removed; they were accused of participating in different criminal actions. In both cases, in flagrant violation of both the Constitution and the will of the people, the municipal presidents were denied the right of a hearing which the State Congress must grant as a prior condition to such removal. These actions have delivered a severe blow to regional autonomy.

Advances and main challenges to the process of autonomy

By way of conclusion, it can be considered that in the first phase of the movement for construction of autonomy in the North Tsotsil region, significant advances were made, which can be summarised thus:

With regard to territory. - After hundreds of years of mistreatment, humiliation and exploitation at the hands of the *caciques* and estate owners, we Indians recovered the land that had belonged to our ancestors, making possible the founding of new *ejido* communities, thus turning us into landowners. This means that we have recovered our territory, which is a fundamental step towards achieving our autonomy.

In the economic sphere. - Exploitation of the land from an indigenous perspective of exploitation of natural resources has been developed, which encourages the strengthening of the self-sufficiency of the communities over and above the obtaining of profit. After recovery of the community land, a productive reconversion of cattle estates into *ejidos* occurred, which has been translated into the abandonment of cattle production in exchange for the production of staples for human consumption, as well as coffee as a cash crop, in a logic of greater sustainability. Different producer organisations have also been formed and consolidated, enabling an organised search for technological and economic alternatives with which to obtain the development of the communities and the region.

In the political sphere. - Although we have obtained land, most of the indigenous population remains marginalised, discriminated and forgotten. A small group of families of estate owners and ex-estate owners continues to exist. These people governed the municipalities for a long time and through that exercise of power they have the opportunity for revenge on the peasants and thus to continue exploiting the indigenous population. In this way, the search for spaces of municipal power became a high priority during the 1990s, important progress being made with the simultaneous establishment of the 8 Municipal Councils and the town councils which were won, thus initiating the exercise of government, firstly in the 8 Municipal Councils and, later, in the 4 town councils which were won and the Municipal Council of Soyaló. The unity and coordination between the government actions of the eight municipalities made possible a certain recognition, still incipient, on the part of the state and federal governments towards the autonomous region as a negotiating and decision-making body. Unfortunately, at the present time, with the strong repression of indigenous autonomous efforts which the government of Roberto Albores Guillén has implemented, the strategy of governing has also been modified and there has been a refusal to recognise the regional jurisdiction as an entity for the negotiation of public investment and development policies.

In the sociocultural sphere. - The strengthening of our identity as Indian peoples, from the perspective of autonomy, and the participation of women both within their own organisational spaces and mixed ones, demanding their right to full political participation and not just support to the common struggles have been achieved.

In this respect, the significant advances made with regard to the participation of indigenous women in the region should be noted, even though they have always been present in the struggle in many different ways: in the land grabs, the resistance to the repression of the *caciques* and government, in the marches and sit-ins, the taking of municipalities, et cetera. Since 1994 when, motivated by *the Revolutionary Law of Women* - promulgated by the Zapatistas - and the presence of women soldiers in the EZLN and by Comandante Ramona, the women of the different organisations (principally CIAOC, CIRSA, *Totzilotic Tzobolutic*, and civil society) have been experiencing a rapid process of awareness raising regarding their right to full political participation, claiming their right to participate in public spaces beyond the community and to hold leadership and representational positions. The emergence of the indigenous women of Chiapas as political subjects is, without a doubt, one of the main positive outcomes of the Zapatista uprising.

For the North Tsotsil region, the incorporation of women into the construction of autonomy rests on the basis of their specific demands for respect of their rights and demands to be heard. The experience we have gained in this respect tells us that autonomy is only real and possible if the full participation of women in its construction exists. The concepts of plurality, inclusion and respect for differences that are inherent to the proposal for autonomy create a political and ethical frame within which it is not logical to maintain the subjugation of half of the population, that is, the women.

There has also been important progress in the establishment of *de facto* autonomy. We have gained territory, we are reconstructing our productive base and making progress with regard to economic autonomy. We have also won elections, there is growing participation on the part of women in the different economic, social and political spheres and the right to exercise political representation is beginning to be recognised. Imparting of justice is also being undertaken within the possibilities of our traditional habits and customs and, to a certain extent, we are having a bearing on the government of the region (in the broadest sense). Nevertheless, legal recognition of our rights as Indian peoples and of our experience of autonomy does not exist.

In this way, on the basis of the recognition of the advances and limitations in our path to autonomy, we have identified that autonomy constitutes not only a political-ideological base but also a strategy for the political participation and development of our peoples. As a strategy, autonomy requires a policy of alliances and consensus between the different subjects existing in the region, within the framework of tolerance and respect for diversity. This enables us to use our potential for development from a perspective of fairness and self-sufficiency of our peoples, and of equal participation of men and women. But it also means confrontation and negotiation with other areas of power, demanding recognition of the rights of our peoples, demanding and negotiating the decentralisation of roles and resources (that is, competencies) towards our municipalities and our region, modifying present legislation to enable recognition to be given to the region as another level of government, which enables the unity of our peoples and communities on a wider level.

These challenges are clear and it is through these that we try to continue working, in spite of the immediate black outlook which the current situation of repression and open war against our peoples has imposed on our mission. Regional autonomy continues to be our dream and our utopia, and for this we will continue fighting.

8th September 1998

Notes

1 An initial version of this document was drawn up with the support of COPEVI. We would like to thank COPEVI, the Municipalist Work Team, and particularly Alejandro Luevano, for their support in this first systematisation.
2 Name given by indigenous communities to non-indigenous people.
3 3rd Encounter of the Autonomous North Region.

INDIAN PEOPLES AND ZAPATISTA AUTONOMIES

Arturo Lomelí González

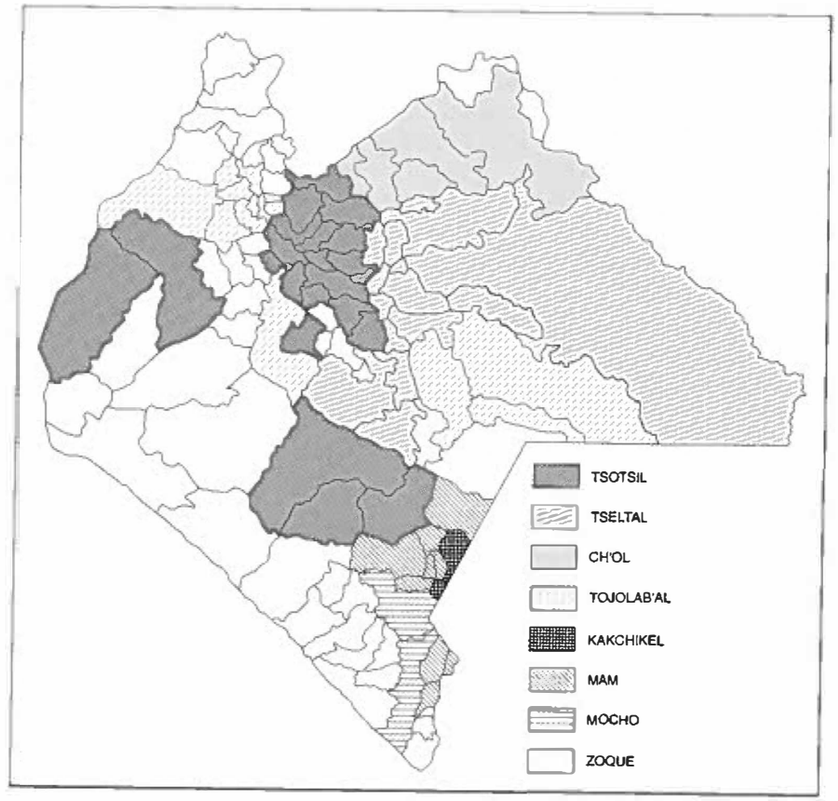
Introduction

In spite of the attacks they have suffered throughout their history, the ethnic groups of Mexico, and particularly those of Chiapas, have managed time and again to revive their ancient bonds of identity. Forced cohabitation with the colonialists enabled them to develop new forms of solidarity and community life. Through a dynamic of exchange with, and adaptation to, the dominant culture, their own traditions persisted. When considering these rather extraordinary facts, one question springs to mind: what have been the mechanisms that enabled this subjugated society to preserve and recreate their own identity? These links have now once more been revived, and incorporate sentiments of rebellion felt by the Indian peoples following the reluctance of the federal government to accept and fulfil the San Andrés Accords. The political struggle has developed in the direction of rebel and autonomous municipalities.

People and identity

With the passage of time, bonds of identity are built amongst those constituting a "*town*"; this is the name given to a set of characteristics denoting the union between members of a culture and territory. The name "*town*" became rooted, persisting even when its application was restricted legally to the use of common lands and other terms were introduced by which to denote different types of ownership and life of the Indians (legal estate, territories of common distribution, own or communal lands, et cetera).

The Indian peoples resorted to the term when they undertook their struggle against the Spanish Crown to recover their territories and forms of communal existence. There was no single form of struggle around the land issue; in fact, the colonial documentation that remains emphasises the pleas for different forms of recognition of the people's property. There currently remains a bitter aftertaste of these struggles, which is characteristic of the peasant struggle in Chiapas. This lies is the ownership of land and the recognition, in some cases, of lands that had,



Map of location of the principal indigenous languages

at one point, already been recognised by the colonial administration but were later snatched back by means of agrarian reform.[1]

Throughout the period of colonialism, Indians and non-Indians used the word *town* to allude generically to the physical and cultural space where the Indians and many mestizo peasants were settled. The Liberal Republic found them there and the Dictatorship expelled them from there. There was nothing strange in the fact that the peasants, Indian and non-Indian, who in this century staged a revolution, launched themselves into it under the banner of the reconstruction of communal spaces, be they *ejidos*, community or town areas: they aspired to recreate the physiocultural spaces from which they had been expelled. And they managed it, albeit in a limited manner and now, late in the present century, the demand and struggle for land is one of the most important

factors of cohesion in community struggles, not only in Chiapas but in the Mexican rural society of today. Based on some of the different land ownership systems that formed part of the Constitution, Indian peoples and peasants have devoted themselves to regenerating their communal forms of existence and their territorial spaces.

"Communality" is the common feature of these forms of social life, which have continued to exist from time immemorial within the territory of what is today Mexico. These forms exist in the concrete physico-cultural spaces of the current territories of the peoples and which I call here the community sphere. The people and families who form the social fabric of each one of them organise their interaction on the basis of the duties of the group, which treats each one of its members according to their concrete integrity, not as individuals but according to abstract rights.[2]

In general, the principles of thought and behaviour which define *communality* do not have an expression in abstract codes, in laws or texts. They form norms of validity and general application between the members of the group, which are transmitted culturally from one generation to the next and which cannot be reduced to an abstract codification. Power is formed in the same way: it never leaves the hands of the people who form the community and who express their carefully woven consensus in assemblies; the authorities are representatives and agents who must render account to the community, which can at any time remove the powers that have been temporarily granted to these people. The terms *K'atinab* (giver and generator of heat and fire), *Ch'uy K'aal* (influencer or balancer of heat and fire), *Ts'unubil* (sower and guide of the social order of the town) are the terms with which the supreme authorities of some Tseltal towns are designated. These people, along with the whole body of authorities, have in their hands the destiny, order and behaviour of the town, of the individual and of the inhabitants who make up that town. The authorities are the ones who oversee the whole social order of the town, establish norms of conduct, norms of respect for the elders. All recommendations are uttered as advice from the mouths of the leaders, of the elders, implying submission to the collective social order, including on the part of the authorities themselves. Power depends on community decision, power is granted by community decision and, at the end of the period, the man who has exercised his authority correctly is a *nichimail winik*, a great man.

In the period following the war of independence, the majority – if not all – of the "towns"[3] were destroyed or dissolved, later to be reconstituted

through the revolution. Their members were often expelled from their physiocultural spaces, their community sphere, to be treated as individuals by the market or the State, in the terms imposed by the dominant economic culture and according to the logic of capitalist society.

The new community spheres are strictly contemporary creations. Although they possess characteristics resembling pre-Hispanic and colonial communities, as well as those of the independent Mexico and the post-revolution Mexico, they also have fundamentally different characteristics, which correspond to an interaction with modernity. For this reason, they can be called post-modern community spheres. They differ significantly from one part of the country to another depending on whether they are urban or rural, but they also have features in common. If, as Guillermo Bonfil suspected, they are towns that are still being guided, in thought and action, by the civilising Mesoamerican mould, it is possible that – as he surmised – they may form the social majority of the country.

The phenomenon of migration to the centres of attraction that are normally urban zones is clear. In the case of Los Altos de Chiapas, the main pole of migratory attraction is the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas - governing centre of the Mayan and Zoque towns and regions of Chiapas - to which thousands of Indians have migrated and reconstructed the forms of their community sphere, threatening to become the majority in numbers in relation to the *mestizo* and *ladino* population and to turn the colonial city par excellence of this region into a town of Indians.

The peoples and cultures whose dominant form of social existence is expressed in "communality" exercise cultural self-determination to different degrees, and many of them have had to fight since before the conquest to maintain or obtain respect for it in economic, social and political spheres. What they have obtained exists as a clear counterbalance to the dominant institutions and is the object of constant harassment. Frequently, cultural self-determination can only be exercised in a stable form within the community sphere; whenever it tries to exert itself in other areas, even in the municipality, it comes up against powerful dissolving forces which the towns cannot overcome. This harassment of the community sphere has intensified over the last decade, through a dismantling of the system agreed to in 1917 and of its formulae for compromise, which had tolerated and even protected diverse aspects of the existence and functioning of the community sphere. Although many towns could not resist the impact of this process, others expanded and strengthened the persistence of their resistance, gained strength and even took on the offensive, through different initiatives.

From out of the unity of material and spiritual well being emanate the political-religious institutions which confer sense on the daily life of the towns. Although anthropological theory has advanced in the study of organisational structures and of some characteristic forms of indigenous government, philosophy and religion have not been exhausted, since the search for contemporary indigenous thought has not been the priority interest. The continuity and validity of the deeper content of indigenous philosophy have yet to be explored by anthropology, their existence is taken as given but their depths are not known, being considered as just one more aspect of popular culture. Nevertheless, some writings by members of these cultures with a certain level of anthropological training exist [4], texts which reveal a current religion of the Mayan and Zoque peoples of Chiapas, recovered in the oral tradition of the traditionalist groups. Thus it is possible to interpret that the religion of the different peoples has evolved.

Indian towns

In the present state of Chiapas, there exist 12 different ethnic groups which originate from a Mesoamerican background, and the mestizo group. There are 70 towns, which I call "indigenous towns". The inhabitants of these towns are distributed over a territory; that is their main characteristic. Territory and culture are two sources that feed identity. Each town and each ethnic group has formed itself from within its particular process of historical development; differences which make it unique.

Anthropological literature has dealt with this and has studied it in different ways and from different approaches, even managing to make generalisations for all the Indian towns of Chiapas or others of Indian Mesoamerica. A basic level exists which I call town, this denotes a territory which, in general terms, corresponds to a municipal demarcation. Therefore, municipality corresponds to town. These towns and municipalities are also made up of a very variable number of localities which, regionally and depending on the location, are called *places* in the Tsotsil and Tseltal region and in official indigenist instruments are called *localities*.

