REMUNICIPALIZATION IN CHIAPAS

POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL IN TIMES OF COUNTER-INSURGENCY

Edited by Xochitl Leyva Solano and
Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor

Foreword by Armando Bartra – Translated by Tim Trench
Chapters by Sonia Toledo, Araceli Burguete, Jaime Torres, Xochitl Leyva,
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Cover, typesetting: Jorge Monrás
Cover painting titled: "Feeding the Universe" by © Juan Chawuk
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ISBN: 978-607-486-152-5
Printed in Mexico City

First edition (September 2007)**:** *La remunicipalización de Chiapas. Lo político y la política en tiempos de contrainsurgencia.* Edited by Xochitl Leyva Solano and Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor. México City: CIESAS, Editorial Miguel Angel Porrúa, and Cámara de Diputados-LX Legislatura "Colección Conocer para decidir".

Distributors:
Mexico: CIESAS, Juárez 87, Colonia Tlalpan, 14000, México City – www.ciesas.edu.mx
Europe: IWGIA, Classensgade 11E, DK Copenhagen 2100 – www.iwgia.org
North America: Transaction Publishers, 390 Campus Drive, Somerset, New Jersey 08873 – www.transactionpub.com

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Preface to the English Translation

Xochitl Leyva Solano and Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor

The book that you have in your hands has been slow to reach maturity. The fieldwork began back in July 2000 and went into 2001. Later came the writing up of the different chapters, and the revision and review stages, which took us up to October 2005. The manuscript then found a place in a collection edited by the Mexican Chamber of Deputies called *Conocer para Decidir* (Knowledge for Taking Decisions), and was eventually published in Spanish in 2007 (Leyva and Burguete 2007). In 2011, we managed to publish this version in English thanks to a translation done by our colleague Tim Trench, as well as the editorial support of the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (CIESAS).

The principal reason that moved us to publish this work in English was to share a collective piece of research that details historically how and why state-led counter-insurgent policies resonate with certain local groups. The first question that a reader might ask is: What national or international relevance could such a study have that deals with a "remunicipalization program" carried out in the context of a political and military conflict, an unfinished peace process and a severely questioned democracy? The reader will no doubt make up his or her own mind, but we would like to think that by placing the histories and interpretations of local actors at the foreground of the story, we manage to go beyond government discourse and practices and open up a privileged space for thinking collectively about the Mexican political system and key issues such as institutional design, corporatism and client networks and civic participation and electoral rights, as well as "municipal development".

All this was very relevant in 2007 because as a country we had just been through a very controversial electoral process in which the difference between the official "winner" and the official "loser" was half a percent. The problem did not lie so much with the narrow margin, but with the countless irregularities that the different parties tried to draw attention to, appealing to the respective institutions. All this stirred up considerable inconformity and led to a severe questioning of the party system and of the institutions charged with upholding electoral democracy. It was in this context that this work was first published in Spanish,

deconstructing and revealing the ways in which the Mexican political system worked on local, regional and state levels.

But the contributions of this collective work do not end there. There is another aspect that perhaps in 2011 seems a little further away than in 2007 but nevertheless remains relevant: the peace accords that the Mexican government committed itself to, before the nation and the *Ejército Nacional de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN). Part of this history is included in the book, obviously taking "remunicipalization" as the thread, and we show how it represented a fundamental element of the counter-insurgent policies deployed by the Mexican government against indigenous autonomy (Zapatista as well as the independent indigenous peasant movement in general) in Chiapas at the end of the twentieth century. The government remunicipalization offer, made by the first Peace Commissioner after the 1994 Zapatista armed uprising, opened up many possibilities and multiple demands emerged for the creation of new municipalities or the restoration of municipal status in those cases where it had been lost for some reason. This restoration of municipal powers was what became known in the local political jargon as "remunicipalization".

This term ("remunicipalization") soon became a political touchstone for the national indigenous movement, but it acquired different meanings in the context of Chiapas after the armed uprising. Thus, while in other states in the country (such as Guerrero, Michoacán and Veracruz) the demand for remunicipalization was deployed by indigenous organizations with a view to self-determination, local self-government and had an autonomous character, in Chiapas, as we shall see in this book, the opposite occurred. This is why the EZLN systematically rejected the government proposal to create new municipalities, clearly understanding it as a government policy that contained counter-insurgent strategies aimed at the Zapatista *de facto* autonomy proposals. Despite the Zapatista rejection, the remunicipalization offer was taken to the negotiations that took place in San Andrés Larráinzar, ending up as part of the "commitment between the parties" in the San Andrés Accords that were signed in February 1996 between the Mexican government and the EZLN.

Counter-Insurgency in the Spotlight

The initiative to create the new municipalities, pushed through by the interim governor of Chiapas, Roberto Albores Guillén, in May 1998, happened five months after the Acteal Massacre and in the midst of the violent dismantling of Zapatista autonomous municipalities; that is, during the most disquieting moments of the low intensity warfare unleashed against the Zapatista rebels. And when we say "happened" we do not mean that the Government's remunicipali-

zation initiative was somehow unrelated or simply ran parallel to these events, quite the opposite in fact. In this book we try to show how the remunicipalization program transformed itself from one of the points on the agenda to be considered by the first Peace Commissioner sent to Chiapas in 1994, into a key element in the counter-insurgency strategy that the state and federal governments implemented in Chiapas. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that this book is not a study of counter-insurgency in Chiapas, but a more modest and limited analysis of a *part* of the political dimension of this counter-insurgency. Much remains to be understood regarding the military, economic and psychological dimensions of this counter-insurgency and a fair amount has already been said by activists, organizations and social movements, although much of this knowledge is under-appreciated and under-valued in academic circles.

One might ask what is useful about studying a group of municipalities that have been labeled by many as "counter-insurgent municipalities". Others might even consider that this study serves only to legitimize and strengthen them. In our view, such opinions would underrate the efforts made by the authors of this book to show the complexity, nuances and shades of grey present in these local processes and regional histories that go (and oblige *us* to go) beyond an analysis of a particular political juncture. We also believe it important to point out that the analytical efforts in this book have been carried out by researchers whose political positions vary, albeit from the center towards the left. In other words, the authors' "gaze" or ideological and political positions are diverse, hence enriching our discussions and debates, although undoubtedly there were some local actors that were not covered with the same level of attention, owing to the nature of the conflict within which this study was carried out.

Remunicipalization after 2006

Although this book does not take into account the period from 2006 to 2011, we believe it is important to mention some of the more recent aspects that might help to contextualize it. In 2007 we wrote that: "It is the reality of Mexican *Realpolitik* and its expression in Chiapas that gives currency and validity to this collected volume by showing how government remunicipalization in Chiapas continues to be voiced and discussed by the governing elite as a possible resource in the political and social control of the 'masses'". Let us explain. In spite of the fact that this books closes with reference to the cancellation of the remunicipalization program by Governor Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía (who succeeded Roberto Albores Guillén at the end of 2000), the demands for new municipalities did not totally disappear during the six years of his administration. In 2006, during the last

months of Pablo Salazar's government, the offer and accompanying demands for remunicipalization returned to the political scene through the election campaigns for state governor of Chiapas. Roberto Albores Guillén ran as a candidate for the nomination of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI) in these upcoming elections and whilst doing so, put the remunicipalization offer back on the political agenda. He proposed continuing with the creation of new municipalities in the state, but not only in the places considered during his previous term in office, but in other regions as well. Albores did not win the PRI candidacy in the end, but he did manage to pass on the issue of remunicipalization to the new state governor, Juan Sabines Guerrero, who contested and won the elections in 2006 as a candidate for the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD).

During 2006, government discourse came to echo that of 1998 as remunicipalization was again presented as the "answer" to the demands of the EZLN and as a "strategy for the pacification of the state of Chiapas". All this can be contrasted, with the continuing existence of autonomous Zapatista municipalities and the creation in 2003 of the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno zapatistas* (Zapatista Good Government Committees), reminding us that whilst there exists resistance and *de facto* autonomy, there is an unresolved political and armed conflict that demands an authentic territorial reorganization, self-determination and a genuine democratization of our day-to-day lives and our institutions.

Since 2000, the creation of new municipalities has been abandoned by successive state governors but this does not mean that they have desisted from intervening in the reorganization of indigenous territories with other formulas. For example, Governor Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía (2000-2006) implemented a policy that created "micro-regions" and the current governor, Juan Sabines Guerrero (2006-2012), has promoted the creation of "Sustainable Rural Cities". Although distinct in their conception, both these proposals coincide with remunicipalization in their attempt to strengthen state institutional presence in indigenous territories, intervening and ordering them according to new disciplinary regimes, regulated by (new) policies of the global neoliberal state. Such policies, as many analysts and activists have pointed out, favor the free market, free trade and the free exploitation of strategic natural resources, many of which are found in indigenous territories. But in 2011, none of this can be separated from the excruciating ruptures in the social fabric of Chiapas caused by the counter-insurgent policies that continue to be implemented, the non-compliance with the San Andrés Accords and the "war against organized crime" (which has cost more than 36,000 deaths so far) waged across the country by the current PAN government of Felipe Calderón.

Chiapas, Mexico,
April 2011

Foreword

Armando Bartra

Lucien Febvre wrote in 1993 "To understand is to complicate". The works found in *Remunicipalization in Chiapas: Politics and the Political in Times of Counter-Insurgency* are magnificent examples of this dictum, demonstrating convincingly that social processes can only be understood by acknowledging this complexity.

The seven experiences of government-led remunicipalization in Chiapas, which inspired the authors' reflections in this book, are instructive not so much for confirming what we already know but for enriching and, in many cases, questioning our preconceptions. It is not the same to frame different regional processes in generic concepts as it is to get inside their multicolored complexity. It is one thing to appeal to the "case studies" with no other intention than to confirm pre-existing hypotheses, but quite another to delve into specific realities with open questions, a willingness to confront surprises, the unexpected and the intellectually provocative. To understand is not to simplify, and in the same way that it is not advisable to store new wine in old barrels, it is not recommended to frame novel realities with outdated concepts. To understand is, in effect, to question and complicate.

In recent years, Chiapas has attracted the attention of innumerable activists, volunteers, analysts and academics but, while the growth in the number of Chiapas specialists is a privilege, it is also a danger. Most of their approaches in this southern Mexican state are exercises in "limited thought" and in "politically correct" postures of various types that are satisfied to simply confirm previously held convictions and interpretations. In a context of political polarization, the analyses tend toward black and white, evading the greys and sacrificing nuances.

Therefore, the seven municipal investigations, which make up this collection, the reflections that come before and after these studies are both timely and suggestive. This is not simply because each case study has a distinct emphasis and presents distinct arguments, but also because they all approach a local reality with open eyes and ears and with the intention to unsettle sociological consciences rather than soothe them. The remunicipalization process initiated by Governor Albores Guillén was undoubtedly authoritarian and vertical in character but this book represents an effort to be more respectful and horizontal; these are municipal studies "from below" in the strictest sense.

From Developmentalist Counter-Insurgency to Constitutional Counter-Insurgency

The municipal alterations that President Ernesto Zedillo and Governor Albores Guillén put into motion in 1998, undoubtedly sought to isolate the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN) and had a clear counter-insurgency intention. But government efforts to "throw cold water" on the rebel movement, to contain, reduce and wear them down with meta-military tactics did not begin or end with this attempt at municipal gerrymandering; it has a longer history.

At first it was developmentalist counter-insurgency; social infrastructure programs, productive projects and "donations" that were intended to drown the potentially subversive popular discontent in public resources. Immediately after the uprising, on January 3, 1994, the Government, through the *Secretaría de Gobernación* (State Department) and the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (Secretariat of Social Development – SEDESOL), set up an office offering "special attention" to Chiapas, and then announced the creation of various development projects in the Lacandon Forest, the epicenter of the uprising.

After 12 days of bloody battles between the army and the rebels, President Carlos Salinas ordered a ceasefire and on January 1, the Amnesty and Reconciliation Commission was set up, headed by the State Department, and comprised of Carlos Rojas, Secretary of SEDESOL, Arturo Warman, from the *Procuraduría Agraria* (Agrarian Attorney's Office) and Guillermo Espinosa, director of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Indigenist Institute – INI). Four days later, the interim governor, Javier López Moreno and the SEDESOL announced a "new aid plan for the affected municipalities". Meanwhile, the obliging Carlos Rojas took note of the demands and financed the transport, food and lodging of delegates from dozens of organizations that participated in the meetings of the *Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinas* (State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations – CEOIC). Such actions represented knee jerk responses to an insurrection that legitimized the historical demands of everyday Chiapanecans and generated hope that things might change. This Council served as a point of intersection that combined honest support for the EZLN with the opportunistic lobbying for public resources. The timely generosity of public servants permitted a cooption of the state representatives of the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasant Confederation – CNC), along with the leaderships of the organization *Solidaridad Campesino Magisterial* (Peasant Teachers' Solidarity – SOCAMA) and the *Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo - Unión de Uniones* (Rural Association of Collective Interest - Union of Unions – ARIC-UU), thus ensuring the presence of

official positions in the CEOIC. Later on, during the administration of another interim governor, Ruiz Ferro, the activism of Dante Delgado, who was in charge of copious federal "counter-insurgency" resources, managed to create a sort of "duality of powers" in the state of Chiapas. Meanwhile, at a national level, the Government attempted to win back the political initiative from the EZLN by creating the *Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral y Justicia Social para los Pueblos Indios* (National Commission for the Integral Development and Social Justice of Indian Peoples), headed by Beatriz Paredes. This fleeting institution, a sort of add-on to the INI, disappeared before we could even learn its name.

In Chiapas, however, this developmentalist counter-insurgency was already in place before the uprising occurred. Since 1992, there had been suspicions regarding the existence of libertarian armed groups in the state. By the beginning of 1993, these suspicions had grown and by May they had turned into evidence. But Salinas' government was in the middle of negotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the last thing they wanted was news in the *New York Times* that a guerrilla group had been found operating in the Lacandon Forest. It was decided therefore to contain the problem before it flared up. On August 20, Luis Donaldo Colosio, then Secretary of Social Development, put in a personal appearance in Las Margaritas in the Lacandon Forest to announce that this municipality, along with Ocosingo and Altamirano would receive 40 million pesos of federal money as part of a "special program" on top of the 140 million they had invested the previous year. A fortnight later, President Salinas himself, accompanied by the Secretaries of Agriculture, Health and Agrarian Reform, toured the Las Cañadas region of the forest.

As William Blake commented two hundred years ago, only after reducing man to indignity do they regale him with pomp and circumstance, thus providing us with a rather sublime and prescient definition of the Government's *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (National Solidarity Program – PRONASOL). During the Salinas government, this program attempted to compensate—and politically capitalize on—the disastrous "collateral damage" inflicted on the poorest sectors by the new policy of economic integration and deregulation proposed by the so-called "Washington Consensus". This compensatory developmentalism, which collected the dead and wounded that neoliberal "reconversions" had left by the wayside, cannot technically be classified as counter-insurgent as it did not occur in a period of insurgency. Nonetheless, it can be understood as preventative counter-insurgency. Robert McNamara, who was not Defense Secretary and then President of the World Bank for nothing, had already said that: "The maintenance of 'absolute poverty' … can end up compromising the basis of contemporary social organization … and represents a growing challenge to political stability ... and could lead … to revolution" (quoted by Astori 1984:199). Thus, to safe-

guard the "system" and its "stability", "absolute poverty" has to be counteracted, but not at the level of its causes, but in its most dramatic and potentially subversive effects.

If in 1993 the "injection" of 40 million pesos, administered by the Solidarity Program, represented "preventative counter-insurgency", after January 1, 1994, it became counter-insurgency in the strict sense of the term. The Integral Program for the Development of Las Cañadas, usually referred to as *Plan Cañadas*, is officially launched in mid-1995, a few months after the "February blunder" when President Ernesto Zedillo was within an inch of provoking a new war with his clumsy attempt to decapitate the EZLN. The program, which included parts of the municipalities of Ocosingo, Margaritas, Altamirano, Independencia and Trinitaria, began with the construction of infrastructure and later handed over small amounts of money for supposed productive activities on an individual basis. These resources were formally channeled through Social Attention Centers and community based Consultative Councils, but in reality they were assigned to the various regional organizations in line with previously agreed "quotas". "The *Plan Cañadas* was to teach us how to ask for help", one of the supposed "beneficiaries" recently remarked to me. Effectively, the program was intended to make communities and regional organizations fit into the mould that Octavio Paz termed the "philanthropic ogre", thus abandoning their rebel and autonomous whims, advocated by the EZLN.

The clientelistic and counter-insurgent character of the *Plan Cañadas* was publicly acknowledged in 2001 and 2002, when Governor Pablo Salazar's non-PRI state government in Chiapas permitted a certain degree of criticism. But in fact some public servants had already admitted as much about the true intentions of the program. In a 1996 SEDESOL internal document, it was stated: "The priority objectives [are] to deactivate social support for the armed group by giving immediate attention to the demands of various social organizations not pertaining to the EZLN, at the same time attempting to discourage and divide the participation of the members of the armed movement …" (quoted in Velasco 2002:249).

The *Plan Cañadas* was SEDESOL's counter-insurgency program and it was controlled directly from Mexico City by the SEDESOL Secretary, Carlos Rojas, under instructions from President Salinas. But it was not the only one of its kind. Beginning in 1998, the Secretariat of Agriculture put into operation, as part of the so-called "Alliance for the Rural Areas" and with World Bank financing, the *Programa de Desarrollo Sostenible en Zonas Rurales Marginadas* (Sustainable Development Program for Marginalized Rural Areas – ZORUMA). This was intended to cover the Northern Zone, Selva (the Lacandon Forest), Los Altos (the Highlands), Centro-Frailesca and the Sierra Madre regions of Chiapas, and was managed through Regional Sustainable Development Councils. Apart from the fact that

the slightly older *Plan Cañadas* still used the somewhat anachronistic term "Integral", whilst ZORUMA used the newer buzz word "Sustainable", the two programs practiced the same counter-insurgent developmentalism. Similar practices were evident, although with more modest sums of money, in the case of the Chiapas delegation of the *Secretaría de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca* (Secretariat of the Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries – SEMARNAP) and its Regional Sustainable Development Councils, and the *Fondo Nacional de Empresas en Solidaridad* (National Fund for Companies in Solidarity – FONAES), through venture capital.

In the same way that there is counter-insurgent developmentalism in Chiapas, there is also counter-insurgent agrarian reform, evident in the policy of buying up land to hand it over to *campesino* groups. This was the Government's reaction to the numerous land takeovers, mainly of cattle ranches and coffee estates, which EZLN's "support bases" initiated and which were continued by other *campesino* groups.

Infrastructural projects, cash injections, the handing over of lands, clientelistic negotiations with the leaderships of popular organizations, such are the resources used to manage a conflict like that of Chiapas, which cannot be resolved solely by military means. Similar tactics were recommended during the 1980s by military leaders in the United States, who had suffered defeat in Vietnam. "Low-intensity conflict does not respond exclusively to military solutions. It requires a multidisciplinary approach that recognizes the interrelation of social, economic, political and military factors …." (General Donald D. Morelli and Major Michael M. Ferguson in "Low Intensity Conflict: An Operational Perspective", cited by Bermúdez 1989:76). And in a 1981 Field Manual entitled "Low Intensity Conflict", published in the USA by the Army Department, it says: "In this strategy, the principal objective will be … [to achieve] … a level of internal security … [through] … the growth or expansion of the economy, policy or the social sector through balanced development programs. [The strategy] is directed at the general population as well as at the rebels" (quoted in Bermúdez 1989:118).

Perhaps the tactics employed in the low intensity war in Chiapas were inspired by the American post-Vietnam war literature. They can also be traced back to the ways in which the armed uprising by the Party of the Poor in Guerrero was managed at the beginning of the 1970s. General Eliseo Jiménez Ruiz, who led the fight against the guerrillas of the Costa Grande, remarked years later: "For me, the problem in the state of Guerrero was not just military". In 1969, the army had launched "Operation Friendship" in order to win over the local population, and commissioned a socioeconomic study of the Guerrero coast, which three years later was included in the Plan for the Integral Development of the State of Guerrero. This study was probably very similar to the study commissioned by Presi-

dent Salinas in the Lacandon Forest at the beginning of the 1990s. It was carried out by Carlos Rojas, then in charge of the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) and was later included in the *Plan Cañadas*. What the founder of the Party of the Poor, Lucio Cabañas, said about the Government's soft counter-insurgency strategies could have been said 20 years later by an EZLN commandant: "Then the campaigns began to be both military and political … Whilst the Government was dealing out punishments and repression [the Government] … was also sending out doctors, giving away beans, building new roads, giving away money, … cows … [handing out] lands to keep the people happy … they are going to wear us down in Guerrero" (Bartra 2000:122).

In a certain sense, the counter-insurgent developmentalism and agrarianism are the Government's responses to the first six points of the Zapatista program: work, land, housing, nutrition, health and education, which in the institutional version became policies: the Temporary Employment Program, the Trust for the purchasing of lands, programs for cement floors. Moreover, in the unfortunate Constitutional Reform of 2001, which substituted fundamental political rights for a meaningless enumeration of everything that our philanthropic ogre considers doing in order to redeem the "Indians", one can detect the echoes of the *Plan Cañadas*. This program was conceived by the Secretary of Social Development who, later as Senator, would be partly responsible for the legislative blunder of the Upper House.

It seems then that counter-insurgent developmentalism inevitably turns into counter-insurgent constitutionalism because even if the intentions to improve the well-being of the indigenous population were honest, the Indians themselves are no longer a "vulnerable group" but rebellious protagonists who will accept nothing less than their rights to autonomy. Whilst the ethnic knot of the Chiapas conflict defies untying, the paradox remains that the right to development and related public programs—a right that indigenous peoples undoubtedly have—becomes unacceptable when they are robbed of their fundamental political attributes. It is clearly evident, for example, when they demand to be recognized as "subjects of the law" but are instead reduced to objects of "public interest". It is as if the objective were to belittle: belittle the historic demands in the San Andrés Accords, belittle the San Andrés Accords in the so-called COCOPA law[1] and belittle the COCOPA law in the constitutional absurdity of 2001.

It is not that there is a desire to see counter-insurgent plots everywhere, but that until the armed uprising is resolved through negotiation and the Zapatistas

1 COCOPA stands for the *Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* (Commission for Concord and Pacification). Based on the San Andrés Accords, the Commission formulated a comprehensive autonomy proposal that was signed in 1996 by President Zedillo's government and the Zapatistas. Subsequently, legislators from the Commission took up the most important of the Accords and drew up the so-called COCOPA law.

stop being in perpetual resistance and can defend their cause through fully exercising their political rights, there will be no innocent actions by the Government.

Remunicipalization from Above and Below

The counter-insurgent developmentalism that begins in 1994—in fact, even before—was the Government's response to the economic and social rights demanded by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in their initial program. The remunicipalization promoted by Zedillo and Albores in 1998, on the other hand, appeared to respond to the regional self-determination, both *de jure* and *de facto*, that the Zapatistas had intermittently been practicing since the first weeks of 1994, but took center stage after the first round of talks at San Andrés and in the reaction to the subsequent break in negotiations.

In 1994, with the outbreak of the conflict, the Federal Government encouraged the creation of new municipalities through the Peace Commissioner, Manuel Camacho, and when this initial attempt was frustrated, Governor Javier López Moreno took it up again later the same year. In 1996, the idea was included in the San Andrés negotiations, and was later incorporated into the Accords themselves, in the form of a proposal to create a Commission to look into the question of remunicipalization, a body that would include congress members and local government, along with the EZLN, communities and municipalities. The very same year, after a break in talks because of federal government incompliance, the Chiapas state government put forward the idea of establishing 12 new municipalities through a Special Commission. Predictably enough, the Zapatistas rejected the proposal and responded by expanding the territory of their rebel municipalities.

By 1998, the government-led remunicipalization had taken on an openly counter-insurgent character, when Governor Albores Guillén combined the re-launching of the project with bloody incursions of public forces into some of the rebel municipalities. This new authoritarian initiative originally imagined the creation of 33 new municipalities and tried to entice support with the promise of a government investment program. The government offer was rejected out of hand by the EZLN and other democratic sectors, but it created certain expectations at the local level amongst those that had already demanded the reinstatement of suppressed municipalities or the creation of new ones. Finally, in 2000, the new governor, Pablo Salazar, dissolved the Commission, which had supposedly turned into a "stumbling block to peace". Nevertheless, a year earlier, in 1999, seven new municipalities had been cre-

ated. This is, in general terms, the course that government remunicipalization took.