Legal property by type of land ownership can be communal property, *ejidos* and even private property; in some municipalities two or three types of ownership may coexist, or only the system of communal property. In the area of the forest and the territories that were distributed during the process of agrarian reform, particularly in the Tojo

lab'al and Ch'ol zones, they are called *settlements*. Finally the localities that form primarily the Zoque region are known as *riverine and lake communities*. These localities, which currently make up a municipality, are what an "Indian town" is comprised of. Several municipalities or conglomerates of localities that speak one language form a linguistic community which I here call *region*. This is broadly a territory within which there are manifestations of a culture different from the national and Spanish culture. In Chiapas there are regions in which, long ago, the use of some languages predominated which have now virtually disappeared or at least been watered down, either by the extension of the municipality, by its more recent creation or as the product of migrations of no more than three generations previous. In the sociocultural reality of Chiapas, this is what makes up an ethnic region.

Culturally, the deep differences that exist between the different towns are striking. Diversity is the constant, both in the historical process and in the different forms of social organisation that have remained to date, and in the creation of new ones.

At the moment, in the state of Chiapas, which is of contrasting geography and densely populated, various indigenous groups live scattered over the territory and, in one way or another, form a world within the context of the state of Chiapas. Their own characteristics make them a group apart from the *mestizo* world, the nation-state, and the channels of communication between the two societies continues to be a fragile thread which leads to the domination of one over the other.

The indigenous regions and zones of the state of Chiapas cover almost all the territory of the state; expressed another way, there is an indigenous population in 70 of the 111 municipalities of the state. Equally, there exist 18,000 localities, of which 13,000 are of indigenous population. Almost 40,500 of the 75,000 square kilometres of the territory are occupied by indigenous people. The indigenous population of the state comprises more than 1,088,230 individuals out of a total population of more than 3,500,000 inhabitants [5], who are distributed by ethnic group in the following way:

The concentration of indigenous peoples varies over this wide territory: there are zones highly populated exclusively or almost exclusively by indigenous people, such as the Tsotsil and Tseltal zone of Los Altos. Amongst others for example, the municipality of Chamula has a population density of more than 630 inhabitants per square kilometre. There are also populations dispersed over a vast territory, who have suffered different forms of colonisation and settlements, such that

they constitute a particular history, although the origin of the forest settlements was through successive migrations, and here the density of population is much less. Isolated indigenous settlements also exist, buried within territories inhabited for a long time by mestizo communities, locally known as "*kaxlanes*"[6].

Although there currently exist 12 ethnic groups within the territory of the state of Chiapas, each one has very particular circumstances due to their own history, which lead to their current condition: a living culture, rich in expressions which contrast with the conditions of economic poverty and development. This population represents 30% of the total population of the state, but it is concentrated in the Altos, Norte and Selva regions, making this an eminently indigenous landscape. In the history of the Indians of Chiapas, as in other regions of Mexico and Indigenous America, these have been grouped around the basis which gives them identity: their towns. Pre-Hispanic towns preserved during colonial times, the era of independence and, of course, under the revolutionary systems, affected their life as a town. The fact that the whole of Mexico was divided politically into municipalities had an impact on the constitutional town councils. Unlike the Indian towns, where everything spiritual is fundamental, the municipalities have the primary function of carrying out public works: roads, schools, clinics, lighting systems, water, drainage.

The authorities of the indigenous municipalities have also been levelled by the *tabula rasa* of national plurality: the party in power.

There is always a PRI council; elections merely replace one PRI council with another, leaving the norms of social order unchanged.

Ethnic consciousness and the typology of the towns

In the situation of domination which the indigenous towns suffer and their unfavourable conditions of life, of social, cultural, economic and political relations, they are denied the elements which could make them feel proud of being different. These Mayan and Zoque ethnic groups are a sociocultural whole which recognises itself as unique, which has its own identity, based on its language, its common past and a series of cultural symbols referring to its own religiousness. All these factors are forms of identification of the ethnic group, in which the language is the habit and transmission of culture and of daily life.

Contemporary Indian reality is presented to us as a result of a history which has three forms: as towns that preserve pre-Hispanic elements, towns which mix the Indian and non-Indian and towns with totally modern elements[8]. There are currently indigenous towns which largely preserve the organisational, cultural and productive systems that existed before the Conquest, albeit with a content which often is, and has been, the result of a mixture of non-Indian and Indian or of something totally modern. Mechanisms of preservation throughout Mexican history have been oriented largely around the demand for ethnic consciousness. Their institutions form part of an organised and ideological system, strongly pressed to defend the ethnic interests of the group in the face of external modern institutions.

There are towns which organise their socio-political and cultural world by means of systems of authority resulting from a mix of official modern institutions and traditional civic religious ones, in which the traditional structure prevails and struggles to dominate over the modern one. In these communities, the functions are interwoven without giving rise to a clear distinction between civil employees, modern functions and traditional civic religious ones. The indigenous population of Los Altos de Chiapas has these characteristics to a greater or lesser degree.

Chamula could be given as an example of where the traditional prevails over the modern; Chenalhó of where there exists a strong link between the traditional structure and the modern one, and *Oxchujk'* where there is a hasty tendency to dissolve its traditional institutions.

In the first category, these towns consider that the central authority, that is, the council, is a body of civil employees or officials with responsibility for taking care of social order through the norms of conduct, uses and traditions inherited by the communities from its ancestors; they maintain the belief that the exact observance of them guarantees the order of the cosmos of which the community is a part and avoids the scourge of calamities and misfortunes on the property of the inhabitants of the towns.

The patron Saints and guardians of the sacred places of each town are considered as divine beings who watch over their children and bear witness to the observance of traditions. Any change to the sanctioned norms of conduct is seen as a dangerous attack on the way of life, which is considered essential, unalterable, metaphysical, of each town.

A custom, a habit, a tradition, is easily attached to a particular way of being and becomes an essential element in the supposed human

being of individuals. Thus when other beliefs are introduced, the evangelical belief, for example, which brings with it a new system of symbols and rites referring to the cult of God, they are rejected, their believers being expelled from the land of the community, because they are considered a threat to the very ethnic identity. One of the fatal weaknesses in this way of seeing the world is that of being easy prey for unscrupulous and manipulative agents, who drag any disagreement into the religious or political sphere.

With this, it is easy to understand the metaphoric rhetoric of these towns, which say to their authorities on handing over command:

they are going to carry
they are going to take
for a day
for a year
the weight
the load
of the town
of the universe

Thus within these towns, the function of authorities belonging to the constitutional structure is to harmonise the divergent forces of two worlds (the modern and the traditional). When they finds themselves up against practices and ideologies that tend to extrapolate themselves when the force of the traditional structure does not find its counterbalance in all sectors of the population, the constitutional authorities find that they need to take arduous and irremediable decisions, which apparently support unjust demands in the eyes of the modern world.

In the second category are the indigenous towns in which modern institutional structures have marginalised the traditional civic-religious structures, being relegated solely to the cohesion of minority groups, although the customs of the ancestors are strongly guarded in the hearts and minds of the population in general. Here can be included the Ch'ol, some Zoque towns, some Tzotzil and Tseltal towns of the lowlands and the Tojolab'al.

Within this second category there exists within the council no overlapping of functions between the constitutional and the traditional, because they are strongly secularised, that is, authority is seen as originating in society rather than being considered as a representation of cosmogonic powers. At the same time, the constituted authority

remains immersed in the demands of a power structure that seeks its justification in an extra-worldly order. The authority has the freedom to pay attention to the groups that control the isolated traditional institutions, more or less depending on their weight, as the existing sectors of power in the community. Certainly misfortunes of a material nature are attributed to the Christian God and to the strength of the Christian or indigenous saints, but the institutions that endorse these beliefs are on the margins of the constituted authorities. Within this category fall those that already only maintain the vestiges of traditional institutions, such as the *"saintships"*, but the old customs are kept in the heart and the collective mind.

Finally, we find indigenous people who, lacking any traditional institutions, maintain ideals of the patron saints of their ancestors, giving them cohesion through the national institutions, as well as constitutional authorities, *ejidos* and committees. Within this third classification are included towns where the traditional, mainly religious, institutions may be found as vestiges or totally absent, preserving only certain saints for their behaviour and ideals inherited from their ancestors. Such is the case of the Mochó, Kakchikel, a good part of the settlements of the forest zone, most of the Tseltal towns of the lowlands, Tsotsil who have settled in isolated localities of the municipalities of Cintalapa, Ocozocuautla, Concordia and Villa Corzo and most of the Zoque towns.

In this category, the structure of modern power has invaded all the arteries of society. The explanation of human existence and its difficulties is by means of popular theology with different religious connections, coloured by beliefs and symbols of the indigenous ancestors. Here the public establishments have abandoned traditional beliefs and practices, which have been relegated to the privacy of the home.

With reference to these three categories, in the first two the use of the Mayan or Zoque language predominates over that of Spanish. It is here that we find a high percentage of towns which are monolingual in their mother tongue, as well as highly bilingual towns. However, in the third category the indigenous language can already only be found as vestigial.

On the other hand, in the second and third categories, religious conflicts no longer fall within the municipal remit or that of the whole town, and tend to focus themselves on the hamlet, place or settlement. Instead of being between traditionalist and non-traditionalist, these conflicts are exclusively between believers of modern style religions.

The conflicts of wider scope are political and agrarian or tend to end up as one of these.

Each indigenous group keeps its traditions and customs alive, an essential characteristic of its culture, constituting an element of social cohesion, of spiritual consistency and, frequently, related to myths and particular beliefs.

Ethnic politics

The Indian towns have experienced relative autonomy with regard to their forms of social organisation; the Municipal councils have been pervaded by the content of Indian culture. Municipal presidents and other authorities must be guardians of this material and spiritual good. Elections, even under the banner of the PRI, have always been the cause of long discussions regarding who are the best men and women to undertake these responsibilities. Failure or inability to fulfil has been punished, on occasions, with brutality and discredit. The struggle for recognition of traditional forms of indigenous culture contains within it these principles of government; to change this traditional form for the conventional one has been a high priority for indigenism and development programmes.

Although these forms have existed from time immemorial, national society has refused to understand them, tolerate them or accept them. On the contrary, it denies them. The Zapatista uprising caused this issue to be brought up once more, within the San Andrés Accords, but it was criticised falsely as Balkanisation and, even more absurd: separatism. The government has refused to recognise indigenous rights, arguing that to recognise them would create privileges and create a rupture in the equality that must exist between all citizens. This is untrue; what is clear is that it continues to deny recognition of the existence of the indigenous towns in the country, their right to exist as such and to exercise their free determination to organise themselves economically and politically as they see fit, to hand out justice according to their own regulatory systems, to have intercultural education and to preserve their culture.

There is a history behind this position. On 19th August 1989, the then President, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and the governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio González Garrido, visited the town of San Juan Kankujk, to declare it a free municipality, a town which for more than 300 years they had refused to recognise as such, as a town or as a municipality;

until that date it had been considered a mere "municipal branch" of the municipality of Ocosingo, the second largest in the country. In his speech of declaration, President Salinas alluded to recognition of the indigenous towns and the fulfilment of an historic debt. This new municipality of the state comprises 28 communities with, in total, a little more than 25,000 inhabitants. The initiative, originally requested on numerous occasions from the different administrations was, according to governor González Garrido, a campaign promise. This demonstrates that when it has been necessary, modifications to the political divisions are recognised but when it is a demand of the towns and of the communities it is argued that it should be postponed, deferred and even denied. Many other towns have systematically demanded their recognition as municipalities: Aguacatenango, San Martín Abasolo, Magdalenas, Santa Martha, Santiago and areas of the municipalities of Las Margaritas, La Trinitaria and Ocosingo.

Rebel municipalities

The model of indigenous town has been transferred into the heart of the new rebel and autonomous town councils. Life within the communities has evolved and the exercise of power in these places is fertile ground for the ideological discourse of liberation and self-management. This exercise of power and collective decision-making based on consensus led to thousands of indigenous members from different Indian towns participating in the Zapatista uprising of 1994. The decision of these people to stand up to the Mexican state with arms was taken through the same mechanism as other decisions relating to the future of the peoples: by consensus.

After the refusal of the peace negotiator, Manuel Camacho Solís, to agree to the proposals which emanated from "the Cathedral Dialogues" in San Cristóbal de las Casas in March 1994, hundreds of communities that were included in the municipalities of Ocosingo, Las Margaritas, Altamirano and Chanal, by their own decision, began to form and to relocate to their inhabitants, maintaining or appointing new authorities which would be the embryos of the new "autonomous municipalities". They began to "compact" regions, turning a certain number of localities into municipalities, following the model of "the indigenous town": a municipal administrative centre, seat of the political and religious authorities, and between 28 and 35 localities, with an organisational structure of committees and people responsible for the different spheres of town life; religious authorities responsible for spiritual life, a traditional council where

the Councils of Elders sanctioned the development of spirituality and the exact fulfilment of traditions and municipal authorities that supervised public well-being and public works. These structures began to coexist alongside the structure of the political and military struggle.

During 1994, the EZLN controlled a vast territory that included the municipalities of Las Margaritas, Ocosingo, Altamirano and part of La Trinitaria, and introduced this model, incorporating the civil and military "structures" of the Zapatistas. At the same time, in the Ch'ol zone or "Sixth Selva Norte" which covers the municipalities of Tila, Tumbalá, Salto de Agua, Sabanilla and Palenque, "municipalities" were also formed which soon came up against opposition in the organisation "Development, Peace and Justice" which began to have an important presence in many communities of the mountainous area of the Ch'ol zone.

The intensity of the Zapatista movement in 1994 reached almost all the communities of the indigenous zone of Chiapas. The constitutional town councils of the indigenous towns were co-opted by the state government, through different strategies and by different institutions. With the appearance of investment support "to solve the roots of the conflict", the municipal authorities "closed ranks" with the state government. In that same year, the Secretariat for the Care of Indigenous peoples - known by its acronym SEAPI - was created, in charge of the state indigenist policy, and which alongside the State Congress came to agreements to ensure the municipal authorities remained in line with the government. This brought with it many conflicts within the communities and towns: between the authorities and the groups that agreed with the demands of the EZLN. These civil groups have antagonised the government supporters, calling themselves "Civil Society" which, whilst supporting Zapatismo, did not form a part of the politico-military organisation. In the mountains and forests of Chiapas, a distinction between "civil society", the Zapatistas and the pro-PRI groups was becoming apparent. Even in the indigenous towns considered "pro-PRI", such as San Juan Chamula, there existed various groups and communities supportive of this politico-ideological movement who ignored the legitimacy of the constitutional municipal authorities supported by government and state congress, and they also began to call themselves "rebel".

In a parallel process, and in communities sympathetic to the Zapatistas or those which were called rebel governments in other regions of the State, rebel municipalities and *Municipal Councils* in revolt and pluriethnic autonomous regions were formed (see annexed map).

The political geography was completely modified by the autonomous regions of Marqués de Comillas, an autonomous region on the border with Guatemala; by the municipalities of Las Margaritas and La Trinitaria; the Tojolabal valleys, the autonomous North region which include the municipalities of Bochil, Simojovel, El Bosque, Huitiupán, Ixtapa, Soyaló and Jitotol; the autonomous region of Soconusco, the autonomous region of the forest with its seat in the community of Las Tazas and 42 indigenous parliaments distributed throughout the region of Los Altos, Selva, Norte, the municipalities of Venustiano Carranza and Nicolás Ruiz and the declaration of the municipality of San Andrés Larraínzar as a Zapatista municipality with authorities sympathetic to the EZLN.

The panorama at the end of 1994 was marked by the EZLN's territorial domination of almost 40% of the state, with great ideological and political influence in more than 80% of indigenous localities.

The result of the elections of 1994 encouraged the revolt. In these elections the largest number of voters in the electoral history of Chiapas was registered. Amado Avendaño Figueroa, candidate of civil society under the banner of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) opposed the official candidate. In these elections, the electoral machinery was manipulated in such a way that the PRI candidate benefited. Thousands of indigenous people and peasants saw that in spite of their efforts to compete in the elections, these were "democratic mechanisms" which could not be trusted. This resulted in a loss of credibility in the electoral processes as an option through which to transform society.

The popular indigenous autonomist movement was thus encouraged by the Zapatista proposal of 19th December 1994, in which 29 new indigenous municipalities were declared, which were accepted in the majority of cases and which had a presence in 38 of the State's municipalities.

The offensive of 8th February 1995 temporarily put a halt to this process of constituting rebel municipalities, which had infected many other communities and who were discussing ways in which to organise new autonomous municipalities. The incorporation of hundreds of communities into the popular indigenous Zapatista movement manifested itself during the San Andrés dialogues. One of the protection belts around the Zapatista leadership for many days was indigenous. Coming from all of the Indian towns, inhabitants of the forests, the mountains, the Tojolabal valleys, from Chamula, and from the Norte region, they protected and at the same time contributed to the proposal for the autonomy of the Indian towns. Currently, 80 percent of the

Indian towns form part of one of the autonomous municipalities, and the incorporation of other communities and the non-indigenous population continues to increase and is a central factor in the indigenous and popular struggle.

In 1995, elections were held to appoint new municipal authorities and to renew the State Congress. The Zapatista towns and communities did not vote in this process, non-participation reached levels of 80% and more, and the voting that took place was used, through multiple strategies of electoral fraud, to elect PRI candidates in the different municipalities.

The revolt began to manifest itself through the appointment of authorities in the rebel municipalities, and the word autonomy began to be the focus of discussions.

The rebel municipalities have some sort of presence in 70 constitutional municipalities of the 111 that make up the political division of the state. The Autonomous Councils have different degrees of development, since some are solidly constituted and with the endorsement and agreement of each one of the communities of which they are composed. Such is the case of the Autonomous Council of Polhó (in Chenalhó) where, in one of their localities, Acteal, 45 indigenous people were assassinated and which is besieged by the paramilitary forces with the purpose of diminishing its development. This Council, made up of approximately 10,000 people from 14 communities, is made up of different political backgrounds, from Zapatista support bases to people with no defined links. It adjoins other autonomous municipalities, which are in different degrees of development. Another example of different development is the *Tsots Choj* autonomous region, which was established on 28th and 29th September 1997 with its seat in the Moisés Gandhi community and with the participation of communities from the municipalities of Ocosingo, Oxchuc, Chanal, Huixtán, Amatenango del Valle, Tenejapa, San Cristóbal and the autonomous Council of Ernesto Che Guevara and of the town of San Martín Abasolo.

On 4th November 1997, in Comalapa, several thousand indigenous and mestizo people from different communities along the border of the municipality of Las Margaritas as far as the Chiapas coast, announced the constitution of the "Land and Freedom' Autonomous Region, formed by rebel municipalities and communities of Zapatista grassroots and sympathisers, replacing the regional organisation, the Independent Peasant Organisational Front (FOCI), which had been formed in 1994. The "Land and Freedom" rebel municipality, which by the end of 1994 had been

declared autonomous, is one of the autonomous municipalities that has reached the greatest degree of development and unity.

Formation of some autonomous municipalities and the government's response

The autonomous municipality of "San Juan de la Libertad" began its public work on 26th December 1995, as a result of the end of term of office of Mr. Diego Días Ruíz, president of the Plural Council of the municipality of El Bosque. On 27th December Mr. Agustín Alvarez Gómez took over the municipal presidency, a president elected by the population according to "traditional law", that is, with the consensus of the different towns, which demonstrate their preference for a particular person who they make responsible for their material and spiritual well-being. Days later, C. Ramón González Sánchez, the PRI's elected candidate in the municipality, tried unsuccessfully to take over the municipal presidency but was thrown out of the buildings of the municipal palace.

From that moment on, two parallel powers were established in that municipality, one governed by a president elected in conventional elections and another elected by means of the procedure of "habits and customs". This latter had an overwhelming majority.

On 11th April 1996, there was an increase in tension between the group supporting the president elected through habits and customs and the PRI group, when C. Ramón González Sánchez requested the intervention of the state authorities so that he could govern from the municipal palace. The Ministry of the Interior intervened and a verbal agreement of non-aggression and mutual coexistence was obtained. From then on, and until 14th March last, in spite of great differences and positions, the groups coexisted without great difficulties. Their differences were resolved in meetings and "agreements" in the style of the local custom.

Nevertheless, on 6th February 1997 at 12:00 hours, around 50 members of the Mexican federal army entered the municipal palace of San Juan de la Libertad, without orders and with no respect for those at the door. Once in the building, they demanded to be provided with the names of the authorities, the positions they occupied and the work they were doing. Never before had a uniformed military authority interfered in the workings of the autonomous municipal presidency of the locality.

Later, on 11th April 1998, the "reorganisation" of the "Ricardo Flores Magón" autonomous municipality in the community of Taniperlas was announced. It was as of this date that the state government, supported by the Federal Army, commenced an open offensive with the intention of "dismantling" these rebel municipalities[9].

The spurious governor of Chiapas, Roberto Albores Guillén, creator of the most dreadful demagoguery in the media and of a crude and unreserved propaganda campaign, was preparing to put an end to the autonomous municipalities created in the zones of Zapatista influence as an alternative form of civil organisation. Albores was able to blow the issue of the autonomous municipalities out of all proportion and to give them an importance that not even the EZLN could have imagined. He turned them into *"the worst and greatest crime"* of the guerrillas.

On 11th April it was the turn of the community of Taniperlas. A day after the festivities in the Ricardo Flores Magón municipality, twelve foreigners were expelled from the country and more than a dozen peasants jailed for the serious crime of *"threatening the state of law"* because they were trying to solve the local and small-scale problems of the communities through a process of self-management.

On 1st May there followed a police and military offensive against another autonomous municipality, "Land and Freedom". Dozens of peasants were arrested, beaten and jailed.

The imposition of "the state of law" by the iron hand of guns and imprisonment followed its course. On 3rd June it was the turn of a PRD municipality, Nicolás Ruíz, (which had declared itself autonomous). The enormous operation was supposedly aimed at protecting a PRI minority which, according to the governor, had been denied both voice and vote in community decisions by their opponents. Gas, infliction of wounds, imprisonment, terror and fear were the outcome of the new full-scale war machine. But events continued until the most terrible consequences of 10th June, a few days after Bishop Samuel Ruíz retired from his role as mediator in the conflict and CONAI disappeared. The rebel communities, threatened militarily, were left with a consequent sensation of abandonment and fear by this position.

Emboldened and with the force of strength behind them, thousands of soldiers and police entered the autonomous municipality of San Juan de la Libertad, penetrating as far as the mountains, as far as the most remote communities. Their excuse: the death of a PRI supporter the previous day in the settlement of Los Plátanos, the only place in the

whole zone populated entirely by PRI supporters since the few Zapatista families in the place, threatened by the paramilitary, had been taking refuge in the mountains since March.

On10th June, the police and the army did not limit themselves to destroying, looting and arresting. They were seeking aggression, a confrontation that would ensure that "the reestablishment of the state of law" was going to be forged in blood. The television images were horrific: mortar and grenade launchers, light tanks, bazookas, helicopters, gunshots and machine-gun fire into the surrounding mountains.

All this against a very poor population such as that of Unión Progreso, where scarcely 26 families lived, and against Chavajebal, a community situated on the mountain's edge. According to the testimony of the towns, thousands of soldiers, *"surrounded the community, entered, destroying everything and dealing out blows, interrogating everyone"*.

On the night of 12th June, a communiqué signed by the 32 autonomous municipalities appeared in Oventic consisting of a phrase written in capital letters. *"To Mr. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León: You are an assassin."*

After the slaughter of El Bosque, the Ministry of the Interior reiterated the government's support of "the decision to orchestrate a policy which enabled conflicts to be resolved by peaceful means." The governor of Chiapas, Roberto Albores, was more crude and described the Zapatistas as "criminals" and "bandits", therefore justifying the aggression.

Resistance

The continuous offensives against the towns, the increasing militarisation and the appearance of paramilitary groups supported by the police and army have made life not merely difficult but impossible for the towns of Chiapas. Will the government be able to put an end to the Zapatista uprising in such a way?

"They will have to do away with all of us and even then the trees will continue to be Zapatistas, the stones too... " says a farmer from Guadalupe Tepeyac, a town in exile for more than three years, and a living example of the rebel resistance.

In another part of the Lacandon Forest, a journalist asks an indigenous boy, wearing a scarf over his face, "Will you continue to resist?" He responds, *"... there is no other way, of course we will continue to resist..."*

This is how the municipalities, the communities, the refugees, the prisoners, the women, the children, have responded, at the cost of hunger, of their crops, their dead, their houses... at the cost of immense pain that tears away at the lives of so many people, who now have nowhere to sow, because their fields and pastures serve as military bases, afraid at night and afraid on the road, with emboldened PRI supporters and paramilitary groups patrolling, threatening, looting... and in spite of everything, the flame of hope remains.

Will this really be the indigenous essence of this struggle, this ancestral wisdom of patience, of having to hope, to resist, to endure, to continue?

In the main centres of the rebel municipalities, guards have organised themselves, taking turns at protecting the autonomous town halls. Peasants from the most remote communities come for one or more days and then leave when others take over. In Polhó, around the whole community, even on festival days for the patron Saint "Peter" there remains a human cordon protecting the autonomous authorities, the refugees and the celebration, a cheerful celebration and without alcohol, not loud, a celebration of resistance in which basketball matches replace the *aguardiente*, to the content of the women. The most amusing are the names of the teams in the contest: "The rebels", "The civil family", "The squaddies of Yabteclúm", "The autonomous ones" et cetera.

The offensive against the resistance uses all the instruments within its power, above all the different media, which the PRI has often turned into its henchmen.

According to some local radio stations and other media, the Zapatistas of Cruz del Rosario and Carrillo Puerto, in Las Margaritas, had given up the battle; a few hours later, on 15th June, the angry reply arrived from those communities in the form of two documents; of course they were not exactly the same in content. The communiqué of Cruz del Rosario stated, *"... we denounce the latest trick of the government to discourage, divide and isolate the EZLN. The government and the PRI have devoted their efforts to recruiting indigenous people and peasants willing to lie for a few thousand pesos and to say what they want them to say. The government uses and manipulates these poor peasants and PRI supporters in order to deceive the people of Mexico, claiming they are Zapatistas in order to be able to state that they have given up the struggle."*

"The people of the community of Cruz del Rosario declare that we are here, that we will continue to resist and that we will not tire even if they threaten us with false lies, because we are already aware that we are fighting for the people of Mexico."

From Carrillo Puerto, also in the municipality of Las Margaritas - autonomy of San Pedro de Michoacán - the same denial was given. A letter signed by 69 Zapatista heads of household, stated:

"Whilst the government and its false communiqués claim that we have already given up the fight, this has never crossed our minds. Instead of discouraging us, through such lies the tricks of the government fill us with courage and make the seeds of revolt take ever more root in our hearts and our consciences."

With this, faced with the impossibility of their lives and to avoid greater harm, the Zapatistas moved: 19 thousand men, women, children and elderly now live nomadic lives of exile, whilst 70,000 soldiers – according to numbers given by CONAI - along with public security forces and the paramilitary, occupy their lands and seize their property.

Resistance has thus additionally meant leaving their houses and taking refuge in the mountains, without tears, asking for nothing, hoping that the time will come when the struggle will be concretised in the fulfilment of the Accords and dialogue. Thus spoke Comandante Tacho when the Army refused to abandon Guadalupe Tepeyac, considered a rebel bastion in 1995, *"May the town remain as a monument to the treason of the government and as a display of Zapatista dignity."* The people of Guadalupe never returned to their houses.

On 25th July, 850 indigenous people from the civil organisation Las Abejas, who were living as refugees in Acteal, in the municipality of Chenalhó, tried to return to their communities. They did not manage this; they found out the night before that the paramilitary had decided to impose taxes on them, to force them to affiliate themselves with the PRI and to make their lives impossible. In addition, it was known that the paramilitary were going to kidnap Bishops Samuel Ruíz and Raúl Vera in order to take them hostage and demand the liberation of all the jailed assassins of Acteal.

The governor of the state, with his usual boorishness, dared to state, *"the government has no knowledge or precise information of the existence of paramilitary groups and far less that they have threatened the displaced."*

To which the municipalities that have declared themselves in revolt or as autonomous municipalities have responded that they will govern with their own laws and their own forms of government, taking into account their culture, their customs and traditions. *"We poor people, indigenous and peasants in general, will be able to govern ourselves without depending on the state or federal governments."* [10]

By way of conclusion

The Indian towns of Chiapas constitute 60% of the municipalities of the state; they have had autonomy in the exercise of their political decisions and life within their towns since the Mesoamerican mould. Most of these towns were recognised as constitutional municipalities, forming part of the political layout of the state, but always subjected to state power as far as decisions regarding investment and development and institutional policies.

From 1994 onwards, the process of autonomy and rebellion have been accelerated by the politico-ideological ingredient of Zapatismo, which has given new strength to it. During the four years of this process, military attacks, paramilitary offensives and smear campaigns in the media have not prevented the Indian towns from joining the rebellion, declaring themselves autonomous rebel municipalities in resistance.

One recent declaration from the municipality of "Land and Freedom" [11] summarises the position of the indigenous towns in revolt:

> *"We will continue to search for a better life. We now resist the treason and the war which the government maintains against the Indian towns that are seeking their freedom... we will continue fighting because this is what we have decided, this is our struggle and we will die for it."*

Relationship between rebel municipalities and autonomous regions. EZLN

(For location, see annexed map)

1. "Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas" administrative centre Santa Rosa Copán
2. "San Pedro de Michoacán" administrative centre La Realidad
3. "Land and Freedom" administrative centre Amparo Agua Tinta
4. "17 de noviembre" administrative centre Morelia ejido
5. "Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla" administrative centre Justo Sierra
6. "Ernesto Che Guevara" Cuxuljá
7. "Primero de Enero"
8, "Cabañas" of Oxchuc and Huixtán
9. "Maya" Amador Hernández ejido
10. "Francisco Gómez" La Garrucha
11. "Flores Magón" Taniperlas ejido

12. "San Manuel" San Antonio settlement
13. "San Salvador" Sibajcá ejido
15 "Simojovel"
16 "Sabanilla"
17 "Vicente Guerrero" Palenque
18 "Trabajo" Palenque and Chilón
19 "Francisco Villa" Salto de Agua
20 "Independencia" Tila and Salto de Agua
21 "Benito Juárez" Tila, Yajalón and Tumbalá
22 "La Paz"
23 "José María Morelos y Pavón" Marqués de Comillas
24 "San Andrés Sacamchen de los pobres"
25 "San Juan de la Libertad "
26 "San Pedro Chenalhó"
27 "Zinacantán"
28 "Santa Catarina" Pantelhó and Sitalá
29 "Bochil"
30 "Magdalena of La Paz "
31 "San Juan K'ankujk' "
32 "Land and Freedom" Autonomous Regions include towns in the municipalities of:
   Las Margaritas
   La Trinitaria
   Frontera Comalapa
   Chicomucelo
   La Grandeza
   El Porvenir
   Siltepec
   Mazapa de Madero
   Motozintla
33 *Tsots Choj* Autonomous Region comprises the towns of
   Altamirano
   Chanal
   Oxchuc
   Tenejapa
   Cancuc
   Huixtán
   San Cristóbal
   Amatenango del Valle
   Ocosingo
   The town of Abasolo
   And the autonomous municipality of Ernesto Che Guevara

Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions (RAP)

34 Marqués de Comillas in the municipality of Ocosingo
35 Fronteriza de Las Margaritas
36 Autonomous North Region municipalities of Bochil, Ixtapa, Soyaló, Jitotol, Huitiupán and Simojovel
37 Soconusco Huixtla Region, Tuzantán, Tapachula, Cacahuatán and Unión Juárez
38 Selva Las Tasas Region
39 Autonomous Council of Nicolás Ruiz

Notes

1 The town of Amatenango del Valle is a key example of this situation. At the end of this century, they are not able to take possession of part of the land the Spanish Crown recognised as theirs and which, during the agrarian reform process, they lost. This part is located in the lands of the current sugar cane zone, the most prosperous; whilst the rest of this people's land is found in the high, mountainous areas.