The manifestations of these municipal changes have been distinct for different people in Chiapas. In the third week of January 1994, the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations (CEOIC) demanded the removal of certain municipal presidents labeled as "civil orchestrators of counter-insurgence". In a meeting held from January 22 to January 24, the CEOIC proposed the "territorial rearrangement of Chiapas, creating compact regions of indigenous territories", administrated by the "pluriethnic peoples that make up the region". In other words, the proposal was to set up "autonomous regions", which at the same time would be "political regions" (Julio Moguel, "*La rebelión municipal en Chiapas*", in *La Jornada,* February 14, 1994). In the same year, many of the groups affiliated to the CEOIC proposed the creation of five "pluriethnic autonomous regions" in Chiapas, affecting more than half of the state's municipalities, in an attempt to redefine self-managed local government. This strategy had a series of repercussions, although on the whole it did not consolidate itself. In December of the same year, the EZLN announced the existence of 33 rebel municipalities, and in 1998 five more appeared, making a total of 38 local self-governments, which rejected any relationship whatsoever with the state and responded instead to the EZLN's command structure. Finally, in 2004, the Zapatistas redesigned their internal political and administrative structure through the establishment of the *Caracoles* (literally "snails") and the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Good Government Committees).

It is in these conditions that local government becomes a battlefield—or "arena" as Xochitl Leyva and Araceli Burguete prefer to say in their introductory chapter—in which two opposing positions are found. On one side, the recuperation of municipalities is a form of struggle and resistance, where the autonomous aspect is radicalized through the total rejection of all contact with "bad government" (i.e., all federal institutions), whilst on the other side there is remunicipalization, a counter-insurgency action that the Government uses to legitimize itself and sabotage the Zapatista cause.

This dichotomy, which has some validity if required to make the inevitable political definitions, becomes less convincing if we are looking to understand regional processes in which, along with players of national importance, there are also local actors to be taken into account, who respond to specific and sometimes circumstantial logic. When we look into these Chiapanecan realities with intellectual honesty and the desire to understand, we discover that reality resists simplifications and reductionisms.

Reality is Always More Complicated

In the new municipalities there is much more than just simple counter-insurgency because the government initiatives combine with local interests and demands. The contrary initiatives introduced by the repressive Albores Guillén reactivated previous demands, some of which were quite old, in the new municipalities. They also unleashed regional processes that, while undoubtedly expressing the interests of local *caciques* or bosses, also created expectations amongst normal citizens interested in improving their well-being through the strengthening of local governments. The case studies in this volume reveal these new power constellations in the recently created municipalities and the accompanying essays problematize the experience as a whole, showing the different tendencies in each case.

For example, the studies of Aldama (chapter 3) and Santiago El Pinar (chapter 4) deal with the region of Los Altos and tell the tale of the struggle for the recovery of municipalities that were merged at the beginning of the 1920s. We are thus dealing with a movement with considerable history, led by more or less homogenous Tzotzil communities, which precisely because of having lost their status as municipal seats had preserved, against all odds, their traditional forms of government.

In these two historically related and neighboring cases, the stubborn fight to have their local governments recognized by the state, occurred within the context of the Zapatista uprising, but it was not absorbed by it. Although there was some flirtation with the idea of rebel autonomy, in the end the majority went for the constitutional option. Moreover, rather than the dichotomy of insurgent autonomy versus institutional municipality, what we find here is the persistence and renovation of an ancestral subject: the community, founded on ancient practices and traditional authority. A very particular type of citizenship, one with long roots, that had been acknowledged in the nineteenth century and sidelined after the revolution, forcefully reappeared on the eve of the new millennium.

These two chapters, anthropological in character, show us the complex intermingling of agrarian, civil and religious identities, which far from expressing inertia and nostalgia, demonstrate an enviable vitality and adaptive ability. Undoubtedly, there is here what has been called the "creation of a new kind of citizenship" and although they experienced the dilemma of whether to incorporate themselves into the rebel municipality of San Andrés Sacamch'en de los Pobres, or persevere in their more modest constitutional municipalities, it seems clear that the dilemma is circumstantial because their motivation is deeper and more radical than the political options that today appear to be in opposition.

San Andrés Duraznal (chapter 2), in Los Altos, and Montecristo de Guerrero (chapter 7), in the Sierra Madre, are newly established municipalities, built upon younger settlements than the ones mentioned above. The first is a Tzotzil village founded at the time of the new estates at the end of the nineteenth century and the second is a *mestizo* village of the same era, but whose roots lie in the expansion of coffee production and its associated activities. Many had already fought against centralist municipalities with the goal of no longer being the poor (and marginalized) relatives of Simojovel, in the first case, and Ángel Albino Corzo in the second. In both cases the actors and identities in play are more "modern" than those of Aldama and Santiago el Pinar; actors such as the Civic Committee that led the struggle to have Montecristo recognized as a municipality and, in the case of San Andrés, organizations such as the *Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos* (Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants – CIOAC) and the *Unión de Uniones Pajal Ya Kaltic* (Union of Unions *Pajal Ya Kaltic*) and political parties such as the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT) and the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD). In these cases, the struggle to have their own municipality was equally old and legitimate as in the first two cases, and similarly reignited by the atmosphere created by the appearance of the EZLN.

Benemérito de las Américas and Marqués de Comillas (chapter 6) are even younger settlements, born during the colonization of the Lacandon Forest and made up of migrants from various states: Veracruz, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Guerrero and Chiapas. This melting pot region of the forest is characterized by its non-traditional organizational dynamics, illustrated by the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union, the *Movimiento Campesino Regional Independiente* (Independent Regional Peasant Movement – MOCRI), the Council for the Sustainable Development of the Lacandon Forest, apart from the political parties. Here the main motive was that they belonged formally to Ocosingo, whose municipal seat was around 350 kilometers away and was therefore unable to understand the necessities of the population or represent their distinct interests. In this region, the EZLN promoted the frontier rebel municipality Tierra y Libertad, but the Zapatistas proved to have less appeal here than in the indigenous communities.

Maravilla Tenejapa (chapter 5), formally part of the municipality of Las Margaritas, is also, like the cases just mentioned, the outcome of the demands of heterogeneous settlements—in this case Tzotzils from Los Altos, Tojolabals, *mestizos* and Guatemalan refugees—which again had been reactivated in the heat of the Zapatista movement. Despite there being attempts to create a new municipality through broad alliances such as the Autonomous Council Tierra y Libertad, the violent repression of the rebels in 1998 and the presence of clientelistic organizations like the *Ejido* Union of Maravilla Tenejapa and *Solidaridad Campesino*

Magisterial (Peasant Teachers' Solidarity – SOCAMA), imposed a counter-insurgency "flavor" to affairs. In these circumstances, the new municipality was set up in 1999 amidst a series of political maneuvers, and possibly with a majority of the population in opposition.

And in Maravilla Tenejapa, the new municipality located in the *Plan Cañadas* region, it was quite clear that Zedillo's and Albores' counter-insurgent municipalization program was an extension, by other means, of the counter-insurgent developmentalism operated by the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL) in the same region. This anti-Zapatista politicization of development encouraged by the *Consejo Productivo Indígena Campesino de la Selva* (Indigenous Peasant Productive Council-Selva – COPICAS) and brought to maturity by SOCAMA, crossed paths with this vertical remunicipalization from 1998 onwards. Such continuity in counter-insurgency is evident in the fact that it was SOCAMA that lobbied for the creation of a new municipality, seeing it as a space in which they could extend their clientelistic and corporate political practices. But it was also because, much like what had occurred since 1995 with the *Plan Cañadas*, from 1999 onwards "the management of government funds had become the principal political arena of municipal life" as Xochitl Leyva and Luis Rodríguez tell us in their chapter. As the question of development moved on to issues of local government, counter-insurgency and its partisans had to face up to novel contradictions, having to compete for the same government resources; in some instances, SOCAMA and COPICAS received more money that the municipality itself.

They say that the citizen is not born but made and, without a doubt, in these marginalized areas of Chiapas, new types of citizenship are indeed invented. But the starting point is always the citizenship "in use", or the "truly existent citizenship" as the book says. Chiapas remains a place where the vote continues to have an "exchange value", an observation wonderfully illustrated by the Tzotzil taxi driver Mariano Pérez Tzu, in a brief tale translated by Jan Rus, which I cannot help quoting: "So the representative told us … that we all had to go … that they would give us T-shirts and caps if we participated. So off we all went that day, thinking about our roofs. But they didn't give us anything, not then and not afterwards. No cap, no T-shirt and no corrugated roofing. It was nothing more than electoral fraud!" (Rus 2000).

In order to unravel the meaning of these processes, it is clearly relevant to differentiate between "the political", which refers to the "clash of wills" in which all of us participate, everyday, everywhere, and "politics", which has more to do with institutional spaces and rituals. Similarly, it would be useful to distinguish between "the democratic", referring to daily practices in the marketplace, office, classroom or in bed where we share and negotiate issues of power in everyday life, and "democracy", which deals with the general forms of intervention in af-

fairs of the State and other more or less centralized public bodies. I am not referring here to the difference between democracy through delegation and a broader form of democracy, as the representative version as much as the participative one are developed in formal spaces and are subject to general rules. In contrast, "the democratic" is a domain characterized by informality, improvisation and invention, a space undoubtedly regulated and consistent but far more creative than its more formal counterpart. I am not talking about Parliament or the forum here, but the bar, public washing places, playtime, etc.

The municipalities represent a privileged space where "the political" articulates with "politics" and "the democratic" with "democracies". But it is nothing new. In an essay I wrote concerning the political history of Guerrero's Costa Grande, which was intended to shed light on the recent struggles to democratize the coastal municipalities, I referred to the tensions between the local and the national evident since the eighteenth century in conflicts between the elected town council and the designated political bosses.

> With them, the *cacicazgo* ["bossism"] becomes institutionalized and the function of the patriarchal boss … is given certain legality through his official appointment. But on becoming formalized, the mechanism becomes inverted … whilst the former *cacique* was legitimized by his clientele, the new political boss was legitimized by being appointed by the state Governor … All the contradictions and social ills are channeled through the function and person of the political boss. We are not simply dealing with an antidemocratic position here, but with a person who represents outside political interests that offend local sensibilities and threaten the regional *cacicazgo* (Bartra 2000:26).

In a similar fashion, in Chiapas at the end of the millennium, tensions have developed between central government and the commons. Governor Albores' municipalities can be seen in a contemporary context to respond to a similarly perverse government initiative, but they contain very diverse interests, have proved fertile ground for a wide range of organizations and have taken very different paths. Without a doubt, counter-insurgent remunicipalization was an authoritarian measure, but the actual processes it set in motion are much more than just the direct outcome of a damaging government maneuver.

Now, to unravel—like the book does—the unfathomable complexity of these local microcosms, is undoubtedly a useful exercise, but it is not enough. Much like the diverse actors in these chapters, who adapted and reworked national initiatives, molding them to their own interests and particular projects, we can see

these regional scenarios as spaces where local people represent, in their own ways, the national drama that affects and moves us all.

Full of Surprises

In this regard, the book surreptitiously suggests a vital and conceptually exciting question. In the introductory chapter, the editors themselves recognize that it "was necessary to go beyond our own dichotomies" and almost all the chapters allude to the fact that when it came to the crunch, the local realities did not necessarily conform to expectations rooted in an analysis of the dominant tendencies at the state and national levels. "The creativity of the people from Aldama cannot be ignored" write Araceli Burguete and Jaime Torres; "… remunicipalization has been appropriated by local people in a wide range of ways, producing a few surprises" writes Neil Harvey; "the results were not always what was expected" conclude Xochitl Leyva and Araceli Burguete.

Neil Harvey endorses Jacques Derrida's proposal, which encourages us to treat the local as "singular experiences" that occur within the political and distance themselves from fundamentalisms and political institutions. From this perspective, Harvey concludes the following with regards to counter-insurgent developmentalism: "From the logic of power … they made use of local interests … to destroy the Zapatista enemy … but the people also have *agency*". This does not imply for the author that we should adopt a voluntarist perspective, but that we should recognize that we are dealing with experiences that received "critiques from within".

I agree wholeheartedly with Neil Harvey's approach, but it seems to me that he could go a little further. It's not enough to simply state that the local "resists", given that the "particular experiences" do not necessarily obey the patterns observed at the state, national and global levels. The question, at the end of the day, is how to unravel the ways in which these experiences are also constitutive elements of the global, and, if possible, to clarify the way in which they could be a premeditated part of a history that for the moment they can only endure, and be part of the world whose margins they inhabit.

Amongst many other things, the essays in this book give faith to the notion that men make history, but by starting with their own histories. History is not the work of a market automaton or an autocratic bureaucrat. It is true that occasionally it appears to be the market and the State that make history—the megatendencies that dominate us are the result of the blind imperatives of the economy and the heartless ones of power—whilst we common men have to be satisfied

making histories: experiences that are occasionally critical but also irremediably contingent and singular.

The book you have in your hands documents some of these histories and it is testament to the "surprise" that such histories almost always move crosscurrent to the initiative that unleashed them. This is true even in the case of the new constitutional municipalities in Chiapas, born in a climate of counter-insurgency to which groups of PRI ancestry reacted in various ways.

But to limit oneself to simply stating that such histories "resist" and can be disruptive for the hegemonic powers and dominant tendencies, leaves us in a position of radical uncertainty, immersed in the "detotalized totality" that Jean-Paul Sartre mentioned in his "Critique of Dialectical Reason", swept along by a perilous history that leads us to disaster, with no intentionality, fatalistic, with nobody proposing it.

So, we have to move on from histories that merely resist destiny (nowadays the market automaton, the autocratic bureaucrat and the blind militarism of empire) to micro-histories that intertwine to actually give some sense to macro-history; perhaps a plebeian history that does not try to impose destinies and is not written by the new triumphant. It could be an open and polyphonic history, the fruit of the collaboration between diverse, overlapping, successive and intermittent histories; a history of histories that will be habitable but not necessarily unanimous.

Mexico City, 2007

Introduction

Xochitl Leyva Solano and Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor

On July 28, 1999, the following new municipalities were decreed in Chiapas: Aldama, Benemérito de las Americas, Marqués de Comillas, Montecristo de Guerrero, Maravilla Tenejapa, San Andrés Duraznal and Santiago El Pinar (see Map, p.35).[2] This event naturally had different meanings for different actors. A quick and perhaps overly schematic interpretation would be that for the Mexican president, the Chiapas governor, the official party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI), congress members and the Remunicipalization Commission, the establishment of seven new municipalities was a central part of the Government's policy to bring peace to this region and with which they hoped to reduce tensions and promote reconciliation (Albores 1998), governability and development.[3] On the other hand, opposition party deputies, members of the *Comisión Nacional de Intermediación* (National Mediation Commission – CONAI) and the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN), as well as pro-Zapatistas considered the decree to be a unilateral act on the part of the PRI government, a provocation and counter-insurgent violation of the San Andrés Accords (cf. Asesores del EZLN 1996; *La Jornada* April 18, 1997; *Cuarto Poder* March 7 and 27, 1997; CIEPAC 1999; CDHFBC 1999a; Rodas 1999).

The only thing that both interpretations had in common was that they refer us back to the political context from which the (re)municipalization proposal emerged and which is vital for understanding the central theme of this book,

2 Decree no. 205 was published in the Chiapas State *Periódico Oficial* on July 28, 1999, and is entitled: *Decreto por el que se crean los nuevos municipio de Aldama, Benemérito de las Américas, Maravilla Tenejapa, Marqués de Comillas, Montecristo de Guerrero, San Andrés Duraznal y Santiago el Pinar.* This same decree also amends article 3 of the Chiapas state Constitution, along with article 11 of the Organic Municipal Law and article 12 of the Chiapas State Electoral Code (see Gobierno del estado de Chiapas, 1999).

3 Roberto Albores Guillén's "Remunicipalization Proposal" can be consulted in its entirety in Jorge Mario Lescieur (1998:256-268). In this book, it can be read textually that the remunicipalization that Albores put forward was considered by him and his government as "an important instrument to strengthen mechanisms of governability …" At the same time, it sought to redirect "… social forces within an institutional framework of respect and tolerance" and "… establish firm political and social foundations to consolidate the advances achieved through dialogue and in the reestablishment of peace and social harmony …" (Ibid.:256).

namely, the "Chiapas conflict" and the unfinished peace process.[4] Such interpretations reflect not only the different interests in play but also demonstrate the importance that remunicipalization had for political projects that operated beyond the immediate interests of local actors (Burguete 1998). It was, however, the *local* dimension that was the least known aspect of the remunicipalization process for us and we were largely ignorant of the local *interpretations*, *histories* and *interests* that were put into play by the initiative. This gap in the knowledge and the questions it begged gave rise to the research carried out in 2000 and which underpins the collective publication that we are now presenting.

The first thing that we as editors asked ourselves was: why was the 1999 remunicipalization process seen as part of the Mexican Government's counter-insurgency policy? To answer this question, in the first chapter we show how the government's remunicipalization proposal evolved from being a simple point of discussion on the Peace Commissioner's agenda in 1994 to becoming a counter-insurgency measure that violated previous agreements and the law, and sought to weaken the Zapatista's strategy of political and territorial autonomy, as well as strengthening the presence of the then state party (PRI) and the Mexican Armed Forces, not only in the so-called "conflict zone" but also in other geopolitically strategic areas.

Without a doubt, our main research goal was to give voice to the *histories and interpretations of the local actors* who had participated, or in some cases, refused to participate, in the remunicipalization process. These histories and interpretations, as we shall see in this book, took us beyond the counter-insurgency question. In other words, the study of the remunicipalization process from below, from the voices of local actors, obliged us to go beyond our own dichotomies and to have a diachronic perspective; in other words, to go beyond the immediate context and explore the regional dimension beyond the municipality, and to go beyond *politics* to acknowledge *the political* and not limit ourselves to the structural dimension but also pay attention to networks of personal relationships.

By attempting an interdisciplinary dialogue between anthropology, sociology and political science, we looked for ways to answer our queries and go beyond our initial dichotomies. These dichotomies were valid in a simple political sense but they soon proved inadequate within what we term an "activist anthropology".[5]

4 It is important to stress that formally speaking the peace process in Mexico is still not finished and that the San Andrés Accords signed between the Mexican Government and the EZLN on February 16, 1996 were only the beginning of a process that has not been concluded. For those interested in more details regarding this process, see chapter 1 of this book as well as: Hernández Navarro (1996, 2003); García Colorado (2000); González (2000); Hilares (2000); Camacho (2000); Bernal (2000); Rabasa (2000); Toledo (2000); Stavenhagen (2000, 2003a, 2003b); Peña (2001); Álvarez (2003); De la Fuente (2003); Zebadúa (2003); Ruiz (2003) and López y Rivas (2004).

5 "Activist anthropology" accepts the possibility of the coexistence between academic rigor and political commitment to resolve a specific problem. For more details, see Hale (2001) and the website "Activist Anthropology" at http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/anthropology/activist/

This book is not an attempt to carry out a study on counter-insurgency in Chiapas; rather we proposed to understand one political dimension of the remunicipalization phenomenon, from a local-municipal level. For the most part, we leave the military and psychological dimensions of this counter-insurgency for future academic studies that will surely have to start with the revision and analysis of a great quantity of material produced by non-governmental organisations and activist networks.

The new municipalities are situated in the Los Altos, Selva and Northern regions of the state, as well as on the border between the Frailesca and Sierra regions (see Map, p.35). Of all these, only the Selva region was strictly considered a "conflict zone", given that it was the political and military heartland of the EZLN. Nevertheless, between 1997 and 1999, the actions of paramilitary groups were carried out mainly in the Los Altos and Northern regions of the state (i.e., outside of the Selva region). Non-governmental organisations acknowledge that "we will never know with certainty the precise number of soldiers [in the state] … whilst the armed forces remain untouchable by civil republican institutions", but they concluded on the basis of field research that by the end of 1999, one could talk of 655 police and military geographical points[6] and between 70 and 80 thousand military personnel in Chiapas, whilst the Government only accepted the existence of between 17 and 25 thousand soldiers (Global Exchange *et al*. 2000:132). Without a doubt, around the middle of 1999, when the new municipalities officially came into existence, the Los Altos, Selva and Northern regions were the most militarized in the state and, as we will shall see in chapters 2 to 6, their inhabitants experienced daily conflicts and internal divisions.

In line with our objectives, from chapter 2 to chapter 7 we occupy ourselves with the reconstruction of the remunicipalization processes from the perspective of different local and regional actors. We start by situating the new municipalities in their regional-historical contexts, with the aim of trying to understand the particularities of each process. As we shall see, the legitimacy of the new municipality varied according to whether we are referring to the villages in the Los Altos region, founded in the pre-Hispanic era (such as Aldama and Santiago El Pinar) or the settlements located in transition zones, products of late nineteenth century colonization (such as San Andrés Duraznal and Montecristo de Guerrero) or the *ejidos* founded in the second half of the twentieth century in the Selva region (such as Maravilla Tenejapa, Marqués de Comillas and Benémerito de las Américas).

6 The source refers to both permanent and temporary checkpoints, military camps, barracks, garrisons, training grounds, police and armed forces (army, air force, navy), all involved in coordinating campaigns against social dissidence and counter-insurgency (Global Exchange *et al.* 2000:133).

In this book, remunicipalization is understood as an *arena,* as a space of *disputes* between various groups, factions and associations that are constantly being restructured and extend their contacts beyond the municipal and regional levels whilst operating in a highly divided context. Many of these disputes had intersubjective, collective and symbolic aspects, as we shall see in the indigenous municipalities of San Andrés Duraznal, Aldama and Santiago del Pinar. It was there, as Toledo, Burguete and Torres all comment, that remunicipalization was directly related to the ethnic development of these Indian settlements. The hierarchy of saints, the *fiesta* of the patron saint, indigenous local government and the nineteenth century cargo system were all salvaged, reinvented or reworked by local groups and factions to legitimize their power and to establish new forms of municipal social organization. Remunicipalization, as we shall see, also became an *arena* where, for example, ethical and moral issues were settled and where–as Harvey mentions–the considerable distance between everyday life and institutional life became apparent (Jelin 1998; Melucci 1998; Mouffe 1999; Scott 2000).

We can also notice how, from chapters 2 through 7, the book moves slowly from an emphasis on the study of *the political* to the study of *politics* itself. Whilst in chapters 2, 3 and 4 more weight is put on the political as "a living movement, a kind of 'magma of conflicting wills' or antagonisms" that "subvert the institutional settings and moorings of politics" (Slater 1998:388), from chapter 5 to chapter 7, apart from this dimension, the authors also look at the "activity, practices and procedures that take place in the institutional arena of the political system" (Ibid.:388). Clearly positioning themselves on the political plane, the authors of these later chapters view the new municipalities and remunicipalization as a whole within the framework of the *transition towards democracy* and the *Mexican political system*. But all the chapters, in differing ways and to a differing extent, discuss politics in this broader sense, looking at the way institutions are designed, the expressions of particular political cultures, old-school corporativism, clientelistic networks, participation, municipal development and advances in electoral rights. From this perspective, politics can be seen as "the institutionalization of an order that is designed to overcome or at the least to confine the threatening conflicts of the political …" (Ibid.:388).[7]

As we mentioned at the beginning and as we shall see in chapter 1, remunicipalization, at least in government discourse and practice, had to do with the peace process. This obliged us to shift our gaze toward authors whose studies have looked at how the character of political systems has been altered by such processes (Córdova 1996; Azpuru 1999; Arnson 1999, 2000; Tulchin and Selee

7 It seems important to point out that David Slater (1998) also suggests that politics and the political are intimately connected and ultimately inseparable. For a deeper reading on the differences and overlaps between politics and the political in the context of social movements, see Butler (1992); Slater (1994, 1998); Arditi (1994); Mouffe (1995) and Walker (1995).