2 For the purposes of this essay, I am defining a *person* as a concrete knot of relationship experiences which defines the integrity of a human subject and individual, as the juxtoposition of abstract properties which are ascribed to a person in order to define the unity of characteristics by which s/he is treated or considered.

3 According to the system of land ownership they chose or managed to gain, they were called *ejidos*, indigenous communities, centres of population, etc.

4 Here the writings of Jacinto Arias Pérez, in particular *El numinoso mundo de los mayas,* must be mentioned; also the works of writers of Mayan and Zoque origin which have emphasised the recovery of oral traditions of customs, tales, history and legends. Although these works have not managed to form a bridge with Mesoamerican civilising society, there exist many parallels with local and regional versions, knowledge and rapprochement with a philosophy that can be called Mesoamerican.

5 These figures are a projection of the population carried out on the basis of the General Census of Population and Housing in 1990. This figure is calculated on the basis of the municipal growth rate obtained, in turn, from the municipal growth observed in the censuses of the previous 5 decades.

6 This is how non-indigenous populations are known in the Tseltal and Tsotsil languages. In the process of colonisation by the *mestizo* population during the Conquest, and to this very day, in the geography of the regions inhabited almost exclusively by indigenous people, the centres inhabited by *mestizos* appear as specks on the landscape. The mountainous and forest regions are populated by indigenous people and the cities of San Cristóbal de las Casas and Comitán and the towns of Yajalón, Altamirano, Ocosingo, etcétera, are inhabited by *mestizos.* The peripheral zones of these towns are currently inhabited by indigenous people, as in the case of San Cristóbal where, of a population of almost 100,000 inhabitants, half or 48,000 are indigenous.

7 The way of associating the magic-religious reality which the peoples have is similar between the different ethnic groups, for example, the calendar or *tz'ok'in o j-tatik-metik,* the concept of ancestors, the inheritance of Mesoamerican cultures or symbols which belong to all Mayan groups.

8 This can be observed when attending a religious ceremony, where the first form is seen in the manner of addressing the gods, in what is said and even in the very concept of the deity. The second form, which mixes the Indian with the non-Indian, can be appreciated in the iconography, saints, offerings and even the very places of prayer and, finally, the totally modern in the use of instruments and energy for the holding of religious festivals.

9 Since 1994 at least 13 paramilitary groups have been formed and are located in strategic spots. They constantly threaten the civil population of the rebel municipalities.

10 Declaration on the conformation of the *Tsots Choj* Pluriethnic Autonomous Region, 29th September 1997.

11 Communiqué of the "Land and Freedom" rebel Autonomous Council 13th September 1997.

OCOSINGO:
LOCAL POWER AND GOOD GOVERNMENT
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE EXTENDED PLURAL MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Ricardo Hernández Arellano

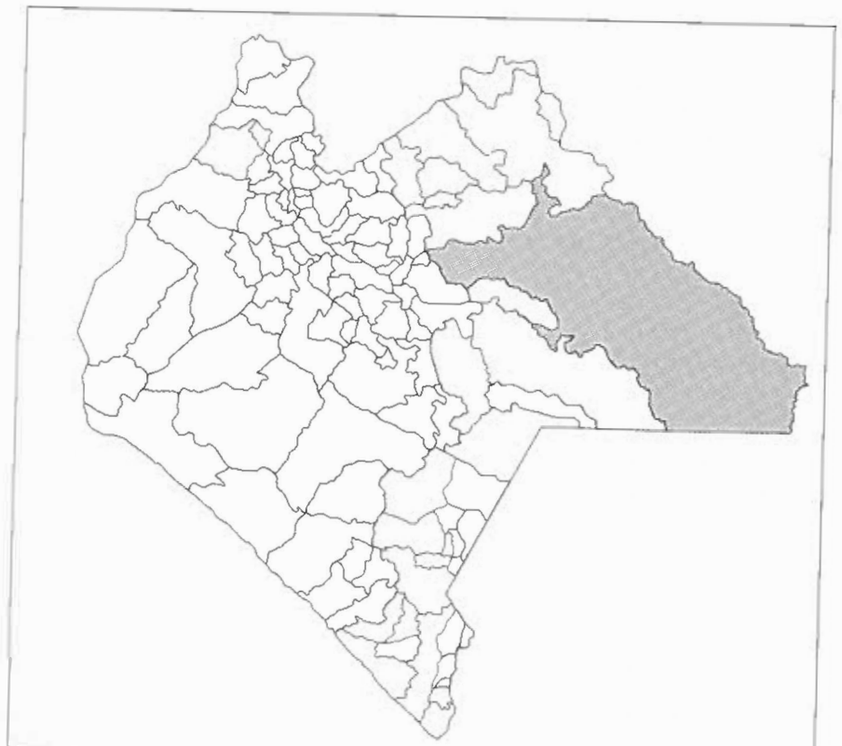
For Ana María

"... who would have thought that one day we would be in government"[1]

Introduction

The old Tseltal and *mestizo* settlers tell us that the name Ocosingo comes from the Mayan words meaning "place of the great gentleman". Others say that in Na'huatl it means "place of the black smoke" or "place of the venerable ocote" or "place of the black gentleman". Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, this municipality was an important indigenous Tseltal settlement. The first missionaries concentrated their activities here and in the middle of the 16th century numerous forest peoples were transferred here by the "Fray Pedro Lorenzo de la Nada" Dominicans. In 1829, Ocosingo was elevated to the category of "town", in 1878 to departmental head and in 1979 it was granted the rank of city. Of the 111 municipalities that form the State of Chiapas, it is the one that has remained the largest with regard to geographic spread. And in spite of part of its territory being separated in 1989 to form the municipality of San Juan Cancuc, its 10,529.3 square kilometres are still equivalent to a fifteenth of the total surface area of Chiapas.

Ocosingo is located to the east of the state, bordered to the north by the municipalities of Palenque, to the east and the south by the Republic of Guatemala, to the south by the municipality of Las Margaritas and to the west by the municipalities of Chilón, Oxchuc, Altamirano and San Juan Cancuc. It has a total forested area of 331, 200 hectares, and a wide biodiversity. It also includes the Montes Azules-Selva Lacandón Biosphere Reserve, which includes tropical ecosystems and one of the world's greatest natural biodiversities within it. It is for this reason that UNESCO has declared it a part of humanity's cultural heritage.



Map of the location of Ocosingo

This municipality has a population of 153,086 people concentrated in nearly 30% of the total area of the region, i.e. 14 inhabitants per square kilometre. 65% are of Tseltal and Lacandón origin; of these 31.29% are monolingual[2].

Significant changes can currently be observed in Ocosingo. There are new flows of migrants caused by the armed uprising of 1994 and the search for jobs. The municipal centre, from being almost one village in 1960 - when it had 1,500 inhabitants – became a small city of 13 districts with 16,000 inhabitants in 1990, and after 1994 became an urban conurbation of 43 districts and more than 40,000 inhabitants.

The degree of marginalisation is very high, it occupies 227th place of all the municipalities in the country, with a 47% illiteracy rate. In addition, the annual population growth is 5%, compared with a national average of 2.4%: this means that the population growth here is double that of the rest of the nation.[3]

Ocosingo is the largest municipality in the zone of conflict, with 1,177 communities. The inhabitants are affiliated to different political parties and indigenous organisations, many of which have been in existence for more than two decades. In addition to this, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) maintains a considerable number of Zapatista grassroots communities within this territory. Ocosingo is, in effect, synonymous with war, the EZLN, organisational capacity, municipal government, social movements, conflict and, for the vast majority, the desire for peace.

The way in which people talk in this area is also significant. It is linked to the events that have individually and collectively marked their lives. They talk of time in terms of *"before or after the war"*, *"before or after the invasions"*, *"before or after the armies arrived"*, *"before or after the division and the ARIC reconciliation agreement"* and, above all, *"before or after the Municipal Council"*.

The organisations' struggle to form a municipal government

As already mentioned, this municipality is one of the poorest in Mexico. It is a land that has borne witness to indigenous and peasant struggles since the 1960s, a land in which the *caciques* have humiliated and exploited the Tseltal people, using them as bonded labourers, controlling them generation after generation. These communities have persistently resisted for years and they have been forced to organise. Through their own organisational efforts, they have defended their dignity and they have fought fiercely for their autonomy, meaning their culture, tradition, history, forms of policy-making and self- government.

In the first days of January 1994, the people of Ocosingo were witness to the burning and destruction of the building which housed the municipal presidency: the symbol of power had thus been destroyed. It was also here that one of the fiercest battles between both armies was fought. All these events have considerably marked the life of the population.

The destruction of the municipal presidency led to the commencement of a phase of civic insurrection that would soon bear fruit in the municipality. The leaders themselves, both male and female, remember it thus, *"In these later years, when we decided to participate actively in politics, a preparedness for participation in electoral processes so that we could take control of the government organs was important. For some, government is synonymous with power, for us it is synonymous with service."*[4] For years, the communities and independent social organisations had not participated

in electoral processes in any organised manner. This was exploited by the power groups, headed by the cattle ranchers and landowners, who were responsible for large-scale electoral fraud. Because of this, the official party was assured of winning virtually all of the votes.

Although the democratic organisations formed alliances, joint struggles and were in permanent communication, it was not until 1994, within the context of war and faced with the urgency of civil peace initiatives, that spaces for coordination and political analysis for concrete action were formed. These efforts initially bore fruit in the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations (CEOIC)[5] and, later, the State Assembly of the People of Chiapas (AEDPCH)[6]. This marked an important precedent that would come to be reflected in the elections for State Governor and President of the Republic. Faced with the great fraud being perpetrated directly by the federal government, these organisations undertook actions of insurgency and civil resistance.

These efforts at unity were reflected at both regional and municipal level. In the case of Ocosingo, at the beginning of 1995, more than twelve social, productive and political organisations of a democratic and independent nature, representing all of the regions, gave themselves the task of constructing a space for analysis and political coordination. The Coalition of Autonomous Organisations of Ocosingo, COAO,[7] was thus formed, in which democratic exercise and decision-making worked through consultation with the communities, permanent analysis and meetings of committees, leaders and authorities. COAO was based on a political project, meaning that the identity, autonomy and mission of each organisation were respected.

Given the forthcoming municipal and local council elections in 1995, COAO decided to consult its grassroots to find out what its mandate should be for the electoral process. The result was a consensus around their participation. COAO thus sought an alliance with the Party of the Democratic Revolution - PRD - with whom they had good political relations at national level and in whom they placed their confidence to be able to participate in the coming elections, in spite of not having an active and formal membership within this party.

A new challenge thus began. The experience of the last elections had strengthened their involvement and interest in participating. They recalled how external and internal pressures had managed to achieve an agreement to hold the elections in a special format within the zone of conflict, organised by personalities and members of civil society, and also how those above 60 had said they did not know what the action of

voting meant, nor that of having voting cards. They also recalled how their assemblies and agreements had been important and had been taken into account in the voting and how their habits and customs could be included in exercising the right to vote. But they also sadly recalled how the federal and state governments had once again made fun of them and committed the same old thing as usual: fraud in order to impose an illegitimate government.

In the political campaign, Tseltal candidate members of COAO visited the *ejidos*, settlements and communities where, apart from speaking the same language, their speech, platform and proposal for government were being developed. During these trips, extreme irregularities were discovered in the holding of elections, in addition to which the military occupation of their territory itself forced them to modify their participation. Hundreds of cases were denounced, of which the most outstanding were those where voters had to walk for more than 12 hours in order to vote, a lack of voting cards with photos on, inflated lists of names, and harassment and persecution of electoral organisers, among other anomalies.

It was for these reasons that organised civil society had to suspend the elections on more than three occasions. In Ocosingo, then, there were no municipal elections. It was the month of October 1995.

With more than 3,000 delegates from the communities, national guests and international observers, a giant Municipal Assembly was set up, a sovereign body of popular decision in which, with agreements signed or thumbprinted, men and women, both young and old, exercised their right to choose their representatives. It was in this way that four leaders were appointed for COAO and one for the PRI (representing a sector not in agreement with their own party structure). All of them were mandated to serve their people. The Municipal Council was thus established, a Council which was said to represent their dignity, government, struggle, democracy, respect, search for peace and autonomy.

After intense mobilisations, debates, political disputes and proposals, the State Congress was put under pressure to take up the name and initiative and to recognise the proposal, establishing an Extended Municipal Government for the first time in the history of the state and the municipality, made up of ten people, five of these from the PRI, the official party. The challenge was in being able to govern the municipality with this type of structure.

Once more, on 1st January 1996, a new and different experience was commencing in Ocosingo, and one which was full of challenges.

The municipal task from another perspective

This Plural Extended Municipal Council was led by two Coordinators who remained in post two months before being replaced in rotating order, according to the order of the assigned Councilmen. Everyone in the Council had equality of rights and obligations; they issued collegial resolutions with the specific aim of seeking progress for all and by all, attending to and solving the demands that had historically been ignored by other administrations.

> *"We recognise that lack of access to a true state of law when participating in the exercise of government means that we may commit some errors but we are learning, undertaking new experiences and demonstrating that it is possible to govern, from the bottom up and for all, plurally and seeking a true democratic and participative practice."*[8]

We learned how to govern differently, despite our political differences and differences of principle. It was possible to reach council agreements by consensus; until then, differences had never been reflected in a majority vote. This represented an important step forward. Different areas have been rebuilt, based on the consideration that the way in which citizens are treated has to reflect changes, providing spaces in which the people can propose and criticise. It is a reality that this municipality is currently confronting the causes and effects of war, and so conflict resolution is of great importance. Respect and a new coexistence between different ways of thinking and acting necessarily occur through reconciliation from the bottom up. These specific spaces relate to each other in order to keep citizens informed on municipal events, and this is also a simple way of developing a programme of citizen education through which to strengthen social participation.

These achievements have been the initiative of the councillors who are members of COAO. They have been able to raise the awareness of the others, as well as counting on the support of important sectors of the population that consider themselves to be beneficiaries of this type of action.

> *"With regard to the Municipal Treasury, income and expenditure, state and federal programmes, this Municipal Council considers it necessary to be clearly informed how much the municipality, communities and urban zone actually generate in federal contributions and how much they receive in contributions and transfers from the federation. For that*

reason it is necessary to remind the treasury authorities of their obligation to provide our municipality with this information." [9]

"...with regard to programme and project implementation, from the very first day began the work of management, prioritisation, formation of subcommittees, sectoralisation and elaboration of technical files which the said programmes require for their development and freeing up of economic resources; we consider that it is at the level of local government that poverty can be overcome. The management of these funds must be carried out directly by the municipalities thus avoiding state and federal bureaucracies being in charge of the exaggerated proceedings that have been required until now. This will also lead to the opportune use of resources, and a balance between the responsibility assumed by the municipal civil employees, and the power of decision that such responsibility must bring with it."[10]

Also, for the first time, support was given to the different social and political demonstrations that were requested by the different organisations, no matter what political or social sector they belonged to.

This Government has encouraged open council meetings, consultations and assemblies in which the *ejidal* authorities, trusts, and social and political organisations from the different regions of the municipality have been present: in all of them the popular will has been respected and guaranteed. Agreements have been obtained in open council sessions to support the people through times which have been difficult for the municipality, state and country, such as the public pronouncement, together with COAO, for peace and the renewal of dialogue between the EZLN and the federal government in February 1997[11], the constant denouncement of the repression and persecution of leaders and communities[12], the support to the displaced and the food and solidarity to other municipalities, such as the community of Acteal in the municipality of Chenalhó in December 1997[13]. These actions have demonstrated that a good municipal government is one that supports and fights alongside those it governs.

This is how it worked during these years, when it was not always possible to serve as was desired, given the pressures from state and federal government. Being a part of this process meant being on a sharp learning curve; in practice we defended Municipal Autonomy and promoted the democratisation of government structures, from their foundations, giving credence to a democratic culture, strengthening civil society, rethinking the public sphere in order to take on, from within society itself, the handling of public policies. It is with the direct participation of all society in decision-making and the implementation of

political and economic development projects that we can most effectively work within a new democratic culture.

COAO: government, society and defence of municipal autonomy

More than two years have passed since then, and we have experienced great satisfactions as well as external pressures, and have also made mistakes. Nevertheless, one of the most significant achievements has been the learning process that the COAO council members have gone through.

"Municipal Autonomy is strengthened when social and critical participation exists and occurs necessarily through a process of civic education. In the future, government progress will be measured through its progress in strengthening civil society. For that reason, we must create ways and means to encourage citizen participation. For example, open council meetings, municipal assemblies etc."[14]

"...Through this experience the communities have been learning how to tell us what to do and how to solve their problems, define their needs and interests, which often exist but we do not see. Within this logic, actions have been carried out where leaders, municipal auxiliary agents, social, productive and civil organisations, amongst others, are recognised as interlocutors; one example is the implementation of projects and budgets where the population themselves carries out the prioritisation of works and, above all, we have promoted the accomplishment of those which represent the greatest community benefit. We have promoted participation, the strengthening of local power. This has led us to promote permanent training, both of present and future civil employees, as well as political cadres and civil society itself, with a view to the future. This represents a great challenge. If we do not strengthen the preparatory stages, the classic style of governing will continue to dominate, even when in opposition, perhaps through fear of undertaking new challenges. To be a democratic government means changing structures and relationships. We must emphasise that it is no use the opposition winning more town councils if these cannot then construct a true proposal for change, otherwise it will be ever more difficult to remain in municipal government through successive elections."[15]

"The municipalist boom is a reality. Let us talk of moving from municipal palaces to real town halls. Let us understand that only when we live in communication and direct consultation with the people is it possible to undertake democratic change."[16]

"The constant tensions and daily problems in municipal government are natural occurrences because of the plurality of existing beliefs within the population. For that reason, we must undertake new ways of approaching the people, of encouraging both society and public servants to feel governed and governors. It is important to be involved in the daily life of the municipality, to experience its needs and problems and to try to look for solutions to them. Learning and implementing effective methods of communication, public relations, social communication, conflict resolution, mediation and spaces to enter into dialogue and negotiation between opposite sides is of vital importance. If we manage to carry out even one of these effectively, we will at least then be truly contributing to rebuilding the social fabric, which in areas such as Chiapas is an urgent need. Plurality and tolerance are terms we have had to learn not only to say but also to practice."[17]

"Finally, we would like to note the role that has been played by the democratic town councils in Chiapas in attempting to stop the war and the conflict. It is clear that these municipalities have formed retaining walls in the face of actions aimed at generating violence on the part of local and state power groups. Their denunciations have served to demonstrate the role played by the army, the paramilitary groups and the security forces, amongst others, in the application of programmes and resources to counterinsurgency aims."[18]

Municipal autonomy

On the basis of our own experience, we can confirm that one thing which turns the municipalities into hostages of the state and federal governments is the budget that is provided for the municipalities, which comes *a priori* earmarked so that when the town council implements this budget (which, moreover, is paltry), it does not correspond to the realities and needs of the territory. Social policies and their implementation continue to be devised in offices, and in order to maintain an autocratic state. The Executive down to the lowest civil servants tear their clothes in defence of federalism in their discourse, speeches which go down well but which nevertheless are very far from the reality that is experienced on a daily basis in the exercise of municipal government. It is interesting how the town council discourse, in municipalist meetings and in daily life, denounces the way in which it is treated as the mere instrument of policies that are never democratically agreed by the population.

In those municipalities that try to exercise democratic policies, budget cuts are the norm, aimed at creating conflict between the government and society, at making the administration lose control through bureaucratic obstacles and constant political pressure.

In Ocosingo, we have experienced very tense moments because of decisions democratically agreed by the population but which were not "state and federal initiatives". One example is the constant harassment of the town council with state and federal audits. In 1997 alone we were audited thirteen times - more than once per month - with the purpose of "discovering mismanagement of funds and diversion to the EZLN". The truth was revealed when nothing irregular was discovered.

When we talk of municipal autonomy we mean that which we defend on a daily basis, where the municipal government can have the economic and political freedom to decide actions together with the population for their own benefit. We are fighting against a merely administrative management, we do not believe in *"subordination plus subordination equals good government"*. The municipality must exercise its true autonomy on the basis of being a government which really promotes development, issues its own legal codes, administers its budget freely under its own responsibility and administratively decentralises public policies in some sectors.

The opposition, through social organisations and political parties, is gaining space; they make the daily exercise of government feel the reality which shackles the municipalities. These can no longer be seen as they were in the past when minicipal position were prizes for political favours, inheritances and chieftainships. Not all is lost, both municipal governments and governed society separately or together can create new ways of working for municipal autonomy and good governance. There are innumerable initiatives with the aim of putting an end to authoritarianism and centralism in the administration of public income, defence of public works and projects to attend to the demands of the population as a whole, and new and viable proposals to promote the local economy, amongst others.

In the Municipal Council of Ocosingo, there are some councillors who think differently from ourselves and who have very clear commitment. They have prevented the process from progressing as we would have wished. Nevertheless, governing the largest municipality in Chiapas with all the characteristics previously mentioned, means that this process is an important one as it contributes towards the passage to democracy and stands as a model of reconciliation and government for all.

The municipal reality shows us that the municipalities are the basic authority of the socio-political organisation and the most important order of government. Political reality and the exercise of centralised power have destroyed true federalism, and municipal freedom has remained under the political and economic control of the state and federal organisations.

The municipal council has publicly stated that it does not want to administer poverty, it wants to be an example of what the people can do: it wants to be an example of municipal development.

The Indian peoples, municipalities and the San Andrés Accords

One issue on the agenda for discussion is that relating to the Indian peoples, autonomy and municipalities. The agreements signed in San Andrés propose the following with regard to the municipal sphere:

"With the aim of constructing a new relationship between the indigenous peoples of the country and the State, based on principles of pluralism, sustainability, integrality, participation and free determination, the federal government assumes the following commitments:

To recognise the indigenous peoples in the general constitution; to broaden their political participation and representation; to guarantee full access to justice; to promote the cultural manifestations of indigenous peoples; to assure education and training; to guarantee satisfaction of basic needs; to boost production and employment, and to protect indigenous migrants.

In order to obtain this, the need to build a new state and national legal framework that incorporates the political, jurisdictional, social, economic and cultural rights of indigenous peoples must be established. Also recognition in the national legislation of:

The communities as entities of public law; the right to associate freely as municipalities with a largely indigenous population, as well as the right of several municipalities to associate, in order to coordinate their actions as indigenous peoples.

The particular characteristics of autonomy; the transfer of powers, functions and resources, as well as the processes of remunicipalisation, with prior consultation of the populations involved, will be established by the local legislatures, on the basis of the constitutional reform of articles 4, 115 and others that are derived from these.

It is particularly noted that the intention of the reform of Art. 115 will be that of strengthening the federal pact, guaranteeing the participation of indigenous communities in the formation of town councils and of mainly indigenous municipalities in public affairs.

With regard to indigenous rights in the municipal sphere, the agreements proposed:

- *That a municipality with a mainly indigenous population does not constitute a different type of municipality, but something which, within the framework of the general concept of this political institution, would enable indigenous participation in its composition and incorporation and which encourages and incorporates the integration of the indigenous communities in the town councils.*

- *That these must be constitutionally strengthened, in such a way that they are endowed with functions with which to guarantee the autonomy of the indigenous peoples, and that the organisation anticipated in the municipal organic laws be reviewed in order to adapt them to the new development challenges and to the needs and new forms of organisation related to indigenous peoples.*

- *That a process of decentralisation of the powers, functions and resources of the federal and state authorities to the municipal governments be undertaken so that, with the active participation of the indigenous communities and the population in general, they assume their own initiatives.*

- *To establish that municipal agents or similar figures are elected or, where appropriate, appointed by the corresponding peoples and communities.*

- *The designation of their representatives, both at community level and within the bodies of municipal government, and their authorities as indigenous peoples, in accordance with the institutions and individual traditions of each people.*

- *Recognition of the figures of the system of responsibility and other forms of organisation, methods of designation of representatives, and decision-making in assembly and popular consultation.*

- *To anticipate in the state legislation the mechanisms that will allow the revision and, where appropriate, the modification of the names of the municipalities, at the proposal of the population settled within the corresponding demarcations.*

- *The recognition of jurisdictional spaces to the authorities designated within the communities, indigenous towns and municipalities, on the basis of a redistribution of state jurisdictional competence, so that these authorities*

are able to resolve internal controversies of coexistence, whose understanding and resolution imply a better procurement and imparting of justice.

- *All this within the framework of the principles, content and processes which the definition of the levels and modalities of autonomy implies: territory, sphere of application, competence, self-development, and participation in the state and national representational bodies.*

- *In the case of the commitments for Chiapas, a very important weight is given to the municipal sphere with regard to the specific characteristics of the municipalities with a mainly indigenous population, the process of remunicipalisation and the conformation of a Commission for Municipal Reform and Resetting of District Boundaries in Chiapas, whose implementation will have to take place in accordance with the reforms of the Federal Constitution.*

- *A debate is currently in progress, although in temporary legislature, concerning three initiatives that attempt to give legal interpretation to these agreements: The COCOPA initiative, supported by the EZLN and a broad representation of the national indigenous movement; the initiative of the Federal Executive; and the PAN initiative.*

- *With particular regard to the municipal sphere, the line that each one of these proposes for reform of Art. 115 of the constitution is as follows:*

- **Remunicipalisation:**

COCOPA: *The legislatures of the states will be able to proceed to the remunicipalisation of the territories in which the indigenous peoples are based; this will have to be done in consultation with the populations involved.*

Federal Executive: The legislatures of the states, when approving the creation of new municipalities, will take into account the geographic distribution of the indigenous communities, seeking the prior opinion of the populations involved.

PAN: The legislatures of the states will be able to proceed to the remunicipalisation of the territories in which the indigenous communities are settled; this will have to be done in consultation with the populations involved and responding to criteria of cultural, political, geographic and social rationale.[19]

We do not know what the future of these Agreements will be, to date they have been threatened by the government's refusal to fulfil what

was agreed. We consider that, supported by this new regulatory framework, a new relationship of respect and recognition of indigenous peoples must be promoted from within the municipalities, in which their traditions, culture, customs and ways of governing become important focal points in a new culture of government. Now, with the pro-government discourse - loaded with artificial patriotism - accusing the indigenous peoples of attacking national sovereignty by demanding separatism through autonomy, it is urgent to generate the reflection and analysis, the solidarity and denouncement with actions that will force the federal government to deal with the historical demands of the indigenous peoples, clearly shaped in the San Andrés Accords.

In the case of the indigenous municipalities, it is urgent to establish their association in order to create a common front to the needs and problems; it is also necessary to create and strengthen existing associations of municipalities at state and national level on the basis of particular interests. The indigenous municipality needs to construct and defend proposals on equal terms.

It seems to me that the most important lesson of the Ocosingo experience is that the indigenous peoples have demonstrated that they can govern for all and with a participative democratic vision, which is inclusive, diverse and tolerant. When all is said and done, it represents an important contribution to a peaceful transition towards democracy. We have learned that only when a true relationship with those that are governed exists can a programme of government, a development plan, co-planning and recognition and acceptance of working together for the good of the municipality be implemented.

This is also how COAO feels, as expressed in the words of Porfirio Encino, one of its leaders:

"The democracy in which we believe is that which is communitarian, where there exists participation, full control on the part of the grassroots in decision-making; that is, a democracy with political and administrative capabilities."[20]

By way of conclusion

The vastness of the territory, the few and deficient roads and the peripheral position of the municipal centre within the municipality itself prevent it from functioning as a centre of integration in the municipal economy and also significantly limit its influence in other respects, such as political control and service delivery.

Nevertheless, this experience has aimed to be a municipal government which exercises it mission in an inclusive way. Appropriate tools and methodologies have been sought with which to strengthen education for social participation, and to find approaches to true strategic planning with democratic vision.

The Municipal Council of Ocosingo is made up of social actors belonging to the social democratic organisations and to the official party, which means that decisions have to be taken within an atmosphere of respect, plurality, tolerance and diversity, thus supporting the demand to seek a peaceful transition to democracy and just peace, creating spaces for dialogue and coordination of the population in general.

When speaking of the town council of Ocosingo, people say that the building is not what is important. True government lies deeper than this.

"And if the PRI supporters want to steal the government it will be only the building they steal because the government will continue. The Municipal Presidency is the house of the people, the house of the forest, the house of all Indians or mestizos.

Somehow or other we have learned that the united peoples and communities can govern and can govern themselves"[21].

From the destruction of the municipal presidency in 1994, out of its ruins, a new proposal is being constructed. The political pressure still remains, there are only a few months until the end of this administration. The federal and state governments are trying once more to retake the municipal government. COAO has decided to participate in the coming elections, to be held in October of this year. Its electoral list and programme of government once more represent men and women from the different regions of the municipality and from its organisations.

The council members of COAO have not been afraid to defend municipal autonomy. On the contrary, the process has been strengthened on the basis of denunciation and proposals. They are fully aware that this contribution enriches the true municipalist struggle, its scope and, above all, the defence of its conquests by civil society.

So, in spite of the fact that official discourse today tries to persecute everything to do with *"autonomy"*, accusing it of being synonymous with rupture, there are increasingly more of us willing to defend and practise it. There is nothing further from the truth than the suggestion that au-

tonomy ruptures political structures. Terms and concepts are also a part of this struggle to take what is ours. Some conclusions in this direction are:

- In the municipal sphere, it is urgent to recognise the municipality as an area of government, with a legal structure and municipal autonomy. This means that we must propose the establishment of defence systems in the face of the violation of municipal autonomy that is experienced on a daily basis in the form of "special privileges", such as the projects implemented directly in the regions without passing through the municipality, or simply the case of the Mexican Federal Army and other security bodies acting without the minimum consent of the municipality and exceeding the authority conferred on them by the Mexican Constitution.

- It is necessary and urgent to dignify the municipality and its government. It is not possible to continue working merely as administrators, following predesigned programmes without interacting with society. The financial support that is due to the municipalities is not charity from the state, it is what is by law its right and this is how it must be in order to be able to exercise its power with full freedom. Without municipal autonomy it is not possible to be a government.
- Regulations are urgently required to ensure that the municipalities are really taken into account in order to dignify the municipal function and professionalise the public servants; there is also an urgent need to fight for special economic resources for weak municipalities. Conflict resolution, human rights and communication must be a part of the organic municipal structure.