2003a, 2003b; Tulchin and Valdés 2003; Arnson, Benítez and Selee 2003). Arnson (1999) suggests that in Latin America, there exists a certain overlap and symbiosis between conflict resolution and the transition toward democracy and its eventual consolidation. The author adds that what is termed the "transition from war to peace" involves numerous processes that go beyond simply moving from a state of authoritarianism to one of democracy. The peace process could turn into a vehicle for attacking structural issues hitherto untouched or into an opportunity for extending mechanisms of participation and inclusion and might be useful for pushing reforms through, especially electoral ones. In the case of Chiapas, Mexico, the 1999 remunicipalization process paradoxically contributed to certain advances in multi-party participation as it occurred in a key moment in the now ex-official party's (PRI) process of internal collapse and restructuring and in the context of the languishing peace process and efforts at state reform.

Scholars, who have studied electoral democracy,[8] have demonstrated that until the end of the 1980s, Chiapas could be considered as one of the PRI's "safe constituencies". For example, in 1988, the PRI candidate for the presidency, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, received more votes from this state than from any other: 89.8 percent (Sonnleitner 2000:113). But from 1991 onwards, the electoral results in Chiapas "revealed the existence of significant points of opposition that begin to question the monopoly of the hegemonic party (PRI)" (Sonnleitner 2000:112). For García Aguilar (2003a), this was closely connected to two processes: the first was national in character and had to do with President Salinas' electoral reforms that relinquished government power over the electoral system, strengthening citizen participation in the electoral institutions. The second factor was more particular to Chiapas and had to do with the PRI's loss of legitimacy, the result of new ways of selecting candidates for municipal government. It was at this point—García Aguilar states—that the PRI began to realize that the old corporate mechanisms of vertical control had been eroded and were no longer tenable.

As we shall see in this book, although the seven new municipalities created in 1999 should be understood in relation to the changes that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was the changes after 1994 that proved more decisive. In fact, in the elections held in August 1994, the results from the ballot boxes strongly questioned the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)'s long held dominance in the state, taking the first steps toward multiparty democracy (see Table I.1) and establishing the foundations for a change in political parties at the state and national levels, something that would eventually take place in 2000, a year after the formation of the new municipalities. As the case studies in chapters 2 to 7 show, this had clear repercussions in the formation of unprece-

8 Regarding research on electoral processes and democracy in Chiapas, see Viqueira and Sonnleitner (2000); Sonnleitner (2001); Leyva (2001); and García Aguilar (2003a).

dented political alliances and networks that influenced the way in which local conflicts expressed themselves, in the legitimacy of local electoral processes and in the forms of political representation in the new municipal councils.

Remunicipalization also presented itself as a government proposal that favored a lessening of tensions and reconciliation, as well as an important tool "for strengthening mechanisms of governability, that [would] bring about in practice greater efficiency in the development of economic, political and social programs" (taken from Roberto Albores Guillén's remunicipalization proposal, quoted in Lescieur 1998:256). As we well know, governability is a process that can be recognized in the way a society interacts with the political system and among its key features is the equilibrium between legitimacy and efficiency (World Bank 1991; Arbós and Ginner 1993; Camou 1995, 2000, 2001; Hernández 1996). As García Aguilar (2003b) comments and as will be illustrated in the different chapters in this book, in the case of Chiapas, legitimacy and the equilibrium between society and the political system are constantly broken and this is intimately related to the ways in which different actors look for support from their social and political networks to push forward their different projects; some of these projects look to reproduce the system and others aim to openly criticize and attack it, whilst others simply hope to accommodate themselves to shifting contexts.

Linked to our reflections on remunicipalization and governmentality are those related to the transformation of civil society institutions and the construction of citizenship, understanding the latter as a learning process involving rights and responsibilities (Jelin 1996), justice and participation (García and Lukes 1999). Aziz (2003:20) states that citizenship in Mexico is a relatively new condition and that "the corporate arrangement that dominated relations between State and society for decades has been superseded [up to a certain point] in the electoral dimension" but this has not been the case for the trade unions or the rural areas in general. In line with this observation, we shall see in the chapters in this book, with the luxury of detail, that the authoritarian, clientelistic and corporate culture is still alive and kicking. The case studies show an abundance of examples of vertical decisions, the absence of a genuine process of consultation with the grassroots, the buying of hearts and minds, nepotism, moral blackmail and unfulfilled promises. All such examples demonstrate how these dynamics have been resuscitated and form an integral part of counter-insurgency tactics.

But at the same time, the case studies reveal the existence of other networks related to the municipal dimension, which also did not escape corporatism, but in this instance we are talking about *social corporatism* (Schmitter, Streeck and Lehmbruch 1992a, 1992b). These other networks functioned and based themselves on a participative, consensual and anti-government ideology. However,

the existence of both types of corporatism in the context of remunicipalization begs the following question: Is it possible to design new forms of government that respond to these new scenarios and contexts? In a similar sense, we also ask: In the case of Chiapas, did remunicipalization bring about intergovernmental changes that benefited the essential functions of the municipality, as well as the conditions for their development and governability? With regards to this, see our last chapter *An Overview,* at the end of this book, and García Aguilar (2007).

To arrive at a proper answer to these questions, we have to read very carefully what the authors of the following chapters tell us, but it is worth remembering that whatever their answers might be, it is impossible to ignore the particular circumstances of 1998. In fact, when the remunicipalization project was first announced, the government offer seemed attractive, in part because it promised significant public investments in the context of a "modernizing" discourse. With this purpose, a trust was set up with 137 million Mexican pesos (around US$15 million at the time), which, according to the president of the Remunicipalization Commission, was supposed to guarantee a viable financial foundation for the new municipalities during the following five years (quoted in *Cuarto Poder*, November 12, 1998). As part of this strategy, in August 1999, the governor of Chiapas requested that federal public servants and Chiapas state secretariats join forces in order to channel resources into the program "Integral Sustainable Development for the New Municipalities". Toledo, Leyva and Rodríguez, as well as García and Solís, offer us specific figures about this investment in San Andrés Duraznal, Maravilla Tenejapa and Montecristo de Guerrero, an investment that the municipal councilors used to initiate this "modernizing" mission. In each and every public act that involved the presence of crowds of municipal residents, it was repeated to the new municipal councilors: "You will have the opportunity to have projects, new schools, the construction or extension of hospitals, as well as access to various agricultural programs, all of which aim to give you hopes of development". But it was also asked of them "Let us not mislead anyone by saying that with the establishment of these new municipalities, the backwardness that these regions have suffered from for so long will suddenly become a thing of the past …" (*Expreso de Chiapas*, August 7, 1999).

The establishment of the new municipalities and the channeling of these resources were loudly announced in the mass media. The aim of this government strategy was to convince national and international opinion that the interim governor "was indeed complying with the San Andrés Accords" whilst at the same time looking to make a show of force in the "conflict zone", so that the Zapatistas would abandon the ranks of the movement and side with the government's new policies. But as we shall see in the chapter *An Overview*, the results were not always the ones expected.

Before moving on to our acknowledgements, we would like to point out that this book is only one of a number of products that were generated by our research project, "The new municipalities in Chiapas: A current analysis", carried out in 2000. An initial product was the elaboration of six executive reports that were circulated amongst the new local authorities, members of the state Congress, government workers and public libraries. Our intention was to share our point of view about remunicipalization with the hope that it might become a point of reflection for political and government action. A second product was the preparation of six monographs that told the story of the foundation of the new municipalities from the point of view of local and regional actors. These monographs were distributed in the localities and municipalities in the hope that they would serve the purpose of disseminating information for all those interested in the subject. A third product is represented by the same monographs, but in bilingual editions (Spanish/ Tzotsil, Spanish/ Tzeltal). The hope with these publications is that they turn into text books that support local efforts to teach reading and writing in indigenous languages, as well as local history. Finally this book represents a fourth product, which is an effort at examining the remunicipalization process from an academic viewpoint in order to situate ourselves in a political debate that appears to be of interest, not only to local inhabitants but also to all those concerned with the past, present and future of Chiapas and of Mexico.

Finally, we wish to thank all the people that made the publication of this book possible. First of all, to all our colleagues who were responsible for the case studies and the advisers who agreed to take part in the research project and this book: For your trust and patience, many thanks. A special debt of gratitude is owed to all those who played a leading role in the remunicipalization process: those who lobbied for it, opposed it and the local authorities in the seven municipalities–thank you for allowing us to get to know your experiences and histories. We also express our thanks to Professor Armando Bartra, Dr Jan de Vos, Dr Neil Harvey and Dr Tim Trench for their critical and constructive reading of the texts. Tim Trench was also our translator and was in charge of the editorial aspects. We would also like to mention the financial support and confidence shown by the Ford Foundation, especially Kimberly Keith Brown, the program's adviser for Mexico and Central America. This publication in English would not have been possible without the support of the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), and thanks, in particular, to Alejandro Parellada, Diana Vinding and Jorge Monrás. And last, but not least, we express our gratitude for the support offered by the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology – CIESAS), our *alma mater*.

Table I.1

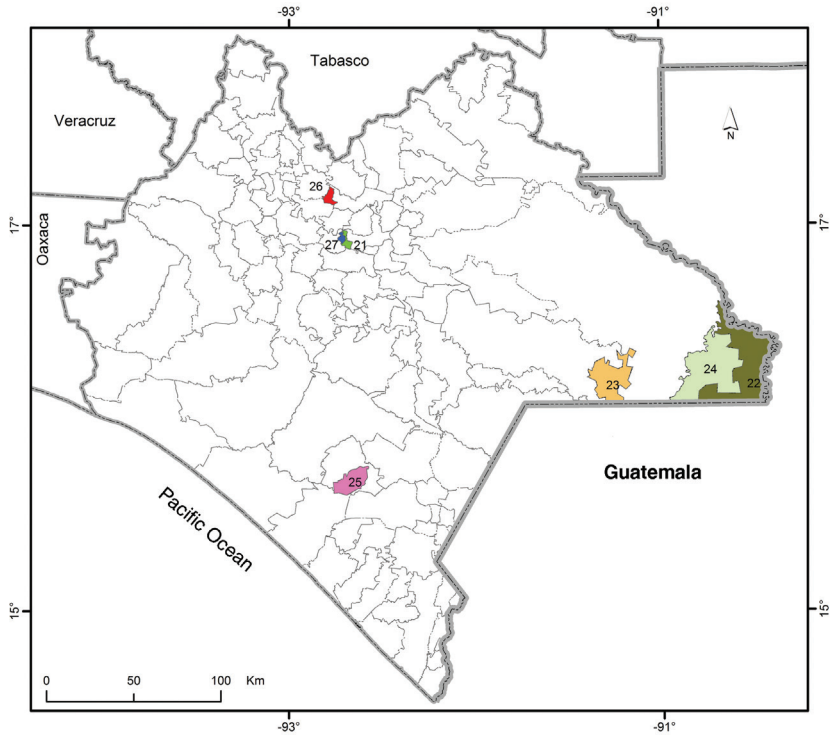
Voting History for the Five Main Political Parties in Chiapas 1991, 1994, 1995

	Local Congress Elections 1991		**Elections for Governor 1994**			**Municipal Elections 1995**		
Parties	Votes	%	Votes	%	Variation 1994/1991 %	Votes	%	Variation 1995/1994 %
PRI[a]	640 320	76.2	502 687	50.5	- 21.5	329 102	48.0	- 34.5
PRD[b]	49 939	5.9	348 735	35.0	+ 598.3	206 936	30.2	- 40.7
PAN[c]	51 789	6.2	91 125	9.2	+ 76.0	104 742	15.3	+ 14.9
PT[d]	4 920	0.6	17 038	1.7	+ 246.3	20 206	2.9	+ 18.6
PFCRN[e]	62 111	7.4	17 329	1.7	- 72.1	10 022	1.5	- 42.2

Source: Viqueira and Sonnleitner (2000:147).

a *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Institutional Revolutionary Party.
b *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – Party of the Democratic Revolution.
c *Partido Acción Nacional* – National Action Party.
d *Partido del Trabajo* – Labor Party.
e *Partido del Frente Cardenista de Reconstrucción Nacional* – Party of the Cardenist Front of National Reconstruction.

New Municipalities in Chiapas, 1999



Boundaries

- State
- International
- Municipal

New Municipalities

- 21, Aldama
- 22, Benemérito de las Américas
- 23, Maravilla Tenejapa
- 24, Marqués de Comillas
- 25, Montecristo de Guerrero
- 26, San Andrés Duraznal
- 27, Santiago El Pinar

Source:

Leyva and Burgete 2007: 21

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Chapter 1

Remunicipalization in Chiapas: Between Peace and Counter-Insurgency

Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor and Xochitl Leyva Solano

Contrary to popular belief,[9] the legislation authorizing remunicipalization in 1999 was not carried out in response to a demand extended by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN). It stemmed originally from a government proposal offered by the Commissioner for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas, Manuel Camacho Solís, to the Zapatista rebels in March, 1994. The intention was to create new municipalities in Ocosingo and Las Margaritas but the EZLN rejected the government's proposal from the start. Faced with this response, the interim governor in place at the time, Javier López Moreno, readdressed the proposal and presented local Congress with some reforms to the state's political constitution which would allow for the creation of the municipalities of Lacandonia, Marqués de Comillas and Guadalupe Tepeyac. López Moreno suggested that this could be achieved by taking parts of the territory belonging to the municipalities of Ocosingo and Las Margaritas. A month later, however, the local Congress announced that the formation of these new municipalities "was being momentarily suspended" because of a lack of necessary technical studies (*La Jornada*, May 11, 1994).

While official remunicipalization was "suspended", events on the ground occurred that attempted to reorganize the political boundaries in Chiapas. In November 1994, for instance, in the aftermath of the Zapatista uprising, a political organization called the *Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinos* (State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations – CEIOC) declared the establishment of five "pluriethnic autonomous regions" in the state. One month later, the EZLN launched a military action, which they called "Breaking the Fence, Campaign for Peace with Justice and Dignity for Indian Communities"

9 According to Senator Jorge Mario Lescieur (1998:255), for example, "... in [the] San Andrés [Accords], the Zapatistas proposed the subject of remunicipalization ..." to "accompany their demands for indigenous rights".

and which announced the establishment of 32 Rebel Municipalities. In this climate of *Zapatismo* and with the electoral process underway, the *Asamblea Estatal Democrática del Pueblo Chiapaneco* (Democratic State Assembly of the People of Chiapas – AEDPCh) declared the establishment of the "Transitional Government of the Free and Sovereign State of Chiapas" on December 9, 1994 (Trujillo Fritz 1996; Kampwirth 1996; Palma 1998; Leyva 2001).

The "Transitional Government" proposed, among other things, "to promote before the federation, complete respect for the sovereignty of the state of Chiapas and the autonomy of its municipalities in addition to constitutional recognition of its pluriethnic autonomous regions and their forms of government; and .... to call, in accordance with the new Constitution, for general elections to elect state and municipal authorities representative of the population to govern the state of Chiapas" (Palma 1998:112). It is worth mentioning that the "Rebel Governor" (Amado Avendaño) had, in the eyes of his followers, jurisdiction over several dozen autonomous municipalities and regions, whilst his mere existence questioned the authority and legitimacy of the governor of Chiapas, who belonged to the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI).

It should be added that in 1994, with the support of the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations (CEIOC), 24 municipal buildings were "seized". The indigenous and peasant supporters of these "seizures" demanded the removal of local authorities, many of whom were labeled "*caciques*". The takeover of municipal seats was clearly motivated by a desire for the democratization of municipal life (Martínez n.d). In practice however, such municipal revolts descended into power struggles between local factions, advancing one party's interests at the expense of another's. In this way, committees were formed and alliances were created between members of different parties who had become united by their common demand for the dismissal of a particular town councilor (Burguete 1998). In 1994, 26 mayors were removed, and mixed and multi-party municipal councils were set up in 37 of the 111 municipalities (González Saravia 1998:2). Between 1992 and 1995, 50 mayors—half the total number in the state—were removed (Sonnleitner 2000:107).

All of the above gives us a clear idea of the level of conflict present in the municipalities of Chiapas before, during and after the uprising on January 1, 1994. At the same time, it helps us to understand why, two years later, in February 1996, in the section entitled "Joint Declaration that the Federal Government and the EZLN Shall Submit to National Debating and Decision-making Bodies" of the San Andrés Accords, it was agreed to recommend reforms to Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution. The aim of these reforms was to strengthen the federal pact and to guarantee the participation and integration of indigenous communities and municipalities with a high indigenous population, into the functioning

of the councils. These general declarations became more tangible in the document entitled "Commitments for Chiapas by the State and Federal Governments and the EZLN", under Point 1.3 of the "Rules of Procedure". This featured a chapter dealing with remunicipalization in which the parties agreed to promote

> adjustments in the municipal divisions of the State of Chiapas ... by way of a Municipal Reform Commission whose composition will be in accordance with Chapter 11 of this document entitled ACTIONS AND MEASURES. The Executive promises to support all resolutions adopted by said Commission, which shall be put before the Legislative Power, repealing the current condition calling for the approval of half of the town councils (quoted in Hernández and Vera, 1998:82).

Under point 3.2, in the section referring to the "*Actions and measures for Chiapas*", the following "Commitments and proposals from the State and Federal governments and the EZLN" were established regarding "Political Participation and Representation" and agreed upon by the different sides:

> The creation of the Commission for Municipal Reform and Boundaries in Chiapas … is made up of delegates from all the political parties represented in the local Congress, as well as representatives from the EZLN, the Chiapas state government, and from the indigenous communities and municipalities throughout the state. The Commission will determine the most ideal, far-reaching and effective methods for more authentically and faithfully incorporating the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and social diversity of the state of Chiapas (quoted in Hernández and Vera, 1998:87).

In June 1996, four months after the San Andrés Accords were signed, the local Congress passed for the first time a bill to proceed with the remunicipalization of Chiapas. When the remunicipalization process began, congress members invited the EZLN to join the discussion but the Zapatista authorities did not respond. The talks between them and the government were virtually suspended after the EZLN had argued that the government was not acting in good faith with its proposals in the *Mesa 2* negotiations, regarding "Democracy and Justice".[10]

Remunicipalization was rejected by the EZLN from the very beginning as it was perceived as a move to obscure the fact that the Zapatistas' principal de-

10 In a press conference held on September 2, 1996, the State Department let it be known that "today a communiqué was received from the EZLN, dated August 29, in which they state their decision not to attend the meeting planned for September 4, in San Andrés Larraínzar, nor will they attend any subsequent ones while what they call 'guarantees' are not met and until there is a serious commitment by the Government" (*Boletín Núm.* 274/96 cit. in CONAI 2002).

mand, constitutional recognition of indigenous communities' autonomy and free determination, had not been fulfilled. The state government, on the other hand, maintained that the establishment of autonomous municipalities violated "the rule of law, specifically, Article 115 of the political Constitution, which indicates that the determination of municipal divisions is the exclusive faculty of the state legislature" (Castro 2002:189). Nevertheless, even for a PRI congress member of the LIX Legislature, the "autonomous municipalities" were "another form of unilateral action by the EZLN, [implemented] to obtain political advantage and to exercise pressure favorable to their struggle's interests" (Lescieur 1998:251).

Faced with the Zapatistas' refusal to become involved in the remunicipalization process, opinion was divided among the politicians. Some believed that it was essential for the EZLN to participate while others maintained that it could continue without them (*Cuarto Poder* March 7 and March 27, 1997). In March and May of 1997 therefore, the *Comisión Especial para la Reforma Municipal, Redistritación y Remunicipalización* (Special Commission for Municipal Reform, Redistrictization and Remunicipalization), made up of congress members of the LIX Legislature, carried out several consultations in the municipalities of Las Margaritas and Ocosingo. The aforementioned Commission was not, however, supported by the parliamentary faction of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD) or by the *Comisión Nacional de Intermediación* (National Commission for Mediation – CONAI). The latter demanded the immediate dissolution of the Special Commission, claiming that the process was inadequate, in particular regarding the "procedures of notification, the integration of the Commission, the scope of its activities and certain steps taken". They claimed that such procedures were not carried out in line with previous agreements and therefore, strictly speaking, they could not be supervised sufficiently by the *Comisión de Seguimiento y Verificación de los Acuerdos de San Andrés* (Commission for Monitoring and Verification of the San Andrés Accords) (*La Jornada,* April 18, 1997).

For their part, legislators in both the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN), agreed that the new municipalities must emerge from the consensus of local populations and not simply from an unconditional acceptance of the Zapatista demands. In the middle of 1997, this debate among congress members was interrupted by the midterm elections for local representatives. The Special Commission for Municipal Reform, Redistrictization and Remunicipalization subsequently lost importance and the process grounded to a halt. State remunicipalization was considered again in 1998 as part of the Federal Government's response to the crisis created by the Acteal massacre, which took place on December 22, 1997.

In responding to this crisis, the Mexican president, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, changed his policy of dialogue and negotiation with the EZLN at the be-

ginning of 1998. He replaced his Secretary of State, the governor of Chiapas and the peace negotiator and proposed a new "Peace Plan" which featured "direct dialogue with the EZLN", "increased investment in the 'conflict zone'", the "returning of displaced people" and "remunicipalization of the state". While the president made changes and pronouncements that appeared conciliatory, the Government, through the State Security Police Force and the Army, was violently dismantling several autonomous Zapatista municipalities (Castro 1999, 2002; Speed 2003; Gutiérrez 2004).[11] In the same period, the government of Chiapas launched an aggressive media campaign claiming that there had been mass desertions from the Zapatista ranks and that many had exchanged their weapons and balaclavas for financial resources destined for "development". (See, for example Leyva and Rodriguez' explanation in this book of what happened in the new municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa). Further "dismantlements" and violent episodes followed, whilst the interim governor, Roberto Albores Guillén, was launching the *Acuerdo Estatal para la Reconciliación* (State Reconciliation Agreement), which did not bear any of the characteristics of an "agreement" and was more akin to a government mandate. It was launched in February 1998 and endorsed via the press by many corporate organizations of the then state party, the PRI.

All of this occurred just two months after paramilitaries from the municipality of Chenalhó had massacred 45 women and children in Acteal and after the EZLN presented information, again through the press, regarding changes in the authorities of several rebel municipalities. With regards to this, the coordinator of the federal government delegation for peace in Chiapas, Pedro Joaquín Codwell, stated that "what the Zapatistas [were] doing in the previous weeks [was] declaring *de facto* autonomous municipalities, as there [had] been no advances in constitutional reform" (cited in *Cuarto Poder*, October 3, 1997). In other words, the Government's own spokesperson recognized the political risks that the Zapatista strategy represented for the Government. It seemed that the EZLN wanted to show that the Government was the least important actor when it came to the remunicipalization process and that all their *de facto* autonomous municipalities required was legal recognition.

The Government's response to this *de facto* autonomy did not take long. Between April and June of 1998, five operations were carried out by the police and armed forces: three in autonomous communities, one in the neighborhood of La Hormiga (in San Cristóbal de Las Casas) and another in the municipality of Nicolás Ruíz. In each place, more than a thousand soldiers, police and civilians vio-

11 Regarding this, there are many accusations made by both national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); as well as by publications such as those of the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" (CDHFBC 1999a, 1999b), the Community Action Group and the Center for Human Rights "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez A.C." (Pérez *et al*. 2002).

lently intervened resulting in theft, destruction and death, as well as a series of arrests, most of which were illegal (Castro 2002). With talks between the EZLN and the Government suspended, the dismantling of rebel municipalities only served to confirm the violent and unilateral character of government policies and to further increase the tension between both sides.

In fact, it was after the dismantlement of the autonomous municipalities Ricardo Flores Magón and Tierra y Libertad, which took place in April and May of 1998, that President Ernesto Zedillo publicly urged the governor of Chiapas to put the remunicipalization program into action. This starting point is in fact acknowledged in the decree that created the remunicipalization program, which justified itself on the basis of two facts, the San Andrés Accords and that

> Doctor Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, president of Mexico, made a respectful call to the state government, on May 19, 1998 in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, with all due respect for the state's sovereignty, to proceed firmly and rapidly in the remunicipalization of the state of Chiapas, beginning with the broadest and most solid social consensus ... (Gobierno del estado de Chiapas 1999).

Seen in this light, remunicipalization in Chiapas should be interpreted as a "presidential program" that, in keeping with the political culture of the time, was virtually impossible to question. Thus remunicipalization had total federal support[12] and one week later, the interim Governor Roberto Albores Guillén responded to the "request" of the executive powers by announcing the launch of the *Programa de Remunicipalización en Chiapas: Una Propuesta para la Reconciliación* (Remunicipalization Program in Chiapas: A Proposal for Reconciliation). This was announced in front of the president of the Republic and it was witnessed by the entire cabinet and representatives of the political parties, as well as the business sector (*Cuarto Poder*, May 29, 1998).

Albores' proposal contemplated the creation of 33 municipalities in the territory that corresponded to the 11 already in existence, mainly affecting those municipalities in the so-called "conflict zone". In other words, the proposal assumed that the autonomous municipalities created by the Zapatistas would be automatically and vertically incorporated into the new constitutional ones (*Cuarto Poder,* May 29, 1998); something that in fact never happened, despite Governor Roberto Albores Guillén making a public invitation to the EZLN in May 1998,

12 In November 1998, the creation of a trust of 137 million pesos for new municipalities was announced. The objective of this trust, according to the president of the Remunicipalization Commission, was to guarantee viable and feasible resources for five years. Moreover, in August 1999, the governor asked all state and federal officials to implement a *Programa Integral de Desarrollo Sustentable* (Integral Program for Sustainable Development) in order to provide the necessary resources for each of the new municipalities for the year 2000 (*Cuarto Poder*, November 12, 1998).

giving them "one week" to join the government's remunicipalization process (*La Jornada*, May 29, 1998). Their participation, he said, "had to" occur within a predesigned scheme, which would formally carry out a "wide ranging consultation with different regional actors". The Zapatistas once again rejected remunicipalization arguing that the national reforms agreed in the San Andrés Accords had first to be set in motion. Albores responded emphatically to this by saying that remunicipalization looked to "… consolidate the state of law and sow freedom and justice" (*La República*, May 28, 1998).

Between June and July of that same year, Governor Roberto Albores Guillén formed a new State Commission for Remunicipalization, relieving the legislature of its functions and giving power to members of the judiciary instead. Because of actions like this and a disregard for the EZLN, independent organizations and opposition political parties, the Zapatistas and pro-Zapatistas rejected the *Alborista*[13] remunicipalization program and questioned its legitimacy. Faced with such polarization, the *Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* (Commission for Concord and Pacification – COCOPA) had to strongly emphasize the urgency of finding consensus between the sides to be able to reopen the dialogue and ensure that the peace process and negotiation in Chiapas moved on.

After the Acteal massacre, it seemed that Albores' proposal would go ahead given the new correlation of political forces in the state. In other words, in contrast to 1994 and 1995, when rebel autonomous municipalities were being defended by independent organizations in Chiapas, by 1998 the alliances between these organizations and the EZLN had, for the most part, crumbled (Pérez 2000; Leyva 2001). Therefore, in 1998, the rebel municipalities were almost exclusively made up of Zapatistas and pro-Zapatista activists. This put the EZLN in a delicate position regarding government attacks. It also brought serious problems to their municipalities and autonomous regions where political conflict and violence was on the increase, subject to the driving force of militarization, paramilitarization and the growing distribution of government financial resources.

On this new stage, so well described by García and Solís for the case of Montecristo de Guerrero (chapter 7 in this book), the *Alborista* remunicipalization offer began to attract other, unexpected, actors, primarily political groups that had ongoing disputes with Zapatista bases, much to the surprise of the government. Burguete and Torres clearly explain this in their case studies of the municipalities of Aldama and Santiago El Pinar (chapter 4), as Leyva and Rodríguez do with Maravilla Tenejapa (chapter 5). However, there were also Zapatista factions which, as in the case of Aldama, left the rebel municipality to support demands for official remunicipalization, thus contributing to, as Burguete and Torres state, a constitutional municipality that

13 *Alborista* is the term used when referring to actions carried out by Governor Roberto Albores Guillén.

was "pluriethnic and respectful of different religions". Furthermore, as can be seen in chapters 5, 6 and 7, various associations that were central to PRI corporatism in the municipalities of Maravilla Tenejapa, Marqués de Comillas, Benemérito de las Américas and Montecristo de Guerrero, promoted remunicipalization in order to advance their own demands. They achieved this by exploiting clientelistic relations between local leaders and PRI politicians (see the cases of Aldama and Maravilla Tenejapa) and between local leaders and the leaders of the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT) (see chapter 2 about the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal).

In 1998, the *Alborista* initiative contained two new elements which had not appeared in previous projects. First, the initiative could not hide the open political and military aggression against the *de facto* Zapatista autonomous municipalities. For example, how in Ocosingo, nine of the thirteen proposed municipalities had their seat and their area of influence precisely in the places where rebel autonomous municipalities had theirs. Leyva and Rodríguez' describe in detail how in the tropical borderlands, local PRI factions supported the new initiative in exchange for favors and money for projects and how the new municipality encouraged the Mexican Army to enter and install road checkpoints and military bases in the heart of the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad.

Burguete and Torres describe something similar occurring in the Highlands (Los Altos) in the case of the autonomous municipalities Magdalena de la Paz and San Andrés Sacamch'en de los Pobres where the new municipalities of Aldama and Santiago El Pinar were established. In the case of the latter, the first action taken by the new councilors was to form the *Consejo Municipal de Seguridad Pública* (Municipal Council for Public Security), the aim of which was to achieve "control of the entire municipal territory". To do this, "the local authorities were given new vehicles in order to oversee their new territory. Through the authorities present in the various villages within the municipality, which now had the status of municipal agencies, the Santiago municipal authorities took on the task of putting together a detailed register concerning all their inhabitants, including their political leanings and religious preferences, as well as the movements of the Zapatistas and PRD supporters under their jurisdiction". They refer here, of course, to the Zapatista municipality of San Andrés Samch'en de los Pobres (see Burguete and Torres in this book).

The other novel aspect in the *Alborista* offer was that it included areas outside of the "conflict zone", thus calling on new political and social groups. This extension of the policy could partly be read as a response to the enthusiasm demonstrated by local people when presented with the government's proposal, but it could also be interpreted, as seen in chapters 2 and 6, as a government attempt to turn the geopolitical areas encircling the Zapatista core region into buffer zones. This book will demonstrate how this occurred by looking at the cases of Benemérito de las Américas and Marqués de Comillas, municipalities located in the ex-

treme south-east of the Lacandon Forest on the border with Guatemala, and in San Andrés Duraznal located on the transitional border between the Highlands and the Northern region of the state. In these municipalities, as told by Harvey and Toledo respectively, *Zapatismo* had important followers in the form of members of different independent peasant organizations. Furthermore, the Northern region, where Duraznal is located, has had a long tradition of independent struggle and popular movement since the mid-seventies, converting the region into a doubly dangerous zone in the eyes of the government.

Containing the spread of *Zapatismo* proved strategic at this juncture and was labeled by some national and international organizations as "the longest period of violence since the conflict began."[14] Global Exchange, CIEPAC and CENCOS denounced the existence of "12 paramilitary groups", the arrival in Chiapas of "5,000 more troops and the opening of 30 new camps and military positions". For these organizations, this period ended with the disappearance of the National Commission for Mediation (CONAI) and with the attack on the Zapatista communities of Chavajeval and Unión Progreso (municipality of El Bosque)[15] on June 10, 1998. These were attacks where more than 400 elements of the Public Security Police and the army used the most atrocious levels of violence against Zapatista bases (Martínez 2005 and Global Exchange *et al*. 2000:129-131).[16]

One year and one month later, in July of 1999, the PRI politicians, with the opposition voting against it, passed a bill in Congress that established seven new municipalities. These seven cases, from an original list of 33, are dealt with in this

14 Global Exchange, CIEPAC and the *Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social A.C.* (National Center for Social Communication – CENCOS) distinguish nine stages between 1994 and 2000 "that mark qualitatively and quantitatively the advance of military police forces in Chiapas". Although these organizations recognize that "we will never know the exact number of soldiers in [the state] while the armed forces remain untouchable by civil institutions", as a result of their field research they estimate that towards the end of 1999 there were between 70 and 80 thousand troops present in Chiapas, whereas the Government only accepted that there were between 17 and 25 thousand (Global Exchange *et al*. 2000:132).

15 The municipality of El Bosque occupied a strategic geographical position, as it is located exactly in the transitional zone between the Highlands and the Northern region, as well as being the seat of the autonomous municipality San Juan de la Libertad.

16 Neither in this book, nor in the present chapter have we provided a detailed account of every violent act committed in the name of "counter-insurgency". We have merely mentioned in passing the Acteal massacre and the dismantling of Zapatista autonomous communities. Between 1997 and 1998, the political dimension of counter-insurgent violence included threats, kidnappings, the Acteal massacre, the assassination of leaders of independent peasant movements, destruction of autonomous municipalities, attacks on pro-Zapatista activists and international observers, deportations of the latter, the breaking into offices of non-governmental and religious organizations, as well as threats and attacks on those involved in the CONAI. To read a more in depth account of counter-insurgency in Chiapas, see information published by non-governmental organizations, activists, academic activists and journalists. See also the Foreword in this book,where Armando Bartra writes about the different forms of counter-insurgency that he has identified in the case of Chiapas.

book. In the case of the other 26, agreements were not forthcoming in the way or timeframe originally hoped for. Of these 26, eleven were proposed by Roberto Albores to the state Congress with view to their creation in a second and third stage of the program. However, the winds of change were in the air, as the presidential candidate for the *Partido Acción Nacional* (Party of National Action – PAN), Vicente Fox, geared up for his campaign for the following year so these subsequent stages were never consolidated. In other words, the PRI's political era, the era of Zedillo and Albores was drawing to a close and there was not enough time to pass a bill for more municipalities. However, this did not prevent President Ernesto Zedillo, during his twenty-fifth tour of Chiapas, from publicly congratulating Governor Roberto Albores Guillén and the new municipalities on "their commitment to peace" (*Cuarto Poder*, July 22, 1999).

As will be seen throughout this book, the *Alborista* remunicipalization would not have been more than a simple program for politico-territorial reorganization of the state or a dull bureaucratic administrative exercise were it not for the conditions of low intensity warfare in which it took place. Unfortunately, there is not space in this book to examine the war in depth, since it only deals with one aspect of it, the *Alborista* remunicipalization initiative. From chapters 2 to 7, the reader can find out about the unconventional war mechanisms set in motion by the state and federal governments against the EZLN and the "organized population" that supported the Zapatista insurgence. These mechanisms were intended to divide the Zapatistas and pro-Zapatistas or even crush them through a combination of financial, political, psychological and military tactics.[17] By focusing above all on the political dimension of counter-insurgency, the contributions to this book show that the results of the government's strategy for asserting control over territory, resources and people varied between regions. In some it was successfully deployed while in others it was superseded, ignored or defeated.

17 In this chapter we have not entered into the theoretical debate about the concepts of *counter-insurgency* and *low intensity warfare,* both developed in the climate of the *cold war*. The term *classic counter-insurgency* refers to a United States doctrine that managed to become institutionalized at the time of President Kennedy (the 1960s) as a state program. It used politico-military strategies, which were employed by the USA to confront guerrilla activity, carry out anti-guerrilla warfare, and suffocate "Third World" revolutions (Maechling 1990). A program that "includes military measures aimed at isolating and fighting guerrillas as well as non-military measures designed to undermine popular support of the insurgent cause" to beat it (Klare 1990:73). Klare and Kornbluh (1990b:15) recognize that *low intensity warfare* comes from *counter-insurgency* tactics. This, they state, during the government of Ronald Reagan (the 1980s), turned into "a policy aimed at suffocating not only emerging revolutionary movements but also revolutionary regimes in power that were considered to be allies of the Soviet Union". We can identify, from the perspective of North American military thinking, different categories of low intensity combat and different experiences of interventionism if we consider the examples of Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Philippines or Afghanistan (see Klare and Kornbluh 1990a).

Although denouncing such counter-insurgency became common amongst non-governmental organisms and activists, the existence of a politico-military strategy to counteract the spread of *Zapatismo* was alluded to from very early on by the research and development center funded by the United States' Army called the "RAND Arroyo Center" (Ronfeldt *et al*. 1998:iii). They claim that since 1994, the Mexican Government and Army were aware of the fact that the situation in Chiapas needed to be counter-attacked by employing both traditional and more novel strategies. Amongst the older techniques were counter-insurgent tactics tried and tested in other countries in the past, and amongst the newer techniques was the need for the Mexican Government and Army to recognize that they were facing *netwars* (Ronfeldt *et al*. 1998). These were defined as a new form of conflict in which its main actors depended greatly on the use of networks for their organization, doctrine, strategy and technology, as well as the solidarity of non-governmental organizations. Such solidarity in Chiapas was expressed just as much by people that physically arrived in the state as through those that fought the enemy in cyberspace, focusing their efforts on one particular objective. These actions in fact managed to influence the direction that the Mexican Government's policies took in dealing with the "conflict in Chiapas" (Leyva 2001, 2004).

It is in this context of *social netwars,* that the implementation of the Government's *Alborista-Zedillista* initiative can be better understood. This initiative hoped to counteract the spread and consolidation of Zapatista autonomous communities, given that between 1997 and 1998, these represented the most important part of the EZLN's international (political) strategy. Through these tactics, the Zapatistas legitimized their demands for autonomy at home and abroad and offered a point of reference for both national and international pro-Zapatista activists, who expressed their solidarity by helping these municipalities, thus strengthening the resistance and *de facto* autonomy of the rebels (Leyva 2001; Burguete 2003; Alonso 2007).

Bringing this first chapter to a close then, we can say that if we limited ourselves to the content of the government's speeches, remunicipalization *could* be understood as an instrument of peace. Nevertheless, as we will see throughout this book, in the *realpolitik* and during Ernesto Zedillo's government and that of the interim Governor Roberto Albores Guillén, remunicipalization became a true instrument of war. This is exactly how the *Aliancista*[18] governor of Chiapas, Pablo

18 The term *Aliancista* is given to the government that emerged from the political convergence of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – PRD), the Party of National Action (*Partido Acción Nacional* – PAN), the Labor Party (*Partido del Trabajo* – PT) and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (*Partido Verde Ecologista de México* – PVEM). This government was successful in the Chiapas state elections of 2000.

Salazar Mendiguchía, considered it when, on December 19, 2000, he announced the closing of the Remunicipalization Commission. He said that the Commission was "a stumbling block for peace" and went against the spirit of the San Andrés Accords. From an academic perspective and as this book demonstrates, we could say that Albores' remunicipalization became tangled up in the networks and webs woven around the war and the peace.

Chapter 2

San Andrés Duraznal: The Political Game of Remunicipalization

Sonia Toledo Tello

In the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal, two elements revealed the remunicipalization project as a political measure that opposed the Zapatistas' and other social organizations' demands for autonomy: the absence of a municipal lobby amongst the population that makes up the new municipality and the location of Duraznal, outside of the core Zapatista territory. Although the northwestern territory of Chiapas, where Duraznal is situated, has seen the birth of some strong social movements, the better part of the new municipality's population has taken part in such movements in a conservative manner, remaining respectful towards government institutions. For many years, this population was one of the few bastions of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI) in the region, although it later affiliated itself with the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT), with which it managed to establish the new municipality.[19]

But on the other hand, it is important to recognize that remunicipalization in the region would not have been possible without the intervention of local political forces. For this reason, I will explore the creation of the municipality as an outcome of the positions and actions taken by local and regional political forces that participated in this process, in accordance with their interests and posi-

19 The work for this chapter was carried out with the collaboration of María Hernández and Yasmina López. Juana María Ruiz Ortiz assisted with the interviews in Tzotzil and with the translations, mainly with women and the elderly. To all of them, my sincerest thanks. Likewise, I would like to express my gratitude to the director of the *Instituto de Estudios Indígenas* (*Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas*), Jorge Angulo Barredo, the administrative director, César Trejo and to Enrique Teomitzi, the driver. I would also like to thank Juan José Lau, ex-director of the *Centro Coordinador Indigenista* (CCI) Bochil, and the technicians from the *Fondo Regional*, Carlos H. Domínguez, Abelardo Cancino and Abenamar Sánchez for the information shared and valuable company during trips within the municipality. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Gracia María Imberton for her invaluable help in revising the English version of this chapter.

tions in the Chiapanecan political scene.[20] Likewise, I attempt to look into how the government project was received and experienced by the local population. This entails a consideration of the positions of social subjects within their *social space*,[21] seeing this space as a product of a regional history, but also linked to more general processes.

However, I also consider that, independent of its origin, the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal forms part of the broader Mexican political system, which currently finds itself in the context of the Mexican State's much announced *transition to democracy*. Tonatiuh Guillén López, a specialist on the subject, maintains that there are two spheres in which this *democratic transition* is expressed, whilst recognizing that this issue includes all areas of social life: in democratic electoral practices and in the consolidation of a democratic culture in institutions and in ways of governing. In this process, municipal governments acquire special importance, becoming spaces for the day to day realization of democracy (Guillén 1999a, 1999b).

It was claimed that the remunicipalization project would, amongst other things, attend to the basic needs of the population, as well as promote regional development through the new municipalities. For this reason, I will analyze the conditions under which the local government operated, considering its financial and human resources and its projects. I will also consider the effects of the federal and state elections in 2000 on the political scene that put into action the remunicipalization project. This is because I wish to consider the development possibilities that the new municipality actually possesses. Given that this chapter was finished at the end of 2001, I will limit myself to a description of the very first stages of municipal government in Duraznal, but situating it within a wider dynamic that links it to national problems and debates, such as the role of the municipality in regional development and in the *democratic transition*.

20 For this analysis, I use Bourdieu's notion of "game", which refers to the way in which social agents participate in a particular space following its logic and "rules", and in accordance with its values, thus competing for its main resources; in other words, the participants naturally act in the spirit of a game. The social actions of both individuals and groups—the moves, bets and risks that they take on (or not)—depend on the position that they occupy in the social space in question, which is mobile and historical and is defined according to the amount and type of resources that they possess, be they economic, political, cultural, prestige-related, legitimizing, etc., (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1995).

21 Following the historical-cultural perspective of E.P. Thompson (cf. Ulin 1990:207-216) and Bourdieu's (1995) related proposal, social subjects are as determined as they are determinant in social spaces, which are understood as complex networks of social relations in tension and competition, where individuals, groups and institutions participate from distinct and changing positions of power.

San Andrés Duraznal from a Regional Perspective

San Andrés Duraznal is a municipality with an area of only 29.9 km²,[22] with a total of 3,989 inhabitants spread over five *ejidos* and six small localities.[23] Duraznal borders to the north with the municipality of Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán and the *ejido* El Ocotal de Simojovel; to the east with the *ejidos* Guadalupe Victoria and La Pimienta de Simojovel; to the south with the *ejido* Ignacio Altamirano in the municipality Jitotol; and to the west with the *ejidos* Emiliano Zapata and Lázaro Cárdenas in Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán and Carmen Zacatal de Jitotol. In 2000, 88.4 percent of its inhabitants were bilingual, speaking Spanish and Tzotzil, although there were a few Zoque families. The remaining population of 11.6 percent was monolingual and mostly made up of women.[24] More than half the population of the municipality (2,578 inhabitants) is concentrated in the *ejido* San Andrés Duraznal, the municipal seat. This *ejido* is the center of the new municipality not only because it is the seat of municipal government, but also because of its geographical character and its particular history.

For a long time, the Duraznal *ejido* has been a point of reference for seasonal day laborers during the coffee harvest in the northwestern part of the state.[25] The agricultural cycle begins in the Simojovel lowlands (at 700 m above sea level) in November and how long it lasts depends on the altitude of the different places in the region. The final stop on this agricultural labor route is the Duraznal *ejido* (at 2,200 m above sea level), where the harvest finishes in April. The day laborers involved in this agricultural cycle come from Duraznal and other localities in the municipalities of Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán, Jitotol and Simojovel.

The seat of the new municipality has also attracted construction workers from nearby *ejidos*, as the majority of the houses are made of cement blocks, with concrete roofs. The provision of basic products—salt, sugar, oil, candles, etc.—is another service that this *ejido* has made available to various neighboring settlements. Petty traders used to supply their goods through the municipal seats of

22 Or 2,991 hectares. Of the seven new municipalities, San Andrés Duraznal is the third smallest in terms of area, after Aldama (26.6 km²) and Santiago el Pinar (17.8 km²).

23 Localities which are actually attached to *ejidos*.

24 This information was obtained from the *Consejo y Comisión Estatales de Remunicipalización del Estado de Chiapas* (Chiapas State Council and Commission for Remunicipalization) in 2000.

25 According to the person responsible for production projects in the new municipality, the San Andrés Duraznal *ejido* is a very productive coffee area, with around 540 producers, many of whom harvest between five and six tons: "Those who produce the least, harvest a ton" and he added: "Here with 14 one gallon cans, you get a 50 kilo sack because the coffee beans are large and weigh more than in warmer climates. In Simojovel, you get a 50 kilo sack with 16 one gallon cans" (Interview with Andrés Enrique Ruiz, September 2000).

Pueblo Nuevo Solistahucán, Jitotol and Simojovel, but with the recent construction of a road to Jitotol, they now do so in Duraznal.

Duraznal was the oldest and largest *ejido* in the municipality of Simojovel (the municipality from which Duraznal was created), and one of ten that were created there between 1930 and 1970. In the municipality of Simojovel and various others in the region,[26] it was the estates (or *fincas*) that were dominant from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1970s, both in terms of their numbers and the particular socioeconomic dynamic that they put into place. The owners of these productive units mostly originated from the non-indigenous population of towns like San Cristóbal and Comitán and migrated to this region in the second half of the nineteenth century (Toledo 2002).

This agricultural activity also attracted people from the Chiapas Highlands (Los Altos) and parts of the current population of the region are descendants of Tzotzils from San Andrés Larrainzar. This is the case with the majority of those who now live in the municipality of Duraznal and various other places in the municipalities of Pueblo Nuevo Solistahucán, Jitotol and Simojovel.

The history of the places that now make up the new municipality is linked to the history of the estates. The land that now belongs to the *ejido* San Andrés Duraznal used to form part of an enormous estate called "La Pimienta". In 1930, the Duraznal *ejido* was established with a grant of 1,865 hectares divided amongst 113 *ejido* members. Don Lorenzo Ruiz Díaz, who claimed to be 120 years old in 2000, said that the lands where the first inhabitants of Duraznal lived were formerly "*terrenos nacionales*" (state lands), but that the estate owners took them over, thus reducing these people to the category of landless *campesinos* (or "*baldíos*").[27] This would seem to be confirmed by the presidential resolution that created the *ejido*, in which the inhabitants of San Andrés Duraznal are described as having occupied "for a long time 880 hectares of state lands (*terrenos nacionales*)", as well as having granted them 985 hectares of pasture land for cattle raising, also located on state lands. Rivera Galeana, which belongs to the new municipality, was also recognized as an *ejido* in the 1930s, receiving 459 hectares split between 25 *ejido* members. Both *ejidos*, which previously belonged to the municipality of Simojovel, were created very early on. The new municipality's other eight *ejidos* were established over the following forty years.

26 Such as, for example, Huitiupán, Jitotol, Bochil, Sabanilla, Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán and Pantelhó.

27 In Simojovel, the "*baldíos*" were workers who lived outside of the estates but had an agreement with the estate owners whereby they worked plots of land belonging to the estates, paying the estate owners in kind, i.e., with a part of the harvest or with their labor. Often, these "*baldíos*" became "tied laborers" when they became indebted to their bosses. Nevertheless, in this case, the vague distinction that existed between these "*baldíos*" and the tied or indebted laborers meant that they were able to apply for *ejido* status.

The establishment of these *ejidos* had an effect on social relations and the big properties were divided up. But this did not fundamentally alter the hegemony of the estates in the region. The *ejido* members and small property owners, which emerged out of the policy of agrarian reform, soon established a dependent relationship with the estates, as they obtained loans on the basis of future harvests. Some worked as day laborers and continued to keep up personal contacts with the estate owners, with both blood ties and symbolic ones, in the same way the permanent workers did. Other workers continued to be indebted up until 1980, when the estates finally disappeared. The inhabitants of Jotolchén, El Ocotal, Río Blanco and El Palmar, localities that now belong to the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal, thus lived under these conditions until relatively recently.

This continuity in relations characterized by the dominance of the estates after agrarian reform had been implemented allowed the estate owners to carry on being in charge of satisfying many of the population's needs, thus keeping up relations of the type that Edward P. Thompson (1984) has called a *moral economy*. The estate owners also controlled the institutional and political spheres by occupying posts in the town hall and other administrative functions in the region based in the municipal seat in Simojovel.[28] The reproduction of this type of relationship (with the estates) ended up limiting the presence of state institutions as well as the development of political intermediaries. Broadly speaking, it was not until the presidency of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) that the presence of government institutions and programs began to be felt in Chiapas.