In order to construct these paths, there is the thinking of others that has preceded us. I will finish this reflection with the words of one of the most outstanding precursors of the municipalist struggle in Mexico, General Emiliano Zapata:

"... municipal freedom is the first and most important of democratic institutions, nothing is more natural and respectable than the right of the inhabitants of a centre of population to settle, by themselves, the affairs of common life and to resolve what best meets the interests and needs of the locality." "... the former dictators suffocated the independence of the municipalities, subjecting them to the iron dictatorship of Governors and political heads, who were only concerned with becoming rich at the cost of the people and leaving the municipalities no freedom of action or financial resources which would enable them to lead a life of their own or to effectively take care of the needs and progress of the neighbourhood." "...municipal freedom is derisory if it does not grant the people due

participation in the solution of the main affairs of the locality, for otherwise, and if the town councils are not monitored and controlled, all that will be achieved is the establishment of a new despotism, one of councillors and aldermen identified with or controlled by the caciques of the towns, which would be no different to the old political chiefs... "[22].

The Commander in Chief of the Emiliano Zapata Liberation Army.
Municipality of Tlaltizapán, Morelos, 15th September 1916.

In summary, a new stage of the municipalist process in Ocosingo is beginning.

Jovel, Chiapas. Mexico – July 1998.

Notes

1 Santiago Lorenzo Jiménez, Coordinator of COAO and historic leader of ARIC-ID, 15th September 1996, at the first popular fiesta and declaration of independence, Ocosingo.

2 See ***Conteo de Población y Vivienda 1995.*** INEGI

3 See ***Segundo Informe, Versión ampliada,*** 1997, Municipal Council of Ocosingo, Chiapas

4 Speech by Councillor Juan Vázquez López in the opening ceremony of the 7th National Municipalist Assembly of the PRD. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas 1998.

5 The State Council of Indigenous Organisations of Chiapas was formed on 13th January 1994 and was made up of more than 300 indigenous and peasant organisations of a plural nature. Its life was very short, given that many of the organisations were affiliated to the PRI.

6 The Democratic State Assembly of the People of Chiapas was established by democratic social, peasant and indigenous organisations, following the disappearance of CEOIC.

7 The Coalition of Autonomous Organisations of Ocosingo is made up of the Rural Association for the Collective Interest Independent and Democratic Union of Unions ARIC-ID, the Rural Association for the Collective Interest Union of Unions ARIC-UU, the Regional Organisation of Ocosingo Coffee Growers ORCAO, United Districts of Ocosingo, the Regional Independent Peasant Movement MOCRI, the "Pancho Villa" organisation, the National Coordinating Body of Indian Peoples-Independent CNPI-I.

8 See ***Primer Informe del Gobierno Municipal de Ocosingo. "De Cara al Pueblo"***, 22nd December 1996.

9 Ibid.

10 See ***Segundo Informe de Gobierno. "Por un Municipio Libre y Soberano: Tolerancia, Participación y Pluralidad"***, 20th December 1997.

11 See ***Declaración Política Del H. Concejo Municipal Plural-Ampliado de Ocosingo con respecto a la situación actual que vive el Diálogo De Paz en Chiapas entre el EZLN y el Gobierno Federal.*** Ocosingo, Chiapas, on 21st January 1997. ..."This Municipal Council has been constantly monitoring events in our state with regard to the current political and social situation. In its first report on municipal activities of 22nd December, this municipal government consequently made known its position with regard to this.""We councillors governing the largest municipality in the state applaud each party making up the negotiation talks. We urge them to execute the San Andrés Accords, in which the just demands of Indian peoples are contemplated." "Now that we are again experiencing the uncertainty of not knowing, because although it is said that peace is approaching, events since February 1996 - when the Federal Government and EZLN signed the first two accords on rights and indigenous culture in San Andrés - have demonstrated the opposite. To date clear signs have still not been given by the federal government of a will to resolve the conflict with justice and dignity.""Given the above, we request that the Federal Government: 1.-Bring to fruition the San Andrés Accords in the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico, so the COCOPA initiatve may be approved by the Congress of the Union. 2.-That the path to Peace and the passage to democracy may be via the path of peaceful politics."Thus the Municipal Council of Ocosingo today adds its name to civil society's call to Dr. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, to respect the San Andrés Accords."

12 *See* ***Boletín de prensa del H. Concejo Municipal de Ocosingo, Dirección de Comunicación Social*** Ocosingo, Chiapas, 8th January 1998. "Today, 8th January 1998, members of the Federal Mexican Army, accompanied by hooded civilians, entered the localities of Sibacá, Patria Nueva, Uhcumiljá and Moisés Gandhi, all within the Free and Sovereign Muncipality of Ocosingo, causing confusion and concern amongst the inhabitants, who have come to this municipal authority to denounce the intimidation and entering of private houses in search of arms. In the face of these events, the Municipal Council of Ocosingo, based on the sovereignty conferred by the constitution and the authority granted it by popular mandate in order to maintain public order, denounces military actions in the municipality which disrupt public peace, upset life in the communities and protect paramilitary groups. The municipal council thus demands that the Federal Mexican Army halts its campaign to seize arms and the searches in the communties, that it withdraws from the localities mentioned and respects the Law for Dialogue, Conciliation and Dignified Peace in Chiapas, of 11th March 1995."

13 *See* ***Boletín de prensa del H. Concejo Municipal de Ocosingo, Dirección de Comunicación Social*** Ocosingo, Chiapas, 29th December 1997. "The Municipal Council of Ocosingo joins in the pain of the families of our brothers and sisters who were brutally assassinated on 22nd December last by elements of one of the paramilitary groups which operate with impunity in our state." "We are deeply pained to find such deeds of barbary and genocide, along the lines of the Guatemalan *kaibiles*, only now on our own land. Our hearts cry out with the immense pain that the families of Acteal in Chenalhó are now suffering." "As authorities of the municipality of Ocosingo, it is our duty to alert civil society, the media and national and international humanitarian organisations that there is a danger of events such as those of Acteal in Chenalhó being repeated; it is public knowledge that paramilitary groups are operating and, throughout 1997, have been equipped with heavy calibre weapons used exclu-

sively by the army, yet the corresponding federal authorities have not proceeded with investigations which would lead to the dismantling of these groups and the detention of those who are promoting them."

14 Speech by Councillor Mario Hernández Pérez during the Meeting of Municipal Presidents organised by the "Heriberto Jara" Centre for Municipal Studies. Coatzacoalcos Veracruz 1998.

15 Presentation given by municipal councillors Juan Vázquez López and Mario Hernández Pérez during the "Municipal Reform" Meeting organised by the Congress of the Union. March 1998.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 *See* Pueblos Indígenas y Municipios. *Dolores González Saravia Calderón - CESEM. 1998.*

20 Porfirio Encino Hernández, Secretary of ARIC-ID and leader of COAO. Interview with international observers on the process of municipal government. April 1998.

21 Nicolás Gómez López, Coordinator of COAO and historic leader of ORCAO. Workshop on Strategic Reflection and Remunicipalisation. July 1998.

22 Extracts from the General Law on Municipal Freedoms, given in the general barracks of the revolution in Tlaltizapán, Morelos, on the fifteenth day of the month of September of nineteen hundred and sixteen. The General in Chief of the Emiliano Zapato Liberation Army.

INDIGENOUS EMPOWERMENT TRENDS TOWARDS AUTONOMY IN THE ALTOS DE CHIAPAS REGION

Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor

The Altos de Chiapas region is currently the scene of a fierce struggle for autonomy on the part of the indigenous population against the *kaxlanes*[1]. These are two ethnic groups that have historically been in conflict. This conflict, however, used to be characterised by the almost absolute domination of the *ladinos* over the indigenous people. Today this is no longer the case. A true interethnic competition for the region exists. Over the last four decades, increasing empowerment has taken place, which has turned indigenous people into a demographic, political and economic force to challenge the historic regional hegemony of the *ladinos*. This challenge finds its political expression in the demand for indigenous autonomy.

Previously, however, and before this indigenous autonomy was expressed in the political sphere, mutations occurred at the level of the social structure, which made the construction of autonomous subjects possible. The aim of this essay is to identify, through the analysis of certain processes, **the structural dimension** of autonomy, which preceded the proposals for political autonomy, a dimension which is now moving forward at a terrific pace.

San Cristóbal de las Casas: the end of (regional) history

"*San Cristóbal, Colonial City*" is not only a publicity slogan for the "Mundo Maya" tourist programme. San Cristóbal was built as and, in effect, remains to this day, a colonial city, but this description refers more to the type of relations that have been established between its inhabitants than to its architectural facades.[2] It is a city which, since the year of its foundation in 1528, has been noted as a settlement of the *conquistadors* and their descendants, by virtue of their being born and living within its borders; a colonial city that learned to live on tributes from the Indians, either by the legal means of *encomienda* and distributions or by means of coercion. Since then "the economy of dispossession" has based its money on a form of production and a *form of relationship* between the Indians and *ladinos*.

This historical relationship has, for more than four centuries, polarised the existence of this city, known as the "governing centre" or "metropolis city" in the spatial configuration which Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán has characterised as a "region of refuge"; a spatial configuration in which the main components were precisely the colonial relations that maintained both Indians and *ladinos* within it but which was also characterised by the situation of "backwardness" that this region maintained in relation to the rest of the national territory which, from the Fifties onwards, found itself in full modernising "take-off"[3].

For Aguirre Beltrán, declaring a particular area of the country a "region of refuge" made it worthy of special politico-administrative treatment, that is, the indigenist policies of national integration. In this way, from the Fifties onwards, indigenism gave itself the task of modifying this regional configuration and the goal of obtaining the integration, of both Indians and *ladinos*, into the Mexican nation, anticipating their "interbreeding" in order to incorporate them into the national ethnic type - *mestizo* - and into the national social relations - class relations[4].

After more than forty years of integrationalist indigenism in the Altos region, the results are notable and are characterised by a paradox[5]. The paradox is that the direction of the process of regional reconfiguration followed by indigenist policies has not necessarily taken the course that Aguirre Beltrán's model had intended. In contrast to what was predicted, the indigenous population of the Altos did not diminish or interbreed. What is more, the caste relationship did not become diluted. On the contrary, ethnic confrontation has polarised in recent years. At the same time, *ladino-mestizo* hegemony has been weakened and a growing process of regional indigenous empowerment has been witnessed.

This last tendency has manifested itself in constant growth and has been the determining factor that has endowed the Altos region with a new configuration[6], expressed through the different processes that I will here document and which have occurred over recent years. They are characterised by a marked sense of autonomy in indigenous actions and could well be considered as struggles of ***decolonisation*** and ***reconquest.***

Towards indigenous empowerment

In Chiapas, different autonomous processes – which call themselves such - have recently been developed. In fact, many of the protagonists involved are not new but have been involved for a long time and have a

Map of the location of the region of Los Altos de Chiapas

long history of resistance. The different struggles for autonomy that are currently being staged are located within the realms of a global tendency towards indigenous empowerment. This has taken the last four decades to construct and is the result of diverse changes which have been made, both in the area of politics and in the sphere of social structures, which have produced a reconfiguration of ethnicity in the regions, municipalities and communities. The expression of this is found in the emergence of new autonomous subjects who play a role within the sphere of regional, municipal and community structures in the indigenous context of the region.

The struggles for political autonomy documented by the press are usually the best known, but they are not the only ones. Political autonomy is more visible because it is expressed through demonstrations of force, often armed. In contrast, however, structural autonomy occurs

in a quiet and secretive manner, aimed at the progressive **re-appropriation** of the region and characterised by a progressive weakening of the *ladinos*, *mestizos* and *coletos*, as well as by an increasing **regional indigenous empowerment.** The context is thus one of struggles for autonomy that are not merely political.

In fact, as we shall now see, the Altos region as a whole had already moved in this direction long before the formation of the autonomous regional governments through declarations of *de facto autonomy*[7]. Long before demands for *political autonomy* were expressly raised, other regional processes of autonomy had been quietly undertaken which affected the regional structure, reshaping the regional order. I have grouped these modifications into six core analytical themes: processes of demographic ***"reindianisation"***; of territorial ***reconquest***; of ***"reindianisation"*** of regional power; of mercantilist indigenous ***"repeasantisation"***; of ***redistribution*** of markets; and of the ***reconquest*** of Jovel.

Process 1: Demographic reindianisation

A central element in the new configuration of the Altos region is the high proportion of indigenous population in relation to the *ladino-mestizo* population. By 1990 these latter had fallen to no more than 12.6% of the regional total, whereas in 1970 they had accounted for nearly 50% (see Figure 1). The increase in the indigenous population has produced a drastic change in the configuration of the territorial space. From an ethnic viewpoint, in the region of Los Altos, the *ladinos* now constitute an ethnic group in the process of becoming crossbred and could be on the way to extinction[8], whereas the indigenous population is markedly consolidating. As can be observed in Figure 1, the *mestizo* population has practically disappeared from the majority of indigenous municipalities over the last decade. It can thus be seen that San Cristóbal and Teopisca have become "municipalities of refuge" for *ladinos*, *mestizos*, *kaxlanes* and *coletos*, a situation that contrasts markedly with the situation existing in the Seventies when they were strategically distributed throughout all the municipalities in order to ensure control of the region.

One of the main effects of indigenous demographic pressure - combined with the autonomous direction of its action - was the progressive disappearance of *ladinos* from the municipal centres of indigenous municipalities. From the Sixties onwards, an emerging indigenous elite was recovering – through purchase - the houses that the *ladinos* had inhabited in indigenous ceremonial centres and were also taking over control of the *ladino* businesses[9].

Severe restrictions have been expressly established in most of the indigenous municipalities of the region in order to prevent *ladinos* from living there. These restrictions have often coincided with the wishes of the *ladinos* themselves, for whom the prospect of living in an indigenous municipality is no longer of interest[10]. On other occasions, however, the *ladinos* have been violently expelled. The result is that the *mestizos* have currently limited themselves to living in two of the 15 municipalities which make up the region. Figure 1 shows how the *mestizo* population virtually disappeared from all the indigenous municipalities between 1970 and 1990, with the exception of San Cristóbal and Teopisca. However in these municipalities, too, they are losing demographic weight.

Process 2: Territorial reconquest

The reconquest of indigenous ceremonial centres or, if you like, the exclusion of *ladinos* from the Indian municipalities was also accompanied by increasing territorial reconquest. Cardena's agrarian distribution was the starting point. Violence accompanied the agrarian demands at that time, given the refusal of the *ladinos* to hand over the distributed land. Now, more than 90% of the territories of the 15 indigenous municipalities are in the hands of Tsotsil and Tseltal. Two thirds of the region's land is under a system of social property (community and *ejido*), whereas less than a third is privately owned (See Figure 2).

This private property, however, is not totally in *mestizo* hands but, over the last 30 years, has been passing slowly into the hands of the indigenous[11]. In the Seventies and Eighties, many Tsotsil and Tseltal migrated to work outside the region in order to make money with which to buy land[12]. The purchase of farms by means of indigenous co-ownership was a generalised phenomenon in all the municipalities of Los Altos. More recently, within the framework of the Zapatista uprising, the ultimate advance in territorial reconquest took place. Many of the lands that were appropriated by action were subsequently bought by the government and distributed to small groups by means of "co-ownership", now leaving little land in the hands of the *ladinos*[13].