This regional process created important differences between the indigenous population in the northwest of the state and those indigenous people who experienced other sorts of changes and conflicts in their communities, recreating their forms of government, practices and beliefs with relative autonomy.[29] In contrast, the indigenous population in the estates had the estate owner as the authority figure. The indigenous authorities that had existed in their places of origin disappeared and many religious beliefs and practices, along with medical knowledge and food habits, were shared (and disputed) by speakers of indigenous languages and *mestizos* alike, including the estate owners themselves.

28 Simojovel, Pueblo Nuevo Solistahucán and Jitotol were established as free municipalities in the first group of 59 municipalities that were recognized in Chiapas in 1921. Jitotol was classified as a "3rd category" municipality, Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán as "2nd category" and Simojovel as "1st category". According to the *Ley del Municipio Libre del Estado de Chiapas* (Law of the Free Municipality of Chiapas state) of 1923, this division into categories had to do with the number of inhabitants: those that had more than 5,000 inhabitants were in the 1st category, those with less than 5,000 were 2nd category and those with an unknown number of inhabitants were 3rd category (INEGI 1996:53, 161, 197, 209-211).

29 The chapters about Santiago el Pinar and Magdalena Aldama in this volume describe this distinct process.

Transformations in the agrarian structure and the end of the hegemony exercised by the estate owners and ranchers took place in the 1970s and 1980s. In this period, Chiapas began to feel the effects of the agrarian and agricultural crises, the social impacts of modernization projects,[30] as well as changes in ideologies; these were the renewed practices of the Catholic Church, through the Diocese of San Cristóbal's propagation of liberation theology, and the presence of various political agents with both ideas and projects aimed at social transformation.

In this new scenario, a regional agrarian movement was built up, with the participation of *ejido* members, tied laborers and "*baldíos*" linked to the large estates.[31] During the 1970s and 1980s, the inhabitants of Huitiupán, Simojovel, Sabanilla, El Bosque, Bochil, Jitotol and Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán recovered 40,000 hectares (González and Quintanar 1999:217). Only a small part of the population of the new municipality took part in this agrarian struggle and managed to receive land grants or extensions to their *ejidos*, as was the case for the inhabitants of Rivera Galeana, Río Blanco and Jotolchén. Later, between 1994 and 1995, in the northern part of the state (*la Zona Norte*), the agrarian struggle[32] resumed and private property practically disappeared in the municipalities of Simojovel, Huitiupán and Bochil, and social property (i.e., *ejidos*) significantly increased in the municipalities of Ixtapa, Jitotol, Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán, Rayón, Tapilula and Reforma. In these years, the *campesino* population "recovered" 10,000 hectares (González and Quintanar 1999:217).[33]

To conclude this section, it should be added that the region in which the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal is situated, has been the scene of intense agrarian mobilizations, counting with the presence and influence of the *Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos* (Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants – CIOAC), the *Unión de Uniones Pajal-Ya-Kaltik* (Union of Unions Pajal-Ya-Kaltik) and the *Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata* (Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization – OCEZ). The actions of these organizations,

30 I refer here to the construction of dams, intensive cattle ranching and the exploitation of oil reserves.

31 In the Simojovel region, the implementing of cattle ranching and the initial work done for the Itzantún hydroelectric project (which was eventually canceled due to organized civil opposition), translated into the expulsion of many tied families from the estates. This meant that this sector of the population began to organize themselves for the first time in order to demand land along with those landless *campesinos* who were descendants of the first *ejido* members. This broke the deep ties of loyalty that the laborers had had toward their bosses for generations.

32 Concerning the resurgence of the *campesino* movement in Chiapas, an important work proposes the need to distinguish between the new meanings that agrarian mobilizations acquire in the context of the Zapatista uprising and earlier struggles for land in the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Villafuerte et. al. 1999: chapter 1).

33 This process is amply documented in various works, such as Pérez (1989); Reyes (1991); Rojas (1995); Harvey (1998a, 2000).

along with those of the Diocese of San Cristóbal and the Government itself,[34] permitted the dissolution of the estate owners' power without the Mexican State being able to consolidate itself in its place. Instead, an intense field of competition emerged amongst different social organizations and political parties, including the PRI and the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasant Confederation – CNC). This dynamic characterized the political game in this region during the last three decades of the twentieth century.[35]

San Andrés Duraznal and Social Conflicts

During the years of intense mobilizations, the *ejido* members of San Andrés Duraznal "decided not to invade". The inhabitants of the *ejido* informed me that some of them had intended to join the agrarian movement, but in the assembly, "the catechists convinced people not to take land away from its owners". The agreement did not prevent some of the wealthier *ejido* members from taking advantage of offers made to them by landowners faced with the threat of invasions and buying land collectively, some of which later became settlements in the new municipality of San Andrés Duraznal.[36]

The attitudes adopted during these periods of conflict and the relationships that were kept up with the old estate owners and some government institutions generated a kind of symbolic capital for the inhabitants of the Duraznal *ejido*: they came to be acknowledged in the region as "good *campesinos*", "hard workers", "honest people" and "not antagonistic". This reputation circulated mainly in the more conservative quarters: ex-landowners, business people and those who continued to justify the existence of the estates, despite not having their own properties. A commercial trader from Jitotol, talking about the people from the Duraznal *ejido*, stated that

34 In 1984, the Federal Government invested 17 billion pesos in the *Programa de Rehabilitación Agraria* (Agrarian Rehabilitation Program) to pay compensation to the owners of properties that had been invaded and to resolve the agrarian conflict in Chiapas. Although the less than transparent management of the program by the Chiapas authorities generated conflicts amongst *campesinos*, social tensions in Simojovel decreased significantly (cf. Reyes 1991 and Rojas 1995).

35 This did not prevent the reproduction of corporate practices which characterized the ways in which government policies were implemented and the projects of social and political organizations in general. Concerning this corporatist tendency amongst the social organizations of Chiapas (see García *et al*. 1998).

36 The inhabitants of the San Andrés Duraznal *ejido* not only were not "invaders" but in 1981, one of the pieces of land that they had purchased was occupied by *campesinos* from Jotolchén. Some *campesinos* from La Pimienta, who supported the "invaders", died in this conflict. Finally, in 1984, the conflict was resolved when the lands were paid for through the Agrarian Rehabilitation Program.

> they are very hard workers and that's why a lot of them have money, but there are others that are very poor, as in all places. But they are not like the people we have in the town hall [referring to CIOAC militants], who prefer to go on strike and expect the government to give them everything. The government cannot deal with everything (Anonymous commercial trader, November 2000).

The inhabitants of the Duraznal *ejido* politically managed their image both amongst themselves and with those with whom they had relationships. "No other community is like this one", said Andrés Gómez Díaz, legal officer (*síndico*) of the Duraznal municipality, "because whilst the others spend all their time in meetings or on protest marches, we devote ourselves to our work, we don't waste our time".

This management of their image as "good people", "hard working" and "not antagonistic" could be considered as a strategy that acted to lower tensions without the apparent use of violence, whilst at the same time guiding ways of acting and perceiving.[37] However, this did not avoid the presence of certain contradictions. For example, during the agrarian movement, there were people in the *ejido* hoping for lands that yielded to the community decision not to invade other properties, whilst at the same time, those who had more resources at their disposal increased the size of their properties buying up pieces of land. Many of those interviewed stated that because of their strong religious feelings, "it wasn't good to take land away from its owners". Another person commented that "God made the world with both rich and poor people" and for that reason they respected the landowners. Following the approach adopted by Héctor Tejera (1996), we can say that the importance placed by local inhabitants on certain types of tradition and religious belief appeared to be the basis upon which they constructed their position with regards to the agrarian movement.[38] It is worth wondering to what extent these "community agreements" acted to obscure internal differences and to reproduce unequal relations amongst the inhabitants of Duraznal,[39]

37 This strategy, from Bourdieu's point of view, does not refer to rational action but to the lines of action that social agents construct in practice, within a specific historical logic, "objectively oriented". In this case, the strategy of using their image as "good people" and "non-antagonistic" and the actions taken in accordance with such an image, perhaps involve a form of symbolic violence, because, following Bourdieu's thinking, they end up reproducing unequal relationships and even allow some individuals and groups to increase their material and symbolic power (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1995).

38 Although we could also say the same about those who took part in land invasions partly based on their religious beliefs, but in this case, liberation theology. Toledo Tello (1996) registers various accounts like this.

39 One recent publication that brings together different essays that discuss this question of democracy amongst the indigenous population is Viqueira and Sonnleitner (2000).

relations that appeared to be harmonious, thus recreating their image as "good *campesinos*"—an image which undoubtedly provided them with certain benefits, especially with regards to the land issue.

This image as "good people" was constructed in opposition to that of "bad people", which was applied to those who took part in the land takeovers and belonged to independent organizations. The members of these organizations were generally categorized as "idle", "disrespectful", "invaders" and as "conflictive".

It must be added that from the moment Duraznal was established as an *ejido*, its internal structure has been subordinated to the state and to the official party (the PRI) via the *ejido* authorities. The members of this *ejido* directed their political activities along institutional paths, in spite of the fact that in this area, government institutions and the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) were practically non-existent.

Remunicipalization in the Northwest of Chiapas[40]

The Labor Party (PT) that lobbied for the creation of a new municipality in San Andrés Duraznal was established in the region by ex-militants from other organizations. Some of these were political leaders that had left their former groups owing to various power conflicts. The regional PT was first created in El Bosque as the result of division in the Unión Pajal-Ya-Kaltik that occurred whilst the PT was still establishing itself at a national level—incidentally, the PT was closely linked to the political group of the then PRI president, Carlos Salinas—and was formally recognized at the beginning of the 1990s. Not long afterwards, in Simojovel, a regional leadership dispute between the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), and the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD), to which the CIOAC was affiliated, produced a split between these organizations. David Morales Valdés, one of the PRD leaders in the municipality, along with other militants, crossed over to the recently established Labor Party (PT). David Morales was to be a key actor in the remunicipalization of this region.

The PT emerged in Simojovel in a context that favored its rapid growth. In 1992, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) began to lose legitimacy in the municipality when a large number of inhabitants, belonging to various organizations, ceased to recognize the PRI-led town hall, accusing the municipal govern-

40 I would like to thank Elvia Quintanar for the valuable information that she provided for the reconstruction of part of the organizational processes in this region at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

ment of encouraging violent confrontations between the PRI and the CIOAC.[41] For many, and particularly for the more conservative groups, this new political party offered a political alternative because, apart from offering economic assistance, it presented itself as an independent party with an approach that favored negotiation over confrontation. The PT gradually won over followers in different places through applying for greater government aid for production activities. It arrived in the San Andrés Duraznal *ejido* in the following way:

> When the *compañero* David arrived, before he was president [of the municipality of Simojovel], we held a meeting in order to encourage people, we said to them: "You know what, *compañeros*, we are going to join together, we are going to present a request before the government that we all get an equal share of PROCAMPO [*Programa de Capitalización al Campo* – a government program to capitalize rural areas]. We are going to ask that everyone gets an equal share, everyone the same, three hectares". So people were heartened by this and everyone began to get organized, and they organized themselves within the PT (Interview with Humberto Ruiz Díaz, municipal seat of San Andrés Duraznal, September 2000).

In 1994, members of the PT in Simojovel created an "economic branch", the *Organización Campesina Obrero Popular del Estado del Chiapas* (Popular Peasant and Workers' Organization of the State of Chiapas – OCOPECH). This organization, thanks to the political networks of many of its members,[42] demonstrated a considerable ability to obtain resources for the support of agriculture and for the extraction and processing of amber.[43]

David Morales launched himself as the Labor Party (PT) candidate for the municipal presidency of Simojovel in 1995.[44] The PT's electoral triumph that year

41 Regarding this conflict, see Rojas (1995) and Harvey (1998a).

42 Juan Carlos Vázquez, project coordinator for social organizations and a member of the state executive commission for the Labor Party (PT), informed us that within the party there were two currents: the first linked to social organizations and the second to the teachers' movement, the latter being more party political in orientation. One of the most significant forces linked to the PT was the *Coordinadora de Organizaciones Sociales y Productivas del Estado de Chiapas* (Coordinator of Social and Productive Organizations of the State of Chiapas – COSPECH), which brought together 85 social organizations from different municipalities in the Highlands (Los Altos), the Northern Zone (Zona Norte) and the Lacandon Forest (Selva). The OCOPECH in Simojovel worked separately, more linked politically to the teachers' movement and its headquarters in Tuxtla Gutiérrez.

43 One of the effects of the agrarian conflict in the 70s and 80s was the migration of people from rural areas to the municipal seat. Since then, various settlements on the edges of the city of Simojovel have housed innumerable families that devoted themselves to the extraction and processing (cutting, shaping, polishing, etc.) of amber, the famous petrified resin found in abundance in the caves around Simojovel.

44 In 1988, he had been candidate for the municipal presidency, but for the PRD.

was facilitated by a large number of abstentions on the part of CIOAC and PRD supporters, as well as by Zapatista sympathizers that adhered to the EZLN's call not to vote.[45] A further factor was a period of ungovernability that the municipality of Simojovel had experienced during the violent conflicts between the PRI and the CIOAC in 1992. This meant that many of the people that had traditionally supported the PRI (even in the municipal seat) saw in the PT a chance to return to "calmer" times and thus voted for this party, thinking that it would not entail the "violent" and "radical" government that many assumed would occur if the PRD won. But one of the fundamental ingredients in the PT victory in this context was the support of the people that would later make up the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal. Many of those I interviewed said that they used their vote to "return the favor" for the assistance they had received from PT leaders.

Land has been one of the main civil demands in the region, but not the only one. From the end of the 1980s, the struggle over the municipal governments became more important. Moreover, during the 1990s, ethnic grievances and demands were growing in the same way as they were in other parts of the country. In this context, on October 12, 1994, distinct social organizations publicly declared the existence of "autonomous pluriethnic regions" in Chiapas. Fifty-four towns and villages from nine municipalities in the northwest of Chiapas participated in the establishment of the northern autonomous region. Although the political declaration of this autonomous region was not consolidated, according to some participants, this mobilization catalyzed a broad discussion in the communities concerning autonomy and spurred on the struggle for the control of municipal governments (González and Quintanar 1999). In the mid 1990s, Zapatista support bases were set up, along with a Zapatista autonomous municipality, San Juan de la Libertad, situated in the municipality of El Bosque. This kept up an important political presence, but later became weakened by internal divisions.[46]

After the agrarian movement of the 1970s and 1980s, the people of the region continued with their struggles, but they became increasingly related to demands for more autonomy, whether through electoral means or through the establishment of autonomous municipalities or the so-called autonomous regions. Following Guillén (1996), we can say that increasing importance was placed on local government in this region, which was expressed in both electoral politics and in municipal governments themselves. In this context of the struggle for autonomy,

45 Nevertheless, in the municipalities of Huitiupán, Bochil and Jitotol, the PRD won the elections in 1995.

46 In the article by Adriana López Monjardín and Dulce María Rebollo (1998), there is a chronology of the war in Chiapas that details the main events in the autonomous municipalities, including San Juan de la Libertad. Another work about Zapatista autonomy is that of Araceli Burguete (1999).

the government remunicipalization project was formulated as a strategy that sought to counterbalance these demands.

Regional Political Actors and the New Municipality

The municipality of San Andrés Duraznal appeared in the list of 33 municipalities proposed by the government of Roberto Albores Guillén, with 6,638 inhabitants distributed throughout 73 localities and with its seat in the *ejido* La Pimienta.[47] The inhabitants of the Duraznal *ejido* claimed that this was how they found out that there "was going to be a municipality" and that, on hearing the news, David Morales Valdés—the then president of Simojovel—along with other members of the Labor Party, began to lobby for the municipal seat to be located in Duraznal. According to the municipal legal officer, the establishment of the new municipality was a demand of the *peasants*

> because they are people who suffer a lot, they have no roads and they are poor [referring to the Zapatistas]. The state government realized, by looking at its maps, which places were particularly badly communicated and they published in the newspapers where the new municipalities were going to be and the news arrived in Simojovel that La Pimienta, which is Zapatista, was going to be the new municipal seat. But as the people from La Pimienta are different, that is, they don't get on with the government because they are Zapatistas, PRD supporters, and they don't want to make a formal request to the government. So when Don David [Morales] heard about this, he told us. They put together a request and spoke to the governor. As they did it well, the municipal seat ended up here, but the municipal president helped us (Interview with Andrés Gómez Díaz, San Andrés Duraznal, November 2000).

Almost all those interviewed from the Duraznal *ejido* expressed the same version of events, commenting very clearly (and almost naïvely)[48] that, as they had supported David Morales to help him win the municipal presidency in Simojovel in 1995, he carried out the bureaucratic steps to ensure that their *ejido* became the

47 The proposal of Governor Roberto Albores Guillén was published in the Chiapas newspaper, *Cuarto Poder*, on May 28, 1998.

48 This "naivety" actually had to do the way in which practices like these are seen as the "natural" way to do politics. These expressions form part of an entrenched political culture, although dynamic and changing. Héctor Tejera, following Roberto Varela, has suggested that political culture can be understood as "the set of signs and symbols that affect power structures. A combination of acting and thinking about political events that are put into play with the purpose of achieving certain objectives or reaching certain social spaces" (Varela 1996:39; Tejera 1996:13).

municipal seat. The local lobbyist for the new municipality commented the following:

> When David began his campaign [for the Simojovel municipal presidency], the people said: "OK, as David gave us a hand with our PROCAMPO, now we're going to help David become president". So we voted for David, here [in the Duraznal *ejido*] we got 750 votes for David, for the Labor Party. And once David was president, that was when this government remunicipalization plan came to light. It seems that David was the secretary of the work plan, so David said: "You all helped me, so now it's my turn, I'm going to help you". And that was the way we began to work and to have help with the issue of the new municipality (Interview with Humberto Ruiz Díaz, San Andrés Duraznal, September 2000).

David Morales was the most visible political figure that took advantage of his position in political spheres to ensure that the municipal seat was located in the San Andrés Duraznal *ejido*. The Labor Party (PT) through its local deputies—Héctor Hugo Roblero Gordillo and Jesús López Constantino—approved the remunicipalization project in the state Congress. This reveals that it was before the government proposal appeared publicly that members of the PT began procedures aimed at the establishment of San Andrés Duraznal.

With regards to the *ejido* La Pimienta, one of those interviewed from San Andrés Duraznal commented:

> Those from the *ejido* La Pimienta are PRD supporters and are very strong, but they didn't move as quickly as those from the PT and for this reason they took the municipal seat away from them, and that is why they didn't want to form part of the new municipality and stayed part of Simojovel (Anonymous interviewee, San Andrés Duraznal, October 2000).

It appears that the inhabitants of La Pimienta, who, incidentally, were not all PRD supporters—there was a significant number of PRI supporters, as well as Zapatista sympathizers—were interested in their *ejido* becoming the municipal seat, but they did not encounter sufficient support from the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) or from the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC), as these groups were very critical of the government's project from the outset. The lack of support from the PRI is perhaps explained by the fact that the PT was already negotiating for the municipal seat to be in San Andrés Duraznal, where it was guaranteed that there would be no conflict, whereas La

Pimienta was a very polarized community. The general secretary of the CIOAC in this region, who was originally from Jitotol, stated the following:

> We always viewed this remunicipalization project as something that would divide our people even more ... In the case of San Andrés Duraznal, they thought that once they were able to establish and consolidate themselves as a free municipality, there was going to be sufficient funds, enough to bring development. But it turned out that the better part of the promises that the remunicipalization project was supposed to fulfill were not kept, and things remain the same. The only thing they have is the road that we managed to achieve through the lobbying of the organization [CIOAC], an application made at the federal level, which was done with the Secretariat of Transport and Communications. But in terms of housing, streets, the town hall, they told them that in four or five months the buildings would be ready, but they still don't have them (Interview with Francisco Pérez Pérez, Jitotol, September 2000).[49]

The villages in the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal thus parted with the municipalities of Simojovel and Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán. In both cases, the local PRI-affiliated authorities respected the government decision and signed the respective town council acts in which they formally expressed their "conformity" with the separation of some of their localities (one of the requirements for the Decree in 1999 that established the seven municipalities dealt with in this book). Nevertheless, in the interviews that I carried out, the municipal presidents expressed, in various ways, their disagreement with the remunicipalization project. The president of Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán commented that they were not consulted about the separation of the three localities, claiming that they were only informed once the decision had been taken and their annual budget reduced. He stated:

> Here in the municipality there is a project to not split the municipality, we realized that if we split it, here in Pueblo Nuevo, it affects us enormously,

49 This interview was carried out in September 2000 and, at that time, the construction work on the town hall and the municipal building for the seat of the *Sistema para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* (System for the Integral Development of the Family – DIF) had still not been finished. But on December 26, the day of the Municipal Council President's speech, the two buildings were ready and were inaugurated. Jitotol is one of the municipalities that borders with the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal and its authorities (PRD supporters) tried to prevent the separation of these two localities; nevertheless, when the municipality was later established, they supported, with considerable foresight, the authorities of Duraznal in the management of its resources, in order to construct an unpaved road that today connects Jitotol with the new municipal seat in Duraznal. This quickly benefited bus drivers and petty merchants from Jitotol.

> therefore my own idea is that in order to solve this problem, as the state government or Congress have not analyzed this problem sufficiently, it wasn't our request to divide [the municipality]. No, the answer is to invest more money in order to find a solution to our problems, and what happens? We divide everything up amongst us into fractions, but it is the same fraction. We're only going to divide up the expenses, so I believe that an alternative should be found, no? We have to invest more money, look for ways to attend to people's needs, more productive projects. And the new municipalities? I've realized by comparing the available funds [for municipalities] that it's a pittance; that is my personal point of view (Interview with the municipal president, Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán, September 2000).

More cautiously, the municipal president of Simojovel commented:

> It affects me a little bit because of all the different productive projects. We have little information, as the new municipality of San Andrés Duraznal is not officially registered, so we can't pass on the funds directly for programs like SEDESOL's COESCAFÉ.[50] I have to approve them so that the funds can be handed over and they send me the receipts and I check them and pass them on to the comptroller's office when, formally, it's no longer my responsibility! I can't really check things that I am no longer managing. That is where I see that it is not quite correct, it's not alright because it puts me in a compromising situation (Interview with Juan Gómez, Simojovel, October 2000).

Of the 73 localities that were originally considered, only 11 became part of the new municipality of San Andrés Duraznal: Las Limas, Río Blanco and El Roblar (then annexes of El Duraznal *ejido*) that separated from the municipality of Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán; Rivera Galeana, the San Andrés Duraznal *ejido*, Jotolchén, Linda Vista I, Linda Vista II, El Ocotal and El Palmar, all of which had belonged to the municipality of Simojovel. In reality, five *ejidos* made up the municipality: the largest was San Andrés Duraznal with 2,578 inhabitants, followed by Rivera Galeana with 457; Jotolchén with 322 inhabitants, El Palmar with 76 and Las Limas I with only 65 inhabitants. The other six localities were *ampliaciones* (extensions) of the larger *ejidos* and some of them were registered as separate localities during the remunicipalization process. This was the case with Linda Vista I and El Ocotal, whilst El Palmar was recognized as an *ejido* only in

50 SEDESOL stands for *Secretaria de Desarrollo Social* (Secretariat for Social Development) and COESCAFÉ for *Comisión Estatal del Café* (State Coffee Commission).

September 2000. These actions were part of the strategy used by the Remunicipalization Commission in order to justify the establishment of the municipality by presenting the greatest number of inhabitants and localities possible.

CIOAC's general secretary in the region mentioned a few reasons why he believed that the people of Jitotol did not want to join the new municipality.

> In the case of Jitotol, we have communities that are near … to the municipal seat [of San Andrés Jitotol]. They were invited to form part of the new municipality. There was a clear invitation to the community to see if they would go for it. But the town hall [of Jitotol] held a meeting with its communities to make them see, well, if the distance benefited them, socially speaking, and that they were free to join the new municipality. The assessment made by the communities was this: "If we have Jitotol as our municipal seat, where we are used to going, it is well communicated, it is next to a paved road, then how is it possible now that instead of just improving things we're going to join a newly set up municipality?" (Interview with Francisco Pérez Pérez, Jitotol, September 2000).

To conclude this section, I would like to add that the establishment of the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal had to do with a central government political decision, but its actual creation was the result of the ways in which different regional political forces acted with regards to the project. For the local PRI authorities, subordinated to the authoritarian and centralist power of the government and its party, the project was a clear imposition. For the regional leaders of the PRD and CIOAC, the real aim of the project was to divide indigenous peoples, and thus their position with respect to the remunicipalization game was very critical and they rejected it. Meanwhile, for the Labor Partiy (PT), it offered the chance to extend their regional power through the control of another municipal government (at that time they also controlled the municipal government in Simojovel). The government proposal was a golden opportunity, given that the most significant support base for this party was to be found in the localities that came to make up the municipality of Duraznal. Therefore, although the PT lost the town hall in Simojovel in the 1998 elections, it managed to win in the new municipality. But in terms of regional power, this did signify a certain loss, as the economic and political importance of Duraznal did not compare with that of Simojovel.[51]

51 It is worth mentioning that the secretary to the municipal council, Tomás Castellanos, was the PT candidate for the municipality of Simojovel in the 1998 elections. On this occasion the PT lost to the PRI candidate, Juan Gómez Núñez, ex-leader of the CIOAC in the region.

Conflicts during the Elections for the Municipal Council

Almost all the inhabitants of San Andrés Duraznal hoped that Humberto Ruiz Díaz (a PT activist) would become president of the municipal council, as he had been the principal lobbyist. According to Andrés Enrique Ruiz Díaz (leader of the Duraznal *ejido* and in a few other places), it was decided within the same party that the post would be taken by Andrés Antonio Hernández Díaz. Andrés Enrique made the following comments:[52]

> I proposed that Don Andrés be the president, because my uncle has a lot of experience, he's occupied various posts in the *ejido* and was also a councilor in the municipality of Simojovel [during the PT's term, 1996-1998]. As people know this, they voted for him but those who supported Don Humberto, the people from my own party, began to attack me (Interview with Andrés Enrique Ruiz Díaz, San Andrés Duraznal, October 2000).

For this reason, Andrés Enrique decided to leave the Labor Party (PT) and joined the ranks of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Andrés Enrique assures us that thanks to his efforts in the municipal seat of Duraznal, the PRI beat the coalition of opposition parties (*Alianza por Chiapas* – Alliance for Chiapas) in the 2000 elections for the governorship: "The PRI, which beforehand only got about 70 votes, is now stronger in Duraznal, it got about 500 votes and the coalition hardly reached 300" (see Table 2.1).

In accordance with the official results, the PRI won by a margin of 157 votes in the federal elections, and in the state elections, it beat the coalition by 21 votes. Regarding this, the council secretary pointed out that one had to consider that the population of the largest *ejidos*—after Duraznal—Jotolchén and Rivera Galeana, did not vote in San Andrés, but in Simojovel, because they had not changed the electoral roll, along with the location of the polling booths and the voting credentials for the new municipality. In both cases, the secretary assured us, the majority continued to belong to the Labor Party (PT). Sure enough, in the elections for municipal presidents and deputies held in October 2001, the PT triumphed, and

52 When interviewed, Andrés Enrique Ruiz Díaz was 27 years old, and according to what he told us, he began to be active in the PT from the age of 13 (perhaps he meant the PRI, as the PT did not exist at that time), whilst he was living in Simojovel. In this municipality, during David Morales' administration, he occupied the post of security representative (*Control de Vigilancia*) in Productive Projects, a post that, because of its importance, gave him certain political capital, which could be used with many of the *campesinos* in the region. Furthermore, in 1998 he was a PT candidate to the post of councilor, when the secretary of the San Andrés Duraznal municipal council, Tomás Castellanos, was candidate to the Simojovel municipal council.

the municipal president was Humberto Ruiz Díaz, the original lobbyist for the municipality.

As part of the power games that took place in the municipality, there appeared two sets of candidates on the day of the council elections, representing the Labor Party (PT) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Those affiliated to the PT, who had led the remunicipalization process, imagined that only the PT would present itself:

> On July 26, 1999, an assembly was held to choose the authorities. The PT had planned that they were going to form the authorities by themselves, but the PRI pressurized them and although the PT were the majority, they were obliged to accept one person from the PRI [the legal officer] in order to avoid confrontations. At that time, those from the Rivera Galeana *ejido* did not belong to a specific party and they decided to support the PRI. In the end, don Humberto (the official lobbyist of the new municipality), who had been proposed as legal officer, gave up his post. At that time, the PRD did not exist as a political force and worked alongside the PT in the assembly. People did not know what a social organization was, there was a lot of indecision amongst people and as we know about parties, we took charge. When one of the parties offered them support, people were ready to accept, but if the other side offered them support, they also accepted it. That is why they don't take belonging to a political party very seriously like other places where they kill each other over political parties and religion (Interview with Armando Gómez Díaz, San Andrés Duraznal, November 2000).

Along with different political forces in the municipality, there were also various religions present, but this did not cause confrontations. In the municipality of Duraznal, conflicts have been resolved through "community" agreements, but this did not mean that all the inhabitants found themselves equally able to participate in the decision making process. It is possible that in tense situations like the one described here, the embodied perceptions, values, orientations that guide action become more accentuated (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1995:87-88), as was the case with their image as "good people" and "not antagonistic"; an image that could have helped to strengthen electoral democracy, by linking local practices and processes with the wider trend of a "transition to democracy".

A Review of the Municipal Council's Activities (1999-2001)

The organizational structure adopted by the municipal council responded to the current national legal model. Given that this municipality was the result of a political conjuncture and not a social demand, this local government had few possibilities of organizing itself in an alternative manner.

The Composition of the Municipal Council

The council authorities were chosen in an assembly meeting by representatives of the 11 localities that make up the municipality. Local inhabitants pointed out that this process adhered to "*usos y costumbres*" (i.e., traditional practices). The members of the municipal council were Tzotzil speakers, from the municipal seat or from one of the other localities in the municipality and members of the PT, with the exception of the legal officer and the treasurer (from the PRD). The administrative employees (from the PT) were directly nominated by the PT's state executive, which sought, according to the council president, to appoint people who had sufficient training to be able to adequately carry out their jobs. The council secretary had a degree in social sciences; the director and sub-director of public works were both architects; and the judge had a law degree and was a Tzotzil speaker, born in the municipal seat. Various residents publicly disagreed with the fact that there were "*Kaxlanes*" (local term for non-indigenous people) working in the council. They said that at the end of the administrative term, they would propose "*pura gente indígena*" (i.e., only indigenous people) to work in the council.

The municipal authorities' educational level was not more than three years primary schooling. Andrés Antonio Hernández Díaz, the president of the municipal council, had some experience of public posts. On a number of occasions he was the *ejido* commissioner and had also been a councilor in the Simojovel town hall. Nevertheless, he had depended on the advice of the council secretary in order to carry out his public duties. The president, the person in charge of productive projects and the manager (*gestor*), amongst others, were all Labor Party (PT) activists, trained in grassroots work, which did not necessarily prepare them for public administration. The only courses that they received were given by the *Comité de Planeación para el Desarrollo del estado* (Planning and Development Committee – COPLADE)—concerning projects within their remit—and the state treasury, which gave a course on public expenditure.[53] The number of employees

in the town hall was 13. Six worked in the public works department and the rest with the municipal police.

The Management of Municipal Government: Budgets and Projects

The high level of marginalization in this municipality[54] and the almost complete lack of infrastructure meant that the new municipal government was seen by locals as a way of getting access to basic services: mains water supply, health and education services, etc. However, the financial and human resources available were tiny and its management capacity very weak. Let us see how the first administration faired.

The San Andrés municipal council began to function in September 1999, with resources that were taken out of the budgets that corresponded to the munici-

53 Juan Carlos Vázquez, member of the PT state executive commission, told us that after some experiences the party had had after winning municipal governments, the party opened a "National Cadre School" in Mexico City. The idea was to train party militants in "party policy" to avoid them using the party for personal ends. In theory, all party electoral candidates "had to" attend the school, but the municipal council authorities in San Andrés Duraznal did not receive any training from this school.

54 In terms of basic services, all 11 localities lacked potable water and drainage systems, public lighting, abattoir, telephones (the municipal seat has had a satellite telephone since 2001), post office, market and warehouse—there only existed a state-subsidized DICONSA shop in the municipal seat—and only three localities had a basic electricity service. Not one locality had paved roads, or parks or public gardens and only the municipal seat had a graveyard. In terms of education, of the 413 children aged 5 and under, 215 did not attend pre-school. There were 750 children between 6 and 12 that, according to official statistics, all attended primary school. Those between 13-15 totaled 331, of which 67 went to secondary or "tele-secondary" schools, which meant that 80 percent of children in this age bracket did not have access to education. Those adolescents between 16 and 19 years of age, the age at which they study *bachillerato* (school leaving certificate), numbered 267 and there were no local schools at this level. 34.52 percent of the population is reported to be illiterate. With regards to health services, there was one clinic—run by the *Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social* (Mexican Institute of Social Security – IMSS) in collaboration with the *Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas Deprimidas y Grupos Marginados* (General Coordinating Committee for the National Plan for Destitute Areas and Marginalized Groups – COPLAMAR)—in the municipal seat. The remaining localities used clinics in other *ejidos*, mainly in the municipality of Simojovel. The inhabitants of the *ejido* El Palmar, one of the smallest in the municipality—"in resistance", according to the council authorities—were receiving some services from a *Médicos sin Fronteras* (Doctors without Borders – MSF) program. Furthermore, and in accordance with the information gathered in the field, there were various individuals that practiced various types of traditional medicine. The majority of the roads were paths and tracks and the only road of this type that was passable in a vehicle was the road between Jitotol and the municipal seat. This road was built at the same time as the municipality was being established, but it experienced serious problems during the rainy season. There was another road under construction that will connect the municipal seat of San Andrés Duraznal with the *ejido* Rivera Galeana. The road that went to Simojovel was passable in a vehicle during the dry season, which is very brief in this region (Consejo y Comisión Estatales de Remunicipalización 2000a). Communications between the different localities in the municipality improved with the acquisition of new radio equipment.

palities to which the new municipalities' various localities formerly belonged. Unfortunately, the establishment of the new municipalities in Chiapas did not signify an increase in the available budget. In total, the municipality received 370,301.28 pesos,[55] which were allocated to the administrative personnel's salaries and bonuses and for the purchase of office supplies, spare parts, electrical equipment, gasoline and expenses. The branch XXXIII (*Ramo 33*) resources, or *Aportaciones Federales para Entidades Federativas y Municipios* (Federal Contributions for Federal and Municipal Entities) were channeled through the *Fondo de Aportaciones para la Infraestructura Social Municipal III* (Fund for Contributions to Social Municipal Infrastructure – FAISM), with a total of 380,026 pesos, and through the *Fondo de Aportaciones Federales para el Fortalecimiento Municipal IV* (Fund for Federal Contributions for Municipal Strengthening – FAFOMUN), whose contribution was 153,142 pesos. The *Fondo III* resources were used to buy vehicles, employ personnel and for the equipping and renovation of the day nursery building. The *Fondo IV* resources were spent on gasoline, vehicle insurance, police uniforms and the renovation of some of the schools in the municipality. The *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (Secretariat of Social Development – SEDESOL) gave the municipality 661,200 pesos to improve coffee production and 144,108 pesos to assist women in production activities, money which was invested in a haberdashery for the artisans, a bakery and two *nixtamal*[56] mills located in the municipal seat. The public works projects managed by the council authorities during the first few months of their government were the construction of a road between Duraznal and Jitotol and the construction of a technical secondary school in the municipal seat.

Although the budget was larger in 2000, few projects were actually implemented. These were split between the 11 localities in the following way: portable radios in 6 localities; a drainage system in one locality and electricity in another. The construction of a rainwater tank and piped water for one village; the opening of a kilometer of road in other localities and the improvement of housing in two others; road surfacing over 1,837.5 m² at the entrance of the municipal capital. Each locality received one, tiny public works project and, in total, the expenses rose to 1,624,697.32 pesos. Furthermore, the authorities used 164,465 pesos to employ four more policemen, buy their uniforms, give them a training course and buy gasoline. Also, the construction of the municipal palace took up 1,316,478.50 pesos, and the offices of the Integral Development of the Family (DIF), 675,809.85 pesos (Gobierno Municipal 2001).

55 342,372 pesos from the *Fondo General de Participación* and 27,929.28 pesos from *Participación extraordinaria*.

56 *Nixtamal* is the local term for maize grain that has been boiled with lime and is subsequently ground into the flour from which *tortillas* are made.

The municipal council distributed SEDESOL resources intended to bolster production and the branch XX (*Ramo 20*) resources ("Social and Productive Development in Regions of Poverty"). In 2000, SEDESOL provided 431,200 pesos for the production of maize, conservation and the improvement of coffee growing areas, which benefited 475 producers throughout the municipality. The *Comisión Estatal del Café* (State Coffee Commission – COESCAFÉ) also invested 406,464 pesos for 438 producers in a project aimed at improving the coffee plantations.

If we compare the enormous needs of the population and of the new municipal government for services and infrastructure, with the resources that were actually allocated, it becomes evident that the state and federal governments were intent on the creation of new municipalities at whatever the cost. They hoped to guarantee the formation of these new municipalities in order to legitimize the remunicipalization project rather than to create conditions that would promote regional development through the municipalities. The municipal authorities faced difficulties common to many of the municipalities in the country, but found themselves in worse conditions than most. As Tonatiuh Guillén López (1996) has shown, modern urban municipalities, like those on Mexico's northern border, have generally suffered from the distortions of centralism that characterize Mexico's political system. Therefore, small, rural municipalities like San Andrés Duraznal, which do not have ways of generating their own resources, suffer even more acutely from such centralism.

Municipalities like Duraznal depend totally on the state and federal governments and are far from being able to exercise some degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, part of the local population considers that the new municipality has brought certain benefits. Some argue that they have finally been taken into account and each community has benefited from at least one public works project. The fact that these projects have meant so much to the local population perhaps reveals the levels of exclusion that they have suffered from in the past, and also shows how poverty has limited the demands and aspirations of these people.

The municipal council's administration revolved around public works and projects to support production. In both cases, the intervention of the Planning and Development Committee (COPLADE) and SEDESOL left little room for the authorities or the inhabitants in the actual planning and definition of projects. The municipal council's work basically consisted in convincing the population, through the community committees, to accept public works projects that had already been allocated to the municipality, such as piped water, electricity, etc.

A further source of funding for production activities was the *Programa de Fondos Regionales* (Regional Funds Program), which worked through the Coordinat-

ing Centers of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Indigenist Institute – INI).[57] The program was managed by a Regional Fund made up of representatives from the different localities in the municipality that aimed to recover the loans as soon as possible in order to be able to continue offering credits.

In 1999, a credit of 1,200,000 pesos was granted to 466 people in six localities for livestock and the purchase of coffee pulping machines. In 2000, a credit of 795,600 pesos was given to 396 producers to support coffee and maize production. The next project that was contemplated was for the export of coffee. According to an INI technical adviser, the municipal seat alone could export around 50 tons of coffee. Like many other people, this technical adviser commented that the people from the Duraznal *ejido* were very hard working and organized, and quickly understood the aim of the program and paid back their loans on time. Projects like this one, controlled by the government, though managed by the producers themselves, may contribute to training local people in how to design their own proposals and how to participate in development programs.

The Construction of Territoriality

Some of the changes registered after the establishment of the new municipality were relevant because they related to the way in which individuals and groups participated in the transformations of the *place*[58] they lived in. A very significant fact was that residents, particularly in the municipal seat, argued about where the *center* of the town would be for various months. A PRI leader said:

> It turns out that people did not respect the area around the [Catholic] Church and as the village grew, people started building houses ... and now that we're a municipality, there is no longer a place to build the municipal town hall (Interview with Andrés Díaz González, San Andrés Duraznal, October 2000).

In the end, the town hall had to be built in another part of town. Piero Gorza made the following reflections about the need for human groups to have a center:

> If we pass from natural landscapes to group identities we appreciate the oscillations between the need to have a center as way of orienting our-

57 The Coordinating Center of the National Indigenist Institute is situated in Bochil.

58 Taking up Lomnitz-Adler's proposal (1995:34-35) regarding *spaces*: "The *place* is the frame of reference for social relations, and it is criss-crossed with the values of these relations …" So the *place* is a product of social relations and, at the same time, contributes to the creation of values that make sense for those that inhabit the space, they are spaces of socialization.

> selves and the emergence of an "otherness" that constructs and modifies how identities are represented in both time and space (Gorza 1999:109).

As an *ejido* in the municipality of Simojovel, San Andrés Duraznal had its center in the municipal seat of the time (i.e., Simojovel). In the church of San Antonio de Padua, (Simojovel's patron saint), also lived San Andrés—the brother of the patron saint of San Andrés Larrainzar—who, according to one of the local myths, came to live in the municipality and has been the patron saint of those people who migrated from San Andrés Larrainzar to the northern part of the state during the nineteenth century.

On becoming the municipal seat, the people of the Duraznal *ejido* became involved in the construction of a new sense of territoriality because of their new identity. There existed a model of the town center set up in colonial times and readjusted according to local conceptions. Therefore, the fact that in this case the civil, municipal authorities and the religious authorities ended up in different places meant that residents had to choose which would be the *center*. In the indigenous collective imaginary, the patron saint is associated with the foundation of towns and villages (Ruz 1997) and, as Gorza (1999:109) shows, even in the case of recently created settlements through colonization or expulsions, "the original foundation model has been constantly repeated, with historical variations, but with schematic similarities. The root can be constituted by the repetition of the same place name". This happened with the foundation of this *ejido*, with people who came from San Andrés Larrainzar, when they kept the name San Andrés and added Duraznal.

The status of municipality gave the small church of San Andrés a greater standing. According to Tzotzil Catholic notions, it was necessary "to recover the tradition" of the patron saint *fiestas* in order to strengthen the identity of the inhabitants of the municipality, or rather, of the children of San Andrés who are obliged to celebrate the *fiestas* of their patron saint. The *fiesta* held on November 30, 2000 was not what the Catholics had hoped for because they did not have sufficient funds to organize it "as it used to be done", that is, with fireworks, music, and with visits from the saint images and people from other towns and villages. This was impossible because of the expenses involved in feeding and housing such guests. According to Don Manuel Gómez, one of the founders of the Duraznal *ejido*, *el sistema de cargos* (civil-religious duties) disappeared more than 20 years ago, when almost half the population began to attend the Pentecostal church. For this reason, as the catechists also argued, there were no longer enough people to take charge of the expenses of the *fiestas* and they asked for help from the municipal council in order to carry out the celebrations. The authorities granted them 6,000 pesos, an amount that was hardly enough, according to the

catechists, for a modest celebration in which only the Catholics in the municipal seat took part. What seems significant is that for the Catholics in the municipal seat, the recovery of "tradition"—in the sense of reinventing the convention of the *fiesta*—would strengthen the identity of this "indigenous" municipality, without having to forsake changes such as the improvement of roads, a telephone service, public transport, etc.

With regards to the *center* of the municipal seat, people decided to construct gardens in front of the Catholic Church and in front of the town hall, as both places are important. The first because it the house of the town's founder—San Andrés—and the second because it is a symbol of the town's new administrative status. Both form part of an identity that is constantly changing and under construction. The discussions held by the inhabitants of Duraznal show how people reinvent their spaces, load them with values and meanings and construct, in this case, their municipality according to their own conceptions of the world around them.

Final Considerations

The process of establishing the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal considered here, reveals that remunicipalization in the northern part of the state formed part of a government measure that looked to counter demands and actions in favor of autonomy on the part of different political forces in the region, including the Zapatistas.

Remunicipalization can be understood within a political game characterized by the dispute over the control of territory, people and local governments, and we have seen how regional political forces situated in different positions of power acted with reference to this political initiative. The social and political organizations that demanded greater regional autonomy or the recognition of autonomous municipalities (as in the case of San Juan de la Libertad) were critical of the government remunicipalization project. The PRI leaders and authorities, despite their disagreements, subjected themselves to their party's authoritarianism and verticality and upheld the decisions of the state and federal executive. Meanwhile, the Labor Party (PT), following formal political policies and revealing its ability to politically capitalize on particular conjunctures, took part in this game by backing the government project. The party voted in the state Congress for the approval of the new municipalities, as well as lobbying for and winning control of the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal, a place where it had considerable support in the region. For the PT, this meant that it was able to maintain some power in spite of losing the municipal presidency in Simojovel in 1998, whilst at

the same time gaining more experience in municipal administration. It appears that the political negotiations that occurred between the PT and the administration of the PRI Governor Roberto Albores Guillén with regards to the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal, guaranteed the establishment of the new municipality without greater conflict, rather than the approval of the government project as a whole. This became clear with the fact that the PT, with the local backing of a "non-antagonistic" population, was able to function as an official mediating body, in a region of intense competition between politically opposed organizations.

On the other hand, if it is true that the population of San Andrés Duraznal was surprised by the remunicipalization project, having made no specific demands in this respect, it is also true that it quickly entered in this political game following its own interests and logics of action. It took part in the construction of the municipality from different positions of power and with different amounts and types of capital—economic, political and social. This was expressed in different ways according to what was at stake; for example, the expectations of those younger people who had left the municipality to continue their schooling were different from those who had no access to education. For the first groups, the new municipality represented a space to which they might return and which might offer them opportunities, something not previously contemplated. These younger people took up the ethnic discourse, maintaining that "only indigenous people" should work in the town hall. For the Catholics, the municipality represented the chance to strengthen themselves as a religious group, as for more than 20 years, half the population had belonged to Adventist or Pentecostal Churches. Achieving the recognition of the Catholic Church and the patron saint as identity symbols for the new municipality would represent a triumph for the Catholics.

The fact that there were no confrontations or divisions does not mean that everyone was equally able to take part in collective decisions. But the inhabitants of Duraznal have undoubtedly created strategies for resolving conflicts without resorting to violence. The use of these strategies was clear on the day of the municipal council elections. As we have seen, PT representatives and the population as a whole imagined that only their set of candidates would present themselves; nevertheless, they gave way to the pressure exerted by PRI supporters and ceded the post of legal officer to the PRI in order to avoid further conflicts and divisions. They put into practice embodied values and positions—the image as "good" and "non-antagonistic" people—in order to take a political decision that permitted the initiation of the municipality, with a minimum of conflict. This strategy, constructed according to historical and regional conditions, grafted itself, at least at that moment, onto a more general process in the country of growing electoral democracy.

The municipality, independent of its origin, is now part of people's everyday lives; the social space has been altered, along with people's expectations. The

new municipal government has meant that the population is now more involved in wider predicament where the social exclusion that this region has experienced has become more conspicuous. The unexpected arrival of the municipality opened the way for more civil participation. Nevertheless, not the authorities, nor the leaders, nor the population as a whole had entered into a process that would permit a better management of the government apparatus as an effective tool for resolving their immediate needs.

For the major political forces in the region, even for some members of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the establishment of a new municipality did not mean a solution to problems of poverty and marginalization. The municipal president of Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán claimed that to tackle poverty it was not necessary to formally establish a new municipality but to strengthen those already in existence with greater investment and development programs. The financial and human resources available to the new municipality were totally inadequate to the task of dealing with the existing social problems. However, paradoxically, one of the achievements of the remunicipalization project, from my point of view, was that without intending to, the project revealed the high levels of exclusion suffered by the municipality's inhabitants. Without the remunicipalization project, Duraznal and its residents would probably never have received government projects, nor awakened the interest of social researchers.

The contrast between the enormous need for services and infrastructure and the resources that were allocated to the municipality simply emphasized the fact that the federal and state governments' priority was to legitimize the remunicipalization project, rather than actually attend to the needs of the population and encourage regional development through the new municipalities.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, the municipality of San Andrés Duraznal was born without the necessary conditions to truly become an autonomous unit. On the contrary, the municipal authority acted as an administrator of resources that were already assigned and earmarked by the Federal Government, and remained a long way from being an entity capable of promoting regional development. Similarly, the authorities' lack of training and experience in public administration and the population's limited ability to lobby for particular causes, meant that they became dependent on the regional leaders of the PT who, although they possessed some technical competence (as university graduates, such as architects, accountants, etc.), still needed better training to effectively supervise the running of local government and develop strategies that encouraged the active participation of local people.