It can thus be considered that the recovery of indigenous territory in Los Altos has been successful. It must be emphasised that, additionally, the Tsotsil and Tseltal of Los Altos not only now possess the majority of their ancestral territories but have also incorporated a significant number of hectares from other regions of the state into their territorial heritage - as a result of migrations to the Selva y Valles Centrales region - which contributes to decisively

to consolidating the territorial base on which ethnicity and the structural autonomy of these peoples are based[14] (see Figure 2).

Process 3: Reindianisation of regional power

One of the most immediate effects of the trends already mentioned was the recovery of political control in the municipalities. It began with the removal of the *ladino* town clerks, who had almost always had extensive power over the traditional and constitutional indigenous authorities. With the emergence of indigenous professionals in the Sixties, the clerks could be replaced by indigenous people. In this context, political power in the 15 municipalities with an indigenous majority is currently exercised by the indigenous themselves and in all the municipalities – with the exception of Amatenango del Valle and Altamirano - the governments are of pro-PRI orientation.

It can be seen that internal colonialism is in retreat, and paths towards the democratisation of the Indian-*ladino* relationship would now appear to be under construction, through the strengthening of the processes here analysed. It must be said, however, that such tendencies are not always accompanied by significant moves towards democratisation within indigenous communities. Steps in this direction are still weak - although they are certainly present - but they have to compete with strong anti-democratic tendencies and authoritarianism on the part of the indigenous *caciques* who, in some places, are all that *ladino* oppression has been replaced with[15], without the citizens of the Indian municipalities perceiving substantial changes indicating movement towards internal democracy.

Demographic reindianisation has had an impact on the reconfiguration of regional power. The volume of indigenous voters has grown and the number of Indian aldermen in San Cristóbal has increased in recent years. The two most recent federal uninominal deputies for the district of San Cristóbal, elected by the PRI, were in both cases Tsotsil, representing both the indigenous citizens and the *mestizos* of this party (who presumably voted for them) equally [16].

Given the importance of indigenous weight in the city, the indigenous legal system is frequently the normative framework for resolution of controversy, no longer only in the indigenous municipalities but also within the jurisdiction of San Cristóbal itself. In the relationship between the indigenous legal system and the state system, the former seems to be gaining space and the imparting of justice in indigenous

languages, regulated by Indian law, has even penetrated as far as the centre of the once "Royal City".

You only have to visit San Cristóbal and observe the traditional districts and numerous new colonies where the Tsotsil and Tseltal population is increasing. To this urban population must be added a significant indigenous majority that lives in the rural areas of San Cristóbal, consolidating the tendency to form a demographic majority in the municipality. That is why it can be predicted that in the immediate future this will stop being "the governing centre" - of Aguirre Beltrán's model - and may become just one more indigenous municipality of the region of Los Altos. In the not too distant future, San Cristóbal could be strongly disputed by the Tsotsil and Tseltal, who will try to govern it the indigenous way or in alliance with the poor *ladinos* of the slums[17].

Process 4: Mercantilist indigenous repeasantisation

The agrarian distribution of the Cardena period was decisive in enabling the Tsotsil and Tseltal of Los Altos to break some of the most searing ties, such as the relationship with the estates. From the Sixties to the Eighties, the people of Los Altos explored new alternatives for survival, and although some continued to migrate to the estates, many others preferred to rent land in the central valleys. Others went away to work in the oil regions of Chiapas, Tabasco and Campeche whilst yet others worked in road construction, dams and in the construction industry in the cities. From then on, money was gaining increasing importance in the life of the communities, the purchase of chemical inputs being incorporated into the local economy, and also the payment of day labourers for the accomplishment of agricultural work.

This model, which functioned until the Eighties, was exhausted by the prolonged crisis which the country sank into from 1982 onwards, which has been widely documented by different authors[18]. The recession, which affected the whole of national life and structural adjustment, had a direct impact on the labour markets and public investment, having the effect of severely restricting the labour market. Many Mexicans were thus left without work. In this context, thousands of indigenous people had to return to their places of origin to live on their plots once more. In the case of the Tsotsil and Tseltal of Los Altos, this return to "the cold lands" meant a return to agricultural activity and they thus became peasants once more.

Nevertheless this repeasantisation was no longer carried out in only one direction but in two, in that some returned to produce for subsistence purposes but others chose to produce for the market, thus rapidly introducing a trend towards *mercantilist repeasantisation.* These differences have introduced deep changes in the use of the land and in intercommunal relations. In most of the indigenous municipalities, class differences have now begun to modify the old social fabric and are beginning to decisively fracture the old homogenous indigenous community, if there ever was such a thing.

These economic differences are becoming deeper by the day and have reshaped intra-ethnic relations, causing substantial modifications in the social and political organisation of the places and municipalities. The incorporation of money into agricultural productive activity has forced some family members to leave in its search, crossing even state and national borders. An increasing number of Chamula men and women go North of the border and over the last five years, the young people of Chamula have most frequently gone to the United States of America. Other people from Chamula have made gardening their speciality. In the tourist port of Cancún, in the state of Quintana Roo, skills in growing organic vegetables have made the people from Chamula a specialised work force which has been channelled towards gardening. Similarly, in the state of Campeche, the Chamula women are in demand for domestic service and in that respect a Chamula "colony" has grown up in that area. Destinations outside the Chamula borders are thus perhaps the only real alternatives in the pursuit of money for agricultural activity, which is becoming increasingly mercantile.

An embryo of what could be deemed an emerging *indigenous bourgeoisie* has now appropriated substantial areas of land, is exerting political pressure for the control of water for irrigation and, in addition, has dominated the local and regional markets, transport routes and usurious lending of capital. Economic power combines with the political control that this group also usually exerts, supported by the structures of government power and the official party.

The importance of this small emerging *indigenous bourgeoisie* in the configuration of the autonomous tendencies that I am analysing here is that they have been the spearhead which has brought these tendencies about, and they are the ones who have had the sufficient strength and capital to take from the *ladinos* everything they previously had and which this small indigenous *elite* now has under its control and domination. The progressive displacement of the *ladinos* has consolidated an indigenous power that is coordinated at regional level and that is also expressed as Indian power in the city of San Cristóbal, which continues to be the main centre of cohesion for the region.

Process 5: Redistribution of markets

Community and municipal spaces have already become too small for this rich indigenous *elite* and for more than fifteen years they have been extending their influence towards the "governing centre", San Cristóbal de las Casas. The economic reconquest of the region has been principally headed by a significant group of Tsotsil and Tseltal with sufficient capital to compete with the *ladinos* for the economic spaces, to the point of having displaced them from the administrative centres of their municipalities, and now also from some businesses in San Cristóbal itself.

Practically 100% of all the collective transport routes circulating in the indigenous municipalities are thus in the hands of rich Tseltal and Tsotsil, or in the hands of small indigenous cooperatives. More recently, indigenous carriers have begun to compete for the transport routes within the city of San Cristóbal itself and they currently control more than 60% of the concessions (taxis, combis and microbuses)[19]. The significant conflict among indigenous people caused by the distribution of these transport routes has to be mentioned.

In the last 15 years, the indigenous have not limited their competition for economic spaces to their municipalities of origin. They have also increasingly moved into the city of San Cristóbal. The "Castillo Tielemans" public market - the main market of the city - is more than 90% controlled by associations of indigenous retailers. These have proliferated to represent - under the purest of corporativist schemes, be it along ethnic, political or religious lines – more than three thousand vendors located in the environs of this market. Competition for these stalls frequently leads to confrontations between these associations for control of members and commercial spaces. The displacement of the *mestizo* vendors by the indigenous is remarkable and has also brought them into such confrontations.

Another business traditionally monopolised by the *coleto* and *ladino* retailers is the sale of crafts. Now they have indigenous competitors. Around the Santo Domingo and Caridad churches are approximately 200 craft stalls, run largely by indigenous women expelled from their communities of origin. Many of these sellers are salaried employees of the large indigenous wholesalers, who come and go, with their own capital and transport, from Guatemala, in order to provide the increasing demand for handicrafts from that country. Additionally, in 1998, the

small business Maya Ik - made up totally of indigenous people - set up a craft store in the exclusive *calle de Real de Guadalupe*, breaking the monopoly of the *ladino* and *coleto* women along this important commercial route.

The same thing is happening with the introduction of other industrialised products into the region, products which long ago were the monopoly of the *coletos* and *ladinos*. The indigenous carriers now own a significant stock of heavy tonnage trucks with which they transport merchandise from and to Mexico City and Puebla in order to supply the small indigenous and *mestizo* retailers. The entrepreneurial vocation of the flower producers of Zinacantán must also be mentioned, the marketing of which they carry out almost totally themselves, selling both along the Chiapas coast and in Mérida and Cancún. The observed change in attitude of the bank managers in their dealings with the indigenous is significant, trying to attract the several thousand dollars of income from the indigenous coffee growers of Chenalhó, Chalchihuitán and Tenejapa during the months of October and November, as well as the 20 million pesos earned in 1997 by the lucrative Zinacantán flower growing industry, a business totally in indigenous hands[20].

At the same time, indigenous people are beginning to become involved in the business of tourism. Tourist activity constitutes the main source of income in the region. In the last three years, two indigenous organisations have been established to sell tourist excursions and they are slowly beginning to make inroads into this lucrative market, once the almost exclusive monopoly of *mestizos* and foreigners.

Competition is also commencing in other, less lawful, areas. Indigenous municipalities are frequently mentioned in the press as "territories outside of the law". In some police raids made on indigenous municipalities, such as Tenejapa, several dozen stolen cars have been seized. Such a situation was public knowledge, yet the authorities did nothing about the matter. Gossip also indicates that some indigenous urban districts of the city, such as La Hormiga, are centres for arms and drugs trafficking. La Hormiga was even denounced as the source of the supply of arms that were unfortunately used in the notorious Acteal massacre.

And so, through both lawful and unlawful business, indigenous empowerment is growing. It must be said that, in spite of the persistence of these tendencies, these processes almost certainly reflect only a small indigenous minority. The rest remain employed in badly paid jobs, with the most lucrative businesses continuing to be controlled by the *mestizos* who are, in reality, the ones running the regional economy, with poverty and hunger continuing to dominate the regional landscape.

Process 6: Reconquest of Jovel

According to indigenous oral tradition, old Jovel[21], previously Ciudad Real and now San Cristóbal, is built on Chamula territory. For many Chamula elders, the municipal demarcations are arbitrary and for this reason some twenty Chamula settlements have been incorporated into the municipality of San Cristóbal.

The territorial spaces which the Chamula indicate as their own are, however, not limited to the rural zones of the municipality but also include part of the urban area. In 1994, Chamula voices were frequently heard talking of *recovering* the Barrio del Cerrillo as an ancestral territory. And although such a proposal has remained no more than a demand, the Chamula people have, through action, not only repopulated the Barrio del Cerrillo but the whole city. The *reconquest of Jovel* lies within a strategy of indigenous territorial reconquest, which has not limited itself to Indian municipalities, but has also extended to urban areas[22].

With the new indigenous settlements which the expulsions, employment and services have encouraged, colonial San Cristóbal - in the past the privileged establishment of the *conquistadors* and their descendants - has undergone a strong and decisive ethnic recomposition. Unlike immigration to other cities, the indigenous who live in San Cristóbal are not only located in the outskirts of the city and are not limited to "the periphery" but have penetrated throughout entirely. Tsotsil and Tseltal immigrants have taken over entirely, reshaping the urban space. What *coleto, kaxlan, ladino, mestizo* or *gringo* does not have an indigenous neighbour in San Cristóbal[23]?

The idea that indigenous equates to rural or peasant no longer reflects contemporary indigenous life, which is why indigenous ethnicity is not limited to peasant ethnicity. To be Indian and to be urban are no longer contradictory identities. Nowadays, agriculture is no longer the main activity of an increasing number of Tsotsil and Tseltal. Their incorporation into the service industry, business and the informal economy increases daily, which is why an increasing number have chosen to live permanently in San Cristóbal, reindianising the seat of the once *coleta* capital.

The indigenous reconquest has consistently strengthened the identity of the indigenous people of Los Altos. Tsotsil and Tseltal are now being employed in a significant number of qualified services, are beginning to go to university without it automatically leading - as happened in the past - to a loss of their identity. Indigenous workers' demands to be employed in government agencies are increasing, and it is already

common to hear advertisements on the radio for employees who have a command of one indigenous language or another.

Some Tsotsil and Tseltal researchers are beginning to gain space in the universities and research centres, until recently the exclusive monopoly of outsiders and foreigners. Defence of identity is mixed with union and group interests; thus an "Association of Indigenous Lawyers"[24] has been formed which claims all court-appointed defence positions in the indigenous regions as their own, and even the PRI members are demanding of their leadership the formation of an "Indigenous Foundation"[25].

As can be seen, indigenous empowerment in the region of Los Altos de Chiapas is a reality. Of course, within this framework the Zapatista uprising contributed decisively to giving a strong impulse to these tendencies by placing the indigenous peoples in a position of greater strength. By legally consolidating indigenous autonomy, the legal foundations would be laid enabling the profiles of this new configuration to be more consistently specified: an event that could be the basis for the building of a new regional history. Such historical processes will not be easy or automatic by any means. On the contrary, they will be extremely complex and contradictory and, given the depth of change that such issues imply, could be accompanied by highly conflictive and violent episodes. This must be understood within the dynamic present in order to achieve the intercultural dialogue which may lead towards *ethnic cohabitation* in this complex region.

Notes

1 The Chiapas Mayans call all non-indigenous people *kaxlanes*, whether they are *ladinos*, *coletos* (the name given to the original Spanish colonialists of San Cristóbal, thus named after the *coleta* or ponytail they were accustomed to wearing – trans. note) or *mestizos* in general.

2 See Jan de Vos, *San Cristóbal, ciudad colonial*. Published by the Society of Friends of the Cultural Centre of the Altos de Chiapas-INAH. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 1986.

3 The theoretical development of this proposal can be found in Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Regiones de Refugio*, SEP-INI; México D.F., 1967

4 See Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Las clases sociales en las sociedades agrarias*. Published by Siglo XXI, México D.F. 1969.

5 The Altos region is made up of the municipalities of Altarmirano, Amatenango del Valle, Chalchihuitán, Chamula, Chenalhó, Huixtán, Larrainzar, Mitontic, Oxchuc, Pantelhó, San Cristóbal, Tenejapa, Teopisca and Zinacantán.

6 A theoretical development of the concepts used in this essay, such as *space*, *spatial configuration* and *territorial configuration* can be found in José Luis Coraggio: *Posibilidades y dificultades de un análisis espacial contestatario*. Speech given in the "Seminar on the Regional Issue in Latin America". The College of Mexico, Mexico 24-29 April 1978, mimeo, and *Sobre la espacialidad social y el concepto de región* in the Seminar on the Regional Issue in Latin America. City Research Centre. Quito, Ecuador 1978.

7 Such as, for example, the declarations of Zapatista autonomies or declarations of CEOIC autonomies and the Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions (RAP), which occurred between 1994 and 1997. A review of the *de facto* autonomies in the Altos region can be found in Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor "Procesos autonómicos indígenas en la región altos de Chiapas". *IEI Year Book 1998*, IEI-UNACH. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. At the press.

8 Reyna Moguel has characterised the different ethnic categories coexisting in the Altos region and has found differences between the *ladinos*, *mestizos* and *coletos*. For an in-depth account of the historical evolution of the region and the coexistence of the indigenous and *ladino* systems, see Reyna Moguel, *Sistemas sociales en los Altos de Chiapas*. Degree thesis. Doctorate in Anthropology. UNAM. 1997.