The task of the state and federal governments with regards to the new municipalities cannot be underestimated because, as democratically elected governments, they should meet the great challenge of providing conditions that encour-

age alternative means for regional development. For this to happen, it is necessary to take into account at least two of the characteristics that distinguish the new municipality: its productive potential—the Duraznal *ejido*, today the municipal seat, has been one of the largest and best quality coffee producers in the region, thanks to its climate and altitude—and the capacity of its population to work hard and fulfill its commitments. These qualities could be very valuable for instigating a good level of organization amongst the producers and for achieving certain control over the production and marketing of the coffee. At the same time, this would permit the creation of a production and communications infrastructure, and would contribute to giving people the necessary skills to campaign for these improvements. Finally, a further urgent action required by the federal and state governments would be to encourage the construction of a more democratic culture.

Table 2.1
Election Results
Municipality of San Andrés Duraznal, Chiapas

Presidential Election					**Governorship Election**		
Type of Polling Booth	PRI[a]	*Alianza por México*[b]	PCD[c]	PARM[d]	*Alianza por Chiapas*[e]	PRI	PDS[f]
Basic	244	188	0	0	191	199	0
Extra	230	129	2	0	184	197	1
TOTAL	474	317	2	0	375	396	1

Sources: IFE (2000) and CEE-Chiapas (2000).

a *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Institutional Revolutionary Party.
b Coalition made up of the PRD (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – Party of the Democratic Revolution), PAN (*Partido Acción Nacional* – National Action Party), PT (*Partido del Trabajo* – Labor Party) and the PVEM (Partido Verde Ecologista de México – Ecological Green Party of Mexico).
c *Partido de Centro Democrático* – Party of the Democratic Center.
d *Partido Auténtico de Revolución Mexicana* – Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution.
e Coalition made up of the PRD, the PT, the PAS (*Partido de Alianza Social* – Social Alliance Party), the PSN (*Partido de la Sociedad Nacionalista* – Party of the Nationalist Society) and the CD (*Convergencia por la Democracia* – Convergence for Democracy).
f *Partido Democracia Social* – Social Democracy Party.

Chapter 3

Aldama: Disputes over the Restoration of a Municipality

Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor and Jaime Torres Burguete[59]

The creation of the new municipality of Aldama was possible because the different actors, who questioned the way in which the remunicipalization process was conducted, managed to establish agreements regarding the type of municipal institution and the make-up of the municipal authorities. The remunicipalization of Aldama took place in a "social field" (Bourdieu 2001) in which various agents unleashed an intense symbolic struggle in order to ensure that their vision of the new municipal institution prevailed.[60] Three political groups con-

59 From the perspective of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, social space and the groups that are found within it are the product of historical struggles, in which agents are characterized by the positions they occupy in this social space and the representations that they make of it. Expressed in his words: "Social space, in effect, is not only an object of perception in which individuals or institutions are characterized in a fixed fashion, owing to a certain number of properties and by occupying a particular position within a classificatory system; it is also the object of struggles amongst agents over the right to impose their own construction and representation of the social world, as well as their own systems of classification, according to which they act in the social world. The dominant vision of the social world or even the production of legislative taxonomies [as was the case with local government institutions in dispute in the context of remunicipalization], is the result of a struggle amongst different agents that, according to their position in the distribution of different social resources (types of capital, economic, cultural, social) and in the ambit of classifications that are potentially inscribed, find themselves differentially armed in the struggle to impose their vision of the world and, especially, to act at the level of denominations and institutions [e.g., the municipalities], which, like frameworks of perception and appreciation are deposited in language, or titles (of nobility or education), are at the same time the product of symbolic struggles and prior struggles over classification and express, in a more or less transformed way, the state of symbolic power relations" (Bourdieu 2001:61-62).

60 From the perspective of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, social space and the groups that are found within it are the product of historical struggles, in which agents are characterized by the positions they occupy in this social space and the representations that they make of it. Expressed in his words: "Social space, in effect, is not only an object of perception in which individuals or

verged in the political field of remunicipalization in order to contest hegemonic control over the remunicipalization process and to impose their design on the institution of the local government that was born with the new municipality. It is important to emphasize that the political projects that were at issue in the remunicipalization process were expressed in the religious sphere. This was because before 1994, in the Chiapas Highlands (Los Altos), and thus in Aldama, the religious field was often where power struggles could be articulated.[61]

In the remunicipalization debate, there intervened, on the one hand, "traditionalist" Catholics, who insisted that the new municipality have a framework similar to that of an indigenous town hall with its traditional civil-religious posts or "*cargos*", (mayors, a governor, scribes and traditional councilors), working alongside a constitutional town hall (municipal president, legal officer, constitutional councilors) in a single government body, much like it functions in the neighboring municipalities of Chenalhó (Guiteras 1972), Chamula (Pozas 1987) and Tenejapa (López Meza 1996). On the other hand, there were the "liberationist" Catholics, who adhered to the liberation theology and were activists connected to the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN), who established the autonomous municipality of Magdalena de La Paz in 1996. This group demanded that the new municipality be recognized as an autonomous municipality and that its internal organization obey the principles of a Zapatista government.

A third group emerged in the context of the remunicipalization struggle, as a consequence of splits in the first two groups. This group took on the government's offer to establish the new municipality according to the constitutional framework of a free municipality, making it their own. From 1994 to 1997, the

institutions are characterized in a fixed fashion, owing to a certain number of properties and by occupying a particular position within a classificatory system; it is also the object of struggles amongst agents over the right to impose their own construction and representation of the social

world, as well as their own systems of classification, according to which they act in the social world. The dominant vision of the social world or even the production of legislative taxonomies [as was the case with local government institutions in dispute in the context of remunicipalization], is the result of a struggle amongst different agents that, according to their position in the distribution of different social resources (types of capital, economic, cultural, social) and in the ambit of classifications that are potentially inscribed, find themselves differentially armed in the struggle to impose their vision of the world and, especially, to act at the level of denominations and institutions [e.g., the municipalities], which, like frameworks of perception and appreciation are deposited in language, or titles (of nobility or education), are at the same time the product of symbolic struggles and prior struggles over classification and express, in a more or less transformed way, the state of symbolic power relations" (Bourdieu 2001:61-62).

61 The social field is one of the basic concepts in Bourdieu's methodological proposal. García Inda (2000:15) defines it thus: "A social field is understood as an analytical construction through which a specific and systemic set of social relations are designated. In other words, we are dealing with a type of system, which can only be defined historically, which allows us to analyze the relational dynamic that develops in practice".

inhabitants of Aldama experienced a serious political polarization. In this context, a third religious group materialized that articulated itself against the "traditionalist" Catholics and the Zapatistas and which identified itself with "universal" Catholicism. This group took on the government project and directed its efforts towards the creation of a municipality that was neither autonomous nor Zapatista, and which was no longer connected to the traditional *cargo* system. At the end of the struggle, this turned out to be the winning project. The Zapatista plan was defeated, and the traditional authorities were only marginally incorporated into the new town hall. This third group ended up in the strongest position, but its triumph was not circumstantial; their project coincided with the government's remunicipalization project.

The autonomous municipalities and the autonomous Zapatista governments (in this case, Magdalena de la Paz), as well as "traditional" forms of indigenous political organization, were not of course considered in the government's remunicipalization proposal. It was not preceded, for example, by state reforms that recognized indigenous autonomy in local government institutions or the principle of diversity through the integration of these authorities in the design of municipal institutions; principles that had been established in the San Andrés Accords, signed in February 1996, but that have subsequently been ignored by the federal and state governments.[62]

The offer of Governor Roberto Albores Guillén to create 33 new municipalities in Chiapas ignored both the letter and spirit of the San Andrés Accords and directed the remunicipalization process along the familiar lines of an integrationist indigenist policy. But despite the fact that this was a government proposal, the creativity of the Aldama inhabitants should not be ignored. They proved themselves capable of creating a new type of local government institution out of this struggle. The municipal town hall that was set up in Aldama is the first one in the Chiapas Highlands that is overtly "pluriethnic" and secular in character. Chamulas and Magdaleneros are both present in posts in the town hall, whilst new religious differences are no longer an obstacle to belonging to the municipal government, in contrast to the other town halls in the region, which do not allow such diversity.

This collaborative chapter is structured in the following way: initially we provide some general facts about the municipality. In the following sections we recount how each group of actors ("traditionalist" Catholics, "liberationist" Catholics and "universal" Catholics) converged in the social field of remunicipalization

62 The San Andrés Accords, signed on February 16, 1996 by the EZLN and the federal and state governments, integrated various documents in which obligations were established between the three parties. Amongst these is a package of government commitments to promote legal reforms that would lead to the recognition of indigenous rights at a national level. These rights should also be reflected in state-level reforms.

and went about constructing their municipalization proposals and their designs for the municipal institutions, in a game of positioning where their relations with other actors–such as the military and the government–also played a role in how events unfolded. We also discuss the political complexity within which this remunicipalization process took place and identify a framework of clientelistic relationships and a government determination that sought—through the remunicipalization of Aldama—to weaken the Zapatista offer of the autonomous municipality of Magdalena de la Paz.

Afterwards, we look at the meanings that each group of actors gave to their remunicipalization proposal, the struggle that appeared in the symbolic field, and the points of coincidence and dissent. We then examine the main features of the new municipal institutions in Aldama, given that it overtly constituted itself as the first secular and pluriethnic indigenous municipality in the Chiapas Highlands region. We finish with a concluding section in which we sketch a few tendencies—and counter-tendencies—in symbolic disputes, looking at how a variety of agents resolved their differences in the struggle over local power, once the municipality had been established.

Some Features of the Municipality of Aldama

Aldama eventually became one of 15 Tzotzil and Tzeltal speaking municipalities in the Chiapas Highlands. The municipal seat is situated at 40 kilometers from the largest city in the region, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, amongst large hills of varying altitudes that the older people say protect them and give them life.

Owing to this variety of altitudes, Aldama's territory has two broad climates: tropical and temperate. The majority of the population lives in the cooler parts, where the oldest settlement can be found and where they have orchards and grow maize and vegetables. In the hotter climates they produce bananas, pineapples, sugarcane, as well as maize and beans. Since the 1970s, after malaria had been eradicated in this region, these hotter lands were gradually settled and coffee cultivation was introduced. These changes provoked alterations in social practices amongst the inhabitants of this municipality; alterations that were to be central to the events described below.

Different Agents in the Remunicipalization Struggle

According to Masferrer's typology of different Catholic groups in Chiapas, "Indian traditionalist Catholics" are defined as those groups of indigenous people

that have evolved particular readings of Catholicism in line with their Indian vision of the world. They have the following characteristics: "the weight of ethnic religions dominates the Catholic part"; "they are usually extremely intolerant and, in the Chiapanecan case, they have taken part in expulsions and in serious human rights violations of Protestant groups and even liberation theology Catholics" (Masferrer 1998:7-8). In Chiapas, "traditionalist" Catholics are also known as "*católicos de costumbre*" ("customary Catholics").

On defining this category of Catholics, Rivera (2001:73) emphasizes the relationship, in some indigenous Highland societies, between "customary religion" and social organization, which produces a structure characterized by a hierarchy that combines both civil and religious elements. The authority system, which is referred to as "traditional" (Prokosch 1973) or as the "*cargo* system" (Korsbaek 1996), dates from the sixteenth century, although it was modified during the nineteenth century (Chance and Taylor 1987).

Aldama used to be a "municipal agency" belonging to the municipality of San Pedro Chenalhó, although before that it had been a pre-Hispanic and colonial town, and had had the rank of municipality during the nineteenth century with the name "Santa María Magdalena", its patron saint. For this reason, the inhabitants of this colonial town are not known as "Aldameros" but as "Magdaleneros". Throughout this text, it is the Magdaleneros that are the main subject of this history.

In 1921, the XXVIII local Legislature, which gave Chiapas a new constitution, reduced the number of municipalities to 59. Santa María Magdalena lost its status as municipality and was reduced initially to a "delegation" and later became a "municipal agency", subordinated to the municipality of San Pedro Chenalhó (INEGI 1996), and remained as such until July 1999, when it achieved remunicipalization.

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, at different times the Magdaleneros fought to recover their status as a municipality, and thus achieve recognition for its nineteenth century authority system, which it had kept up over the decades. Nevertheless, when in 1998 an opportunity presented itself in the government remunicipalization program, things in Magdalena had already changed. The system of civil-religious *cargos* had progressively deteriorated and its membership had dropped. Furthermore, many Magdaleneros had converted to other religions and no longer recognized the indigenous *Kavilto*[63] as legitimate. At the end of the twentieth century, in the context of the Zapatista uprising and the remunicipalization process, other projects emerged in the remunicipalization field and competed with the traditional *Kavilto* to take the lead in this process.

63 The Tzotzil term *Kavilto* derives from the Spanish *Cabildo* and refers to the traditional town council, made of a variety of civil and religious posts and responsibilities.

"Liberationist" Catholics

During the 1970s, it was the struggle for land that characterized the majority of social movements in the region. Santa Maria Magdalena also felt the repercussions of these struggles, along with other events that made this decade a watershed in the history of indigenous towns in the Highlands (Pérez Enríquez 1994): a) population growth, as a result of health and sanitation policies, which in turn fed the demand for land; b) an indigenous rebellion in San Andrés Larrainzar that expelled *Ladinos* (i.e., non-indigenous persons), who had been occupying communal lands; c) the Indigenous Congress that was held in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in 1974; d) the expansion of pastoral activities on the part of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, led by Bishop Samuel Ruiz; e) the arrival of independent social organizations and opposition political parties; f) the intolerance of the political system which resulted in the expulsion of political-religious dissidents; and g) the increase in coffee production in some parts of the Highlands and the region's subsequent insertion into the market economy. Thus, during the 1970s and 1980s, the Magdaleneros would respond to these developments, constructing their own strategies that would give birth to new religious and political identities.

Beginning in the 1960s, and increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s, the Magdaleneros of the lowlands began to produce coffee. This enterprise meant that monies previously devoted to ritual events and consumption needed to be redirected to the production process. Consequently, Magdalena experienced a number of changes. During these years, the way the settlements were distributed altered. Unlike the old villages, which were located in the temperate, maize growing zone, new settlements gradually appeared—like Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en—in lowland areas, which were now free from malaria and other illnesses that had been eradicated, thus making this region habitable.

The villages of Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en were established in the lowlands, a region that favored coffee production. Once immersed in the coffee economy, these people, in contrast to those who lived in the temperate zone, became cut off from their original lineages. They were now businesspeople and incorporated the appropriate values, such as the importance of schooling and good spoken Spanish, both of which were essential to be able to enter into the competitive coffee market. The innovations in production introduced by coffee quickly generated new needs and a change in values.

The Magdalenero coffee producers thus began to question the considerable time that their participation in the *cargo* system required. In the municipal seat, the home of the Virgin, Santa María Magdalena and where the authority of the *Kavilto* was located, they were obliged to take on posts in the civil-religious hierarchy on an annual basis. They also began to question the leaders in the tradi-

tional *Kavilto* and the criteria used for their selection. The coffee producers preferred to choose younger educated and bilingual persons as their representatives, favoring voting in the assembly as the means of election over the accumulation of prestige, gained by carrying out civil and religious services, which underpinned the nineteenth century *Kavilto* that governed Magdalena. Little by little, the people from Cotzilnam were attracted by the idea of "modern democracy", introducing elections and substituting the promotion list and values to do with "virtue", features that characterized the "old democracy" (Sartori 1989).

The lowland Magdaleneros began to see drawbacks in their traditional authorities, such as their age, their very limited literacy and use of Spanish, and their lack of ability to solicit credits, fertilizers and other benefits that were important for small-scale coffee producers. Furthermore, these authorities had little influence in the municipality, being only a "municipal agency" subordinated to Chenalhó, and therefore did not have access to funds nor had any significant infrastructure. Gradually, the Magdaleneros became less homogenous; there were now two ways of seeing politics and the political, perspectives that would eventually enter into conflict.

The coffee producers of Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en thus separated themselves, both ethically and culturally, from the other Magdaleneros in the temperate zones. The *Kavilto* of Santa María Magdalena was being questioned. This meant that the *parajes* (villages located outside of the municipal seat) rebelled against the traditional hierarchy. The first to do so was Cotzilnam. They had managed to build a school in this village, which meant that a significant number of people moved to this settlement. With the school, an education committee was nominated, which immediately took on the rank of local authority and began to exercise a sort of self-government. The creation of this committee had considerable implications in local "geopolitics"[64] as the committee no longer recognized the authority and jurisdiction of the *Kavilto* and the municipal agency in Santa Maria Magdalena. To ratify its self-government, Cotzilnam requested its own municipal agency from Chenalhó, considering that it would obtain more direct benefits that way.[65] Two years later, Xuxch'en did the same, as it was experiencing similar technological and cultural changes.

64 A useful methodological proposal for the study of disputes in the social space of indigenous territories is suggested by Dehouve (2001), who incorporates the notion of the geopolitical.

65 In many regions in Highland Chiapas, indigenist interventions had significantly contributed to territorial and local indigenous government reorganization. In some municipalities, the construction of a school was sufficient reason to establish a village, along with new forms of representation, such as education committees. In many Highland communities, these communities still constitute mechanisms for internal governance. In some cases, such settlements have managed to achieve the rank of municipal agency.

The establishment of these municipal agencies in Magdalena's communal lands (*bienes comunales*) provoked a violent reaction from the *Kavilto* in Magdalena. It meant that the government "of the Magdaleneros"—understood as a town with its own jurisdiction—was no longer being recognized. From the perspective of the Magdaleneros, each new municipal agency was seen as a fracturing of its territory and as a parallel authority to the *Kavilto*, whose civil-religious hierarchy was understood as the only government of the Magdaleneros. The social practices in which many Magdaleneros were now involved—articulated through coffee production—had also introduced new cultural elements. By the end of the 1970s, social life in Magdalena had changed, but the traditional political elites refused to accept it.

The political and ideological fields experienced transformations in Magdalena as a result of the presence of new agents in the 1970s. Motivated by the expulsion of *Ladinos* from San Andrés Larrainzar in 1974, the Magdaleneros began to take over land in order to recover its territory. More than half of their best communal lands were occupied by 22 ranches that were in the hands of *mestizos*. But not all the ranchers waited until their lands were invaded, some preferring to sell up before this happened. However, they did not sell the land to the Magdaleneros but to their workers, who were landless farmhands that lived on the ranches. The most loyal workers were Chamulas, who made the most of the opportunity to buy these ranches from their bosses at low prices and over long periods of time. This unfolding of events was not predicted by the Magdaleneros who, on expelling the *Ladinos*, expected to recover their lands, or "*lum*".[66]

Irritated by these sales, the Magdaleneros then attempted to expel the Chamulas and take over the lands that they had bought from their former bosses. But the municipal seat in Chenalhó intervened and did not allow such actions. In order to protect the Chamulas, the authorities in San Pedro Chenalhó created new municipal agencies—similar to those that Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en had accepted—in San José Fiu, Revolución Fiu, Slumka and Xulumó. All of these were Chamula settlements within lands that the Magdaleneros claimed as part of their ancestral territory. The members of the *Kavilto* in Magdalena did not accept the solution of Chenalhó because they did not consider it to be within their remit. They argued that whilst Santa María Magdalena was formally a municipal agency of Chenalhó, they had their own communal lands (*bienes comunales*) and their own authority system (the *Kavilto*) and therefore, their own jurisdiction.

The authorities in Chenalhó, on legalizing the presence of the Chamulas in Magdalena, provoked the disagreement of the Magdaleneros, sparking an inter-

66 "*Lum*" refers to the notion of territory amongst the Tzotzil and Tzeltal peoples of the Chiapas Highlands, whilst "*Hteklum*" refers to the municipal seat, which is considered a sacred place (Arias 1985).

est in recovering the territorial jurisdiction that they had lost in 1921. Faced with this situation, the Magdaleneros put together a request for the governor, Manuel Velasco Suárez, in which they asked him to legally recognize their authority system through the reinstatement of their municipality. The governor only gave them partial answers. He offered Santa María Magdalena the recognition of their traditional authorities through the figure of a "regional president", which the community rejected as it had no clear legal basis.

In the 1970s, the Magdaleneros of Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en were searching for visions of the world, forms of organization and cultural orientations that fitted with the changes they were experiencing in their social practices. The Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and liberation theology offered them new paradigms. The catechists from this Diocese—who arrived in Santa María Magdalena in 1960 from the parish of San Andrés Larrainzar—intended to substitute the traditional, syncretic Catholicism of the indigenous governments, which was based on the *cargo* system.[67] The catechists encouraged the values of monogamy and marriage and tried to eliminate ritual expenses and particularly the excessive consumption of alcohol that accompanied traditional Catholic religious expression. This is how one person recounts how "the word of God" arrived in Cotzilnam:

> We decided to come and listen to the word of God, but I didn't understand a lot of these good words, and there were a lot of catechists. There were four or five who preached well enough. The word of God was so that we didn't die, so that we lived longer. Afterwards it grew, those who arrived to hear the word of God, about 50 or 60 people arrived and it reached 60, 70. Then we believers were many, and we began to make agreements. We began to think, about how we see the village, and life. We asked if life was good. Then in 1975 we sat down around a table. VM was also there, who is now municipal president, Alonso was there, and myself and others, Miguel, Mateo. And we were thinking that things were not so good, that it wasn't good because firstly we have to take part in the *cargos*, paying for the fiestas, and we have to fetch the monkey costumes (*maxes*) for the fiesta, and give everyone to eat for free. So I said to them "This is what

67 These events in Aldama were part of a broader regional process. Sánchez (1997:118-121) documents this same process in the case of Huixtán in the following way: "The catechists' and priests' insistence on eradicating the *cargo* system and the consumption of alcohol motivated the traditional Tzotzils to briefly move their ceremonial center to the ranch San Andrés Puerto Rico, arguing that the patron saints were fleeing from the new preaching". Between the 1970s and 1980s, "with the evangelization efforts of the Tzotzil priests and catechists, an attack began on traditional religious systems and on the consumption of alcohol. As a result of political decisions and the proselytizing activities of Catholics, the *cargo* system disappeared in the municipality of Huixtán at the end of the 1980s".

> makes us poor!" And we talked about this later, we wondered: "Will it be possible to get rid of the *alférez*, the *capitán* [both religious posts], the *Kavilto*? Because the only posts that are really any use are the *mayol* [police] and the *regidor* [councillor], because the *regidor* calls people together and has his job to do". And this was how we became encouraged and we said to the traditional Catholics that we didn't want to take part in the *cargos* any more. "Up to here and no more!" we said to them. First we talked about the *alférez*, and then the *capitán* and *Kavilto*, because they were the most difficult and we said that this was the reason we were becoming poor. They got very angry, it was very difficult because they were around 350 and we were 50 or so, but we fought a lot for our freedom of worship (Anonymous interviewee, 2000).

The *Kavilto* strongly opposed the presence of a modernizing brand of Catholicism. From the traditional Catholics' perspective, the authorities of Santa María Magdalena guaranteed the loyalty of the gods and saints, which entailed benefits for all inhabitants, taking care of the "town's unity", preventing diseases and, through the relationship with the saints, protecting it from outside evils.[68] But the lowland Magdaleneros no longer saw it like that and questioned such a vision of the world, whilst at the same time the catechists launched a strong campaign to discredit the traditional authorities and their religion.

This conflict, and particularly the intervention of Chenalhó in pressurizing the municipal agencies of Santa Marta and Magdalena to accept these political-religious dissidents, meant that the *Kavilto* took up the demand for the return of municipal powers to Santa María Magdalena in 1984.

At the end of the 1980s, the traditional government of Santa María Magdalena increasingly fractured into a mosaic of municipal agencies that had their own authorities, acknowledged by San Pedro Chenalhó and which, in turn, recognized Chenalhó, and not Magdalena. Gradually the number of members of the civil-religious hierarchy began to decline significantly: from 35 to 21 after 1984.

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68 The traditionalists' intolerance toward religious diversity and their persecution of other religions are understandable given that the traditionalists saw this as one of the main functions of government. In fact, they are upholding practices and regulations that existed in the past and have not, in this case, been substituted. The persecution of political-religious opposition was a function and practice of the state and municipal governments for many years. For example, in Chiapas' first constitutional charter as a state that belonged to Mexico, drawn up in 1825, the 5th article states the following: "The religion of the state is and will be indefinitely the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman one, without tolerance for any other. Consequently, the state protects it with wise and just laws and will always prohibit deeds, words and writings that offend it in any way" (Pérez Mota 1994:86). Nevertheless, this was soon used to justify authoritarian and corporative power in order to obstruct the presence of political pluralism in the municipalities.