9 A critical review of the role of bilingual teachers in this process can be found in Luz Olivia Pineda, "Maestros bilingües, burocracia y poder político en los Altos de Chiapas", published in *Chiapas: los rumbos de otra historia*. CIESAS-CEMCA-UNAM-UG, Mexico, 1996, a collection compiled by Juan Pedro Viqueira and Mario Humberto Ruz.

10 It was no longer in their interest for *ladinos* to live in indigenous communities. They had done so for a long time because through their presence they could gain indigenous "bonded" labour for work on their estates. Now that this type of arrangement was no longer used, and mechanisms of compulsion were no longer necessary for salaried work, the few lands and their bad quality had produced an army of unemployed, which the system no longer had the capacity to absorb. In San Andrés Larrainzar, a violent expulsion of *ladinos* took place in 1974 and in Huixtán in 1980. See Alejandro García, *Un eterno retorno a la tierra fría. Cambios históricos en la migración y uso del suelo en los Altos de Chiapas*. ECOSUR. Mimeo. 1995.

11 See Oscar Sánchez Carrillo, *En el umbral de la memoria. Análisis genealógico en Zinacantán, Chis*. Thesis presented for the degree of Master of Science in Regional Rural Development. Autonomous University of Chapingo. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. Typewritten document, 1997.

12 See George Collier, *Basta. Tierra y rebelión zapatista en Chiapas*. Co-published by UNACH-Institute for Food and Development Policy.

13 As can be seen from Figure 2, the communal property and *ejidal* lands make up more than 60% of the land tenure in the region. Private co-ownership is also currently another form of tenure that is typically indigenous, which is why 10% of co-owned lands are in the hands of indigenous people. Thus, according to *INEGI (1990)* and *PROCAMPO (1997)* sources, the indigenous population hold at least 70% of the land in the region in their hands, more if we add land bought over the last decade.

14 See Agustín Romano Delgado, "La expansión territorial Tseltal-Tsotsil" in *Homenaje a Alfonso Villarojas, en Antropología mesoamericana*. Víctor Manuel Esponda, et al. (Compilation) 1992.

15 See, in this respect and with relation to Chamula, the text by Jan Rus; "La comunidad revolucionaria institucional: la subversión del gobierno indígena en los Altos de Chiapas, 1936-1968", *in Chiapas: los rumbos de otra historia*, previously mentioned.

[16] Although to date the nomination of indigenous candidates to such posts has been within the context of 1994, this obligation has now in some ways been incorporated into the Electoral Code of the State of Chiapas. In an action that left the leaders of their respective parliamentary groups within Congress concerned, all the indigenous deputies of the Local Congress struck it lucky by joining together as an "Indigenous Parliamentary Group" and proposing - and achieving - the approval of an addition to article 40, paragraph XIV of the said Code, which says, "In the districts and municipalities of predominantly indigenous population, the political parties will give preference to the registration of indigenous citizens as candidates, following an internal process of election, through popular consultation, and in the lists for the formation of the town councils, the indigenous population of those municipalities will be proportionally represented." This reform was approved by all the deputies of all parties with two abstentions: the coordinators of the parliamentary groups of the PRI and the PRD. An account and critique of this reform has been made by the columnist Pepe Figueroa in the newspaper *Cuarto Poder,* Monday 20th October 1997. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas.

[17] A different interpretation, which assumes that the urban indigenous settlers could become "*coletos*", can be found in Edgar Sulca Báez, *Nosotros los coletos. Identidad y cambio en San Cristóbal las Casas;* 1996 Year Book. Centre for Higher Studies in Mexico and Central America-UNICACH. Offprint. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, 1997.

[18] See George Collier, "Los zinacantecos en su mundo contemporáneo" in V. M. Esponda et al. (Compilation). *Antropología mesoamericana. Homenaje a Alfonso Villa Rojas,* 1992. Manuel Parra and Reyna Moguel, *Situación actual y posible evolución de la agricultura maya en las tierras altas de Chiapas.* ECOSUR. Mimeo. 1995.

[19] One of the State government's strategies with which to deflect the peasants' demands for land – following reform of article 27 and following the Zapatista uprising – was the massive distribution of taxi concessions. From 1994 to 1997, many peasant and indigenous organisations which sat down at the "agrarian table" to negotiate land deals ended up at the "transport table" negotiating public transport concessions. This strategy required the government to have previously made a redistribution of already existing licences. Most of the *mestizos* of San Cristóbal, and of practically all the municipalities in indigenous regions, found their concessions cancelled. Where this was not possible, the excess supply of taxis has forced the *mestizos* to retire from the taxi business which, perhaps in the past, had been very lucrative. Now, virtually all indigenous and peasant organisations have their "transport division" and a large number of their activists are taxi drivers by night and political leaders by day.

[20] In the newspaper *El Dictamen Coleto,* dated 2nd August 1997, its main headline read, "In Los Altos, Zinacantán is number one in the economic takeoff", referring to the earnings made by the greenhouse flower industry. Although this activity is predominantly the domain of the people of Zinacantán, it is not limited to this municipality alone, as other areas, such as Chamula, Mitontic and Larrainzar also participate.

[21] Jovel is the name given by the Tsotsil, from time immemorial, to the territory on which San Cristóbal de las Casas is currently built. The name comes from the predominance of a grass which the Tsotsil call "jovel".

[22] See Reyna Moguel, op. cit.

[23] The ethnic complexity of San Cristóbal de las Casas has been noted by Juan Pedro Viqueira, "Los Altos de Chiapas: una introducción general", in *Chiapas: los rumbos de otra historia,* op. cit. See also Jorge Angulo, "Población y migraciones campesino-indígenas en los Altos de Chiapas", in IEI Year Book IV; IEI-UNACH. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 1994; and "Comportamiento de la población regional y grupos étnicos en los Altos de Chiapas (1960-1990)", in IEI Year Book V; IEI-UNACH. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 1995.

[24] See *el Diario de San Cristóbal,* Saturday 27th July 1996. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.

[25] See the newspaper *Cuarto Poder,* Saturday 1st June 1996. Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas.

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Member of the *Regional Border Committee* of the *Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Farmers CIOAC-Border Region,* Comitán, Chiapas, 1983; General Secretary of the *Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Farmers CIOAC-Border Region,* Comitán, Chiapas, 1985-1988; General Coordinator of the *Independent Council of Tojolab'al Peo-*

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A *local deputy in the LIX Legislature, State Congress of Chiapas*, 1995-1998, for the Party of the Democratic Revolution-RAP and *President of the State Council of the Party of the Democratic Revolution-Chiapas*, 1997-1998.

Adviser to ARIC-Union of Unions Ocosingo on agrarian issues and production projects, 1992-1993.
Founder and president of the *Convergence of Peasant and Indigenous Organisations of Chiapas A.C.;* San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 1994-1995.

Member of the political leadership of *the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations of Chiapas* (CEOIC), San Cristóbal de las Casas, 1994.

Founder member and General Coordinator of the *Executive Council of the Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions of Chiapas (RAP);* San Cristóbal de las Casas, 1998-1999. Founder member and member of the *Commission for Follow-Up of the Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy,*

ANIPA, 1995 and member of the *National Indigenous Council of the Secretariat of Indian Peoples of the Party of the Democratic Revolution*, 1998-1999.

Secretary of the *Training Centre for the Self-Development of the Indian Peoples of the Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions (CECADEPI-RAP);* San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 1998-2001.

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Miguel González Hernández

He is a member of the Tsotsil people and was born in the municipality of Jitotol, Chiapas.

For many years he worked as a bilingual primary education teacher.

Of his representational positions, the following can be highlighted:

Organisational Secretary of the Union Delegation D-1-92, Bochil.

General Secretary of the Union Delegation D-1-92, Bochil.

Secretary for Work and Special Level Conflicts, Section 7 of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE).

Public Relations Secretary for the State Executive Committee of the Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), 1992-1995.

Organisational Secretary for the State Executive Committee of CIOAC, 1995-1999.

Promoter and founder of the *Regional Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations (CROIC)*, member of the *State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations (CEOIC), North Region*, 1994-1995.

Municipal President of Jitotol 1996-1997, Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) of the Autonomous North Region. He was arbitrarily removed from post by the State Congress, accused of cattle rustling by means of an irregular legal and administrative process.

Elvia Quintanar Quintanar

She graduated as an agronomist from the Metropolitan Autonomous University, and is a probationary teacher on the Master of Science in Rural Regional Development - Autonomous University of Chapingo.

She is originally from Jilotepec, Mexico State.

Adviser in "Economic Organisational Processes and Production Projects" to the *Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC)* since 1987.

Coordinator of the *"Training Programme in Productive Ecology of the CIOAC-North Region"* 1993-1997.

Member of the collective leadership of the *Women's Commission of the Democratic State Assembly of the Chiapas People (AEDPCH)*,1994 .

Member of the *State Executive Committee of CIOAC,* holding the post of Women's Secretary, since 1995.

Arturo Lomelí González

He is a graduate from the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH).

He has devoted himself to the study of the indigenous culture of Oaxaca and Chiapas, where he has lived for 18 years.

He has written a number of different books and articles on the Mayan culture of Chiapas.

Since 1990 he has been adviser to a number of different indigenous and peasant organisations, accompanying the different political processes that have developed in south-east Mexico.

Ricardo Hernández

Over the last four years, his work has focussed on the different ways of contributing to strengthening popular and municipalist struggles.

Member of the *Popular Movement for Democracy (MCD),* area of popular education, 1994; member of the *State Attorney General's Office of the Chiapas People,* 1994; member of the *National Civic Alliance,* area of Electoral Bodies and in charge of the Programme of Young Observer Brigades in the Sierra de Chiapas zone for the elections for President of the Republic, 1994-1995; member of *Civic Alliance, State elections, Tabasco,* 1994-1995 and trainer of *Electoral Observers;* 1994-1995.

Member of the *Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity;* 1995-1996.

Adviser to the Congress of the Union, LVI Legislature, 1995-1996. Party of the Democratic Revolution.

Town clerk of the municipality of Ocosingo, Chiapas, 1997-1998.

In addition, he has led numerous workshops on municipalism, human rights and democracy, communication, civic education, citizen rights and conflict resolution and reconciliation with peasant and indigenous organisations of the State of Chiapas.

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Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor

She holds a Master of Science in Regional Rural Development from the Autonomous University of Chapingo and is a sociology graduate from the UNAM.

She is presently a teacher and researcher at the Centre for Research and Higher Studies of Social Anthropology (CIESAS-Sureste).

She is the author of 35 articles, and co-author of 7 books and 3 popular education leaflets.

Member of the "Group of Independent Experts", *Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos-OAS,* San José, Costa Rica, 1991-1992.

Founder member of the *Latin American Council for Support to Indigenous Struggles (CLALI),* Mexico D. F, 1982; member of the technical team of the *Independent Front of Indian Peoples (FIPI),* Las Margaritas, Chiapas, 1987-1998; promoter, founder and president of the *Committee for the Support and Defence of Indian Rights A.C. (CADDIAC),* Mexico D.F., 1990-1994.

Founder member of the *Support Group to Regional Indigenous Autonomy (GAARI)*, Mexico D.F, 1994; member of the Advisory Council of the *Abya-Yala Foundation for Indigenous Self-Development (FAY)*, Oakland, California, USA, 1994-1999; founder member of the *Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA)* Mexico D.F., 1995-1998; member of the *Maya-Ik Technical Council - Ecological and Cultural Tourism of Mayan Peopled S.C.*, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas 1995, and Academic Director of the *Training Centre for the Self-Development of the Indian Peoples of the Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions of Chiapas (CECA-DEPI-RAP)*, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, 1998.

Adviser to the *Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN)*, 1995.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEDPCH	Democratic State Assembly of the Chiapas People.
ARIC-ID	Rural Association of Collective Interest Independent and Democratic Union of Unions.
ARIC-UU	Rural Association of Collective Interest-Union of Unions.
AZA	Zoque Assembly of Amatán.
CCRI	General Command of the EZLN.
CEOIC	State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organisations of Chiapas.
CEPICH	State Coordinating Body of Indigenous Producers of Chiapas.
CFE	Federal Electricity Commission.
COCEI	Worker Peasant Student Coalition of the Isthmus.
CIOAC	Independent Union of Agricultural Workers and Peasants.
CIPCCH	Indigenous Popular and Peasant Council of Chiapas.
CND	Democratic National Convention.
CNMIM	National Coordinating Body of Indigenous Women of Mexico.
CNPA	National Coordinating Body of the Ayala Plan.
CNPII	National Coordinating Body of Independent Indian Peoples.
COAO	Coalition of Autonomous Organisations of Ocosingo.
COCICH	Convergence of Peasant and Indigenous Organisations of Chiapas.
COCOPA	Commission for Concordance and Peace.
COLPUMALI	Coordinating Body of Organisations of the Mayan Peoples in Struggle for their Liberation.
CONAI	National Intermediation Commission.
CPNAB	Council of Nahua Peoples of Alto Balsas.
CRIACH	Council of Indigenous Representatives of Los Altos de Chiapas.
FAC-MLN	Extended Front for the Reconstruction of the National Liberation Movement.
FAPICH	Fund for the Self-Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas.
FIPI	Independent Front of Indian Peoples.
FTA	Free Trade Agreement. United States - Mexico.
Maya Ik'	"Mayan Wind".

MOCRI	Regional Independent Peasant Movement.
MODECH	Democratic Movement of Chalchihuitán.
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations.
OCEZ	Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organisation.
OCOPECH	Popular Worker and Peasant Organisation of Chalchihuitán.
OIC	Indigenous Organisation of Cancuc.
OIMI	Independent Organisation of Indigenous Women.
OISS	Indigenous Organisation *Sjamel Sitik* ("Let's open our eyes").
OMIECH	Organisation of Indigenous Doctors of the State of Chiapas.
OMPTACH	Organisation of Traditional Doctors and Birth Attendants of Los Altos de Chiapas.
OPEZ	Emiliano Zapata Proletarian Organisation.
OPIECH	Organisation of Indigenous Producers of the State of Chiapas.
ORCAO	Regional Organisation of Coffee Growers of Ocosingo.
ORIACH	Indigenous Organisation of Los Altos de Chiapas.
PCM	Mexican Communist Party.
PRD	Party of the Democratic Revolution.
PRT	Revolutionary Workers' Party.
PSUM	Unified Socialist Party of Mexico.
RAP	Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions.
SCOPNUR	Cooperative Society for the Improvement of Our Race.
SEMARNAP	Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fishing.
SOCLICH	Cooperative Society for Indigenous Struggle in Chiapas.
SOCOMU	Cooperative Society "Muktavinik".
UCIZONI	Union of Indigenous Communities of the North Zone of the Isthmus.
UEC	Union of Organisations, Ejidos and Communities.
UMOI	United Movement of Independent Organisations.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Azolve: Sedimentation.

Azuchil: Tree typical of Mexico, for ornamental use, also called "fire flower".

Kaxlanes or Caxlanes: Name given by the indigenous communities to people who are not indigenous.

Copal: Scented resin.

Cuajilote: Plant whose fruit is edible, similar to cocoa.

Chalalate: Used for healing wounds.

Mezcal: Alcoholic drink obtained from the Agave (a plant of the *amarilidacia* family).

Pochote or Ceiba: A sturdy American tree, about 30 metres tall. It produces a kind of cotton.

Tequio: Free community labour within rural communities.

Topiles: Community officers, of lower position in the system of responsibilities or indigenous government.

Veneros: Streams or springs.

Zempazuchil or Cempazuchil: Plant of traditional use, of pre-Hispanic origin, used in the festivities to the dead.