The catechists had other options, they had set up a cooperative, bought lands and received financial assistance from the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. After more than 20 years, the "modernizers" project had triumphed in Santa María Magdalena. The "Cotzilnam group" played an important role by putting pressure on the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Indigenist Institute – INI) so that the latter prohibited the traditional government from carrying out expulsions or obliging the population to participate in the *fiesta* system or to accept the civil-religious authorities as their authorities.

The "Universal" Catholics

Despite managing to achieve the status of municipal agency and the recovery of a significant amount of land with coffee plantations, the lowland Magdaleneros were not yet satisfied. The "Cotzilnam Group" continued to reflect upon their situation and decided that there was still much to be done. They understood that to obtain good prices for their coffee, they had to access the international market but that the production costs were going up because they lacked roads, transport and marketing companies. They also quickly realized that the status of "municipal agency" did not really help very much as its powers were marginal to government political structures. Those Magdaleneros that participated in this process of religious reflection arrived at similar conclusions from the perspective of liberation theology. At last, as they themselves used to say, they had "taken the blindfold from their eyes".

During more than two decades of reflection and analysis, the "liberationist" Catholics in Magdalena had entered into organizational processes in order to improve the quality of their products and ways of marketing their coffee, which in turn introduced them to new cultural perspectives and forged alliances with coffee producing organizations in other parts of the state. They also managed to access loans for the transportation and storage of basic foodstuffs with the assistance of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. For example, the most organized and well stocked general store that existed in the Aldama municipal seat was the result of processes encouraged by liberation theology religious education, a distinctive sign of the Diocese of San Cristóbal.

Through this process of reflection in Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en, a considerable number of leaders had emerged who were able to clearly explain their situation in the world. This often led them to identify "guilty parties" as the cause of their misfortunes, amongst which was "bad government". This "political coming of age" occurred when, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) was discussing the expediency of its public emergence as an armed force. Many liberationist Catholics in Magdalena became Zapatistas

and shared the same cultural perspectives that questioned the social relations that they experienced on a day to day basis.

From 1994 to 1998, the politicized character of these leaders meant that the Magdaleneros found themselves in the foreground of the Zapatista movement. Thus, when the EZLN undertook the military operation "breaking the fence" in December 1994, men and women in balaclavas burst into Magdalena to set up the autonomous municipality Magdalena de la Paz (see Table 3.1).

As they had done in the past on setting up their own municipal agencies, the Magdaleneros from the villages Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en and the Chamulas from Revolución Fiu, forged alliances amongst each other to endorse their break from the nineteenth century hierarchy, no longer recognizing the jurisdiction of the "traditionalists" and nominating their own parallel authorities, which did not acknowledge the *Kavilto*. In the context of the armed rebellion, these new authorities were the foundation upon which the autonomous government and municipality of Magdalena de la Paz were set up.

As time passed and the armed conflict continued without any tangible benefits for the coffee producers, who were desperate for infrastructure, loans and markets, many of them had problems remaining in resistance. Consequently, an important section ended up rejecting Zapatismo, including a considerable number of those from Cotzilnam and Xuxch'en. The split occurred at the same time in the religious field. At the same time as they rejected Zapatismo, they also rejected the "liberationist" Catholics and went on to strengthen the then incipient group of "universal" Catholics.

This religious group had emerged before the armed conflict, encouraged by the bishop of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, who begun to recruit catechists and followers through a new proposal, which refused to make connections between religion and politics and was thus opposed to both the liberation theology and autochthonous theology that were being promoted by the Diocese of San Cristóbal. From 1994 onwards, and in a context that was characterized by splits in community life, this religious group served as a refuge for those "liberationist" Catholics who had first refused to join the armed movement and later had totally disassociated itself from it. It should be added that other "liberationist" Catholics joined Evangelical Protestant Churches and, as a minority, would support the "universal" Catholics and their proposals in the remunicipalization process.

From 1994 until 1998 Magdalena experienced moments of serious internal division. The different groups argued over the meaning of the new society that they imagined would emerge after the armed rising. In this same period, the different actors abandoned the religious field, which gradually took on a clearly political dimension. The "universal" Catholics allied themselves with the state government, which was present through leaders of the *Partido Revolucionario Institu-*

cional (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI), as well through those who implemented various government programs, which sought to weaken Zapatismo.

The remunicipalization program of the state governor, Roberto Albores Guillén, announced in 1998, created the conditions for the definition of the struggle. It offered the "universal" Catholics a privileged opportunity to lead the remunicipalization process and an institutional basis for its political project to create a new municipality. In July 1999, when Magdalena emerged as a municipality with the name "Aldama", the majority of the new Aldameros claimed to be supporters of the PRI and adherents of "universal" Catholicism. Their hegemony was evident in the makeup of the municipal council (see Table 3.2), from which members of the new autonomous Zapatista municipality were excluded and which subordinated the *Kavilto* authorities. In fact, the government proposal to create new municipalities encouraged some Zapatista Magdaleneros to take advantage of the situation and obtain the new status of free municipality, although this was not exactly the type of town hall for which they had fought beforehand.

In April 1999, the Aldameros proceeded to choose their municipal council members, all of whom were members of the PRI. In terms of their place of origin, 32 percent were from Cotzilnam, 13 percent from Xuxch'en, whilst the Chamula villages of Xulumó and Santa Cruz represented 13 percent and 5 percent respectively (see Table 3.3). The figures show that 63 percent of the new municipal council was made up of Magdaleneros and Chamulas, who were from the main Zapatista localities that had abandoned the armed struggle in 1998 in order to take on the government's remunicipalization proposal and the running of the emergent municipality.

The New Municipality on Top of the Autonomous Zapatista Municipality

The birth of the new municipality of Aldama was made possible because one of the actors (the "universal" Catholics) became a dominant force when its particular project for the local government institution won symbolic dominance. Government authoritarianism, the pressure of military force, the construction of consensus amongst the Magdaleneros and the promises of economic benefits for the municipalities made by the Roberto Albores' government became the formula that permitted the construction of agreements that favored the free municipality, with the dominance of the PRI, on the top of the autonomous Zapatista municipality.

When Roberto Albores Guillén proposed the establishment of new municipalities in Chiapas in May 1998, he had at least two advantages: a) he had ef-

fected the dismantlement of the autonomous Zapatista municipalities (in April 1998), intimidating their members, besieging the Zapatistas and obstructing their possible legal recognition (Burguete 2002); and b) he made further commitments with some of the actors in the areas programmed with remunicipalization (the majority of them connected to the PRI), which meant that the process could be put into action.

There was also another crucial element: the splits within Zapatismo. With the PRI in place in Aldama, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD) could do little to counter the government proposal given the internal conflicts that had weakened them both. But despite the hegemony of the "universal" Catholics, which had managed to ensure that other actors supported the government project, the now modest Zapatista opposition still managed to make itself felt. On November 27, 1998, whilst the formal work that would lead to remunicipalization was being carried out, the Zapatistas confronted government officials from the Remunicipalization Commission, charged with putting into effect Albores' strategy.[69]

The presence of government institutions as further actors in this conjuncture was a decisive factor in the municipalization of Aldama along government lines. Although the intimidation of those involved in the autonomous municipality of Santa Magdalena de la Paz was not done in the same way nor at the same time as it was when the government dismantled the autonomous municipalities of Flores Magón and Tierra y Libertad, military presence around Magdalena de la Paz had similar effects in that they managed to break up the autonomous municipality, which later ended up supporting the government program.

The success of Albores' remunicipalization program in Aldama occurred when a strong section of the coffee producers in Cotzilnam and Xuxchén decided to abandon the armed struggle in order to lead the remunicipalization process, assisted by the persistence of the PRI, which prepared itself for the setting up of their party's municipal committee, along with the new municipality.

The repositioning of the PRI in Magdalena-Aldama can be observed by looking at the electoral behavior of the Aldameros. In a detailed study, Willibald Sonnleitner (2001) was able to observe the electoral dynamic in section 0398—which included Cotzilnam and other small villages like Chivit, Coco, Ico, Sepeltón, Tabac, Tavilukum, Tzelejpotojtic, Xulumó and Yolontzuy—in the municipality of Chenalhó from August 1991 to 2000 (see Table 3.1). In this section, the PRI suf-

69 The team of interviewers from the Remunicipalization Commission carried out 728 interviews in a record time of 29 hours (cf. *Archivo Municipal de Aldama* – Aldama's Municipal Archive). This was done amongst the inhabitants of the then municipal agency. Pedro Ruiz Hernández, the president of the *Consejo de Vigilancia (*Supervisory Council), and the first mayor were the main authorities in charge of these tasks (Consejo y Comisión Estatales de Remunicipalización del estado de Chiapas, *Acta administrativa (*Administrative Record), November 27, 1998.

fered a significant decrease in votes in the governorship elections of 1994. Whereas in 1988 it had obtained 100 percent of the votes, in 1994 it received only 65.6 percent. In contrast, in this same period, votes for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) went up from 0 percent to 33.7 percent.

In the municipal elections of 1995, the EZLN called on its support bases and on citizens in general not to go to the polling booths, as it was opposed to the electoral process. The Zapatista abstention let the PRI win again, thus beginning a period of recovery with 98 percent of the valid votes. This tendency continued in 1997, with the PRI obtaining 100 percent of the valid votes, whilst in 1998 it won 96.3 percent of the votes. Therefore, when Governor Albores announced his remunicipalization program, the PRI was again the main political force in the area. In the federal elections in July 2000, the PRI won 95.1 percent, whilst in the governorship elections in August of the same year, it won 96.1 percent (Sonnleitner 2001). In the municipal elections on October 7, 2001, the PRI maintained its lead.

Disputes over the Design of the Municipal Institution

Looked at from the religious field, the three groups unleashed a symbolic struggle to ensure the dominance of their project vision and hoped to mould the emergent municipal institutions according to their distinct visions. The traditionalists fought for the recovery of the old order and the town hall that they had lost in 1921. They also hoped that the *Kavilto* and its *cargo* system would be formally recognized. However, as we have argued in this chapter, by 1999, when the restitution of the municipality was being argued about, the *Kavilto* had experienced a serious deterioration as a governing structure. For many Magdaleneros, this institution only represented posts and responsibilities pertaining to customary religion, not a genuine authority structure. In this dispute, and particularly in the final stretch, the project of the "traditionalist" Catholics was the weakest of all and offered the least competition.

The Zapatistas also hoped that their parallel authorities, located in the autonomous municipality of Magdalena de la Paz, would be recognized. The members of the EZLN refused to recognize the new municipality because they argued that they had initiated their own municipalization process before Governor Albores had made his offer known. They argued that instead of creating a new government structure and jurisdiction, what should be done was to "apply the San Andrés Accords" and recognize the legality of the autonomous municipalities. But the Magdalena Zapatistas were weak, both numerically and in terms of

their governance structure, and their numbers actually went down when the lowland coffee producers abandoned their ranks.

On disputing how the remunicipalization process should have been led, the "universal" Catholics managed to impose their design for local government, having achieved the symbolic defeat of the other two projects; a defeat that is not yet definitive however, as we shall see below.

Aldama: A Free, Secular and Pluriethnic Municipality

The electoral results presented in Tables 3.1 and 3.4 give an idea of political preferences in Aldama, which were corroborated with the statements of members of the Aldama municipal council, who claimed to be affiliated to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). However, such statements do not do justice to the subtleties of political life, nor the different pacts and alliances that lie behind this apparent uniformity. In reality, the Aldameros are more complex and less homogenous than their party political affiliation would appear to show.

In Aldama, such pluralism is not only expressed in the political terrain but also in the religious preferences of the council members. There is considerable religious pluralism in the town hall, something that is uncommon in other Highland indigenous municipalities. When asked, the council members described themselves as "universal" Catholics, Presbyterians and Pentecostals, whilst others described themselves as "traditionalist" Catholics. The religious pluralism in the municipal council introduced a radical change in the composition of the Magdalenero government, which went from being a civil-religious government (made up of a *cargo* system, as in other Highland town halls) to being a constitutional town hall with no connection to religious tasks and duties. The new municipal authorities repeatedly insisted that in Aldama, no authority post had within their remit the carrying out of religious activities; politics and religion were separated. Furthermore, everyone had the right to continue practicing the religion of his or her choice.

It is worth remembering that for decades, the traditional government in Magdalena had prohibited religious freedom. Those interviewed referred to the religious conflicts that existed in the 1970s and 1980s as something shameful that they preferred to forget, and many celebrated the fact that they were able to live together in this new situation, without their religious beliefs interfering. From the point of view of the majority of those who make up the authorities, the town's religious *fiestas*—such as the *fiesta* of Santa María Magdalena or the *fiesta* of "El Señor de Tila"—should be the responsibility of the festivities committee and the traditionalist religious group, not the municipal government, as it had been in

the past. For the municipal council, *la fiesta* was a religious activity and not an act of government. This perspective differentiated it from the rest of the Highland indigenous communities for whom *la fiesta*, as a ritual that ensured good relations with the saints, the ancestors (*los abuelos*) and the forces of nature represented one of the principal tasks of the town hall.

Furthermore, the Aldama town hall differentiated itself from other authority systems in the Highlands in other ways. The municipal council maintained a clear distinction between the functions of the *Juzgado de Paz y Conciliación Indígena* (Justice of the Peace and Indigenous Reconciliation)—a judicial institution set up in indigenous municipalities in 1998 as part of the remunicipalization process—and the town hall as an executive institution. The imparting of justice thus remained in the hands of the judge. It is important to remember that one of the main functions of traditional authorities in the Highlands has been the imparting of justice on the different levels where the civil-religious hierarchy operates.

In a similar fashion, the council distanced itself from land issues, leaving this to the agrarian authorities in coordination with the *Procuraduría Agraria* (Agrarian Attorney's Office). This institution began to have weight in Aldama when, in the context of the remunicipalization, it issued the appropriate agrarian documents to satisfy the various requirements that the new municipality had to fulfill. Before remunicipalization, it was the *Kavilto* that dealt with the numerous agrarian conflicts, as this institution was considered to be superior to the communal land agrarian authorities.

Furthermore, Aldama is a municipality that has modified the notion of ethnic unity that generally underpins indigenous governments in the Chiapas Highlands. The history of municipalization in the Highlands can be illustrated with the following equation: each town (with its own patron saint) had its own authority system, which, in turn, corresponded, to a municipality. The case of Chenalhó illustrates this well. On becoming a free municipality, four ethnic identities were incorporated into one territorial unit: the Pedranos, who were members of the town of San Pedro Chenalhó; the Magdaleneros, with whom we have been concerned here; the Marteños (from the town of Santa Marta) and the Chamula population—located in the territory of the Magdaleneros but within the municipality of Chenalhó[70]—who lived in the *ejido* Belisario Domínguez and the Fiu communities. The latter three groups, who were distinct from the Pedranos, were always ignored and were never permitted to participate in the *Kavilto cargos* of the mu-

70 The category of "*Agencia Municipal*" was used by the Chenalhó authorities to acknowledge and differentiate between these identities (although this category was later politicized and used as a resource by Cotzilnam, Xuxch'en and the Chamula settlements). Chenalhó was organized territorially in the following way: three municipal agencies (Magdalena, Santa Marta and Belisario Domínguez), five *ejidos* and the rest villages.

nicipal seat of San Pedro Chenalhó and they were excluded from benefits enjoyed by the Pedranos.

But the Magdaleneros themselves, who were excluded by the Pedranos, reproduced this same relationship of exclusion with the Chamulas who lived in their communal lands, despite the fact that the latter made up a quarter of the population of Magdalena. It is important to remember how in the 1970s and 1980s, the Magdalena authorities tried to expel the Chamulas from lands that the latter had bought from their former bosses. But this was obstructed when the authorities in Chenalhó granted the Chamula communities the status of municipal agencies. Nevertheless, the tensions did not go away. The Magdalenero *cargo* system continued to exclude the Chamulas for political and religious reasons, as well as for ethnic differences. Therefore, the Chamulas did not participate in the religious and social life of the Magdaleneros, nor did they participate politically. In order to confront this situation they adopted various strategies, such as ignoring the jurisdiction of Magdalena's traditional authorities. First, they only recognized the jurisdiction of San Pedro Chenalhó, on becoming a municipal agency. Later, they became Zapatistas and declared themselves members of the autonomous municipality of Magdalena de la Paz.

Given the Chamulas' population and the political importance they acquired on declaring themselves members of the autonomous Zapatista municipality, the political processes that would lead to the new municipality of Aldama could not afford to ignore them. As the remunicipalization process was being led by ex-Zapatistas who possessed considerable political know-how, religious pluralism and multiculturalism could not be ignored in the search for a balanced proposal for the new municipality.

Officially, the new municipality of Aldama incorporated a population of 4,033 inhabitants, distributed in the following way: 2996 Aldameros, 901 Chamulas and 136 Andreseros. Given their demographic importance, the alliances made between the different political and religious groups in preparation for the new municipality included the "ethnic minorities" in order to construct the new "Aldamera" identity. The Chamulas abandoned Zapatismo and accepted their incorporation into the new municipal government on the condition that Aldama recognized their rights to residency on an equal footing with the Magdaleneros. For this reason, a Chamula was given an administrative post and another was made a reserve councilor. Also, in the general assembly, the rights and obligations of the Chamulas were agreed upon, as the following passage demonstrates:

> a) There will be no takeovers of lands belonging to inhabitants from the municipality of San Juan Chamula by Magdaleneros; b) they [i.e., the Chamulas] will contribute economically and attend agrarian meetings that are

> held by the Commissioner of Communal Lands in the municipality of Aldama, and are exempt from paying a fee to join the town of Aldama; c) they will contribute economically to the traditional *fiestas*; d) they will provide their labor to care for and maintain the Church of the Virgin of María Magdalena; e) they will not provide labor in the municipality of Aldama, only for the construction of schools in general, when the heads of family have children studying in one of the communities or the municipal seat of Aldama; f) those persons originally from the municipality of Chamula that enjoy the use of lands in Aldama will be able to occupy the traditional posts in the *fiestas* of Aldama and will be able to do so in a voluntary fashion (Concejo Municipal de Aldama, *Acta de Acuerdo* [Record of Agreement], Chiapas, May 26, 2000).

Apparently, the change of name from Magdalena to Aldama was also part of the agreements made by the different actors involved in the process. It was part of the effort to erase the monoethnic implications of the name "Magdalena". In the collective imaginary of the Aldameros, this name only covered those native to Magdalena who took themselves to be the children and descendants of the saint. In contrast, their identification as "Aldameros" had no such ethnic connotation and therefore could include all of them. For this reason, the inhabitants of the municipality were not sure what name to give to it. On many occasions, they called it "Magdalena", whilst others called it "Magdalena Aldama" or simply "Aldama". This indecision was even reflected in the municipality's official documents, which were signed indiscriminately.

The name "Aldama"—taken from the old municipal agency, when it had depended on Chenalhó—did not enjoy much support amongst the inhabitants of the municipality. Apparently, this name was given by the Remunicipalization Commission, without the agreement of the Magdaleneros, although others said that the name was decided on in the assembly.[71] The municipal council members (who were not those who had lobbied for the new municipality) had made known that they were not happy with the name and sent various letters to the state Congress so that it would be changed and replaced again by the name "Magdalena". In order to reconcile these views, it was proposed that it be named "Magdalena Aldama", thus including both identities.

71 In reality, this was never cleared up. The name "Aldama" appears in an agreement made by those that lobbied for the new municipality. In a letter to the Remunicipalization Commission, dated April 1999, it was agreed that the name to be given to the new municipality would be Aldama, thus rejecting "Aldama, formerly Santa María Magdalena"—the term used before remunicipalization. (*Acta de Acuerdo, Aldama, antes Santa María Magdalena* [Record of Agreement, Aldama, formerly Santa María Magdalena], Chenalhó, April 14, 1999).

Until 2000, the Magdaleneros continued to make numerous formal requests with the state government to have the name changed, and although the congress did not accept it, the municipal council named itself "Magdalena Aldama" in an early act of rebellion. The challenge manifested itself in the fact that the official documents appeared as "*H. Concejo Municipal de Magdalena Aldama*" ("Honorable Municipal Council of Magdalena Aldama") and not "Aldama" as it had been registered in the government decree.[72] Furthermore, on the bronze plaque that commemorates the date that the town hall building was inaugurated, is written "*Nuevo Municipio de Magdalena Aldama*" ("New Municipality of Magdalena Aldama").

Some Concluding Remarks: New Disputes in the New Municipality

It is very early to make predictions about the future of Aldama. The first municipal council's term was brief; it started on September 1, 1999 and ended on December 31, 2001. It is thus somewhat premature to say whether the tendencies that rose to the surface in the last stages of remunicipalization will consolidate themselves. Nevertheless, it is probable that the religious sphere will remain the most dynamic, as political pluralism has yet to consolidate spaces for its expression. As can be observed in Table 3.4, in the elections of October 7, 2001, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) did not put forward any candidates and therefore did not register any votes (CEE-Chiapas 2002:224). This omission will have future repercussions, as it will hamper the development of political pluralism in the town hall.

The design of the secular municipality remained in place when the new municipal government took over on January 1, 2002. The elected municipal president was Pedro Ruiz Hernández, a Presbyterian and originally from Chamula, who had played a part in the lobbying process for the new municipality. Before being elected, he had been president of the municipal committee of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), a committee that arrived along with others as part of the "remunicipalization package".

72 On November 4, 1999, the Aldama municipal presidency sent a letter to the president of the state Congress so that "… the name of our lady patron be recognized and added, whose name is the 'Virgin María Santa María Magdalena'. For this reason we request with the utmost respect that 'Santa María Magdalena' be prefixed to the name of our municipality, thus becoming 'Santa María Magdalena Aldama', as this name has a lot of history, being the original name of the village, before the second name, Aldama, was added" (Letter from the H. Concejo Municipal de Aldama to the Remunicipalization Commission, November 4, 1999). A similar letter was sent to the president, Ernesto Zedillo, dated January 25, 2000.

Similarly, the political agreements amongst the Magdaleneros to build the new municipality of Aldama appeared to be still in place. Apparently, Aldama had found, through Governor Albores' remunicipalization, the legal bases that ensured political harmony. In the middle of 2001, the Aldameros held an assembly to choose their authorities, as they had always done. But this time they had to ratify their choices at the polling booths by voting on October 7. The elections took place without serious conflicts or incidents and with a majority vote in favor of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), as can be seen in Table 3.4.

Despite these conditions, which could be seen as continuities, other tendencies may emerge and create conditions that permit the repositioning of both old and new actors in the municipality. This would seem to be happening with the "traditionalists". There were certain events that promised a possible strengthening of the "traditionalist" Catholics. Whilst it is true that the new town hall did not take on the *cargo* system and was not designed along the lines of an "indigenous town hall", this does not mean that the members of the old *Kavilto* have been totally excluded from municipal institutions. Two of them (the first and second "mayors") were installed as "traditional authorities" in the Justice of the Peace and Indigenous Reconciliation, which was one of the institutions that arrived as part of the remunicipalization process.

However, these authorities no longer have the influence that they used to have amongst the Aldameros in the past. Also, the election mechanisms for these authorities have changed. Only two of the "mayors" were chosen from the traditional civil-religious hierarchy; the other two "mayors" were nominated by members of Evangelical Protestant Churches. The Justice of the Peace and Indigenous Reconciliation thus included two Evangelists, who were also nominated as "traditional authorities" so that a total of four assistants were incorporated into the administration of justice in this new body. This decision favored religious pluralism but left out 19 (of a total of 21) of those who made up the old *Kavilto*.

So it was, therefore, that whilst the constitutional municipal authorities were settling into the new town hall, and the four "traditional mayors" shared the new building of the Justice of the Peace and Indigenous Reconciliation, the remainder of the traditional authorities found themselves in a dilapidated building called the "Old *Kavilto*", which had housed the Magdalenero government for more than 70 years.

But, unpredictably, in September 2000—one year after the municipality was established—the *Kavilto* was not entirely defeated. With renewed verve, it requested, before the municipal authorities, changes in the design of local government in Aldama. The old *Kavilto* authorities proposed an "indigenous town hall", similar to that in Chenalhó or Chamula, where the traditional posts joined up with the constitutional ones to make up a single body. In these municipalities,

they argued, the constitutional authorities worked alongside the traditional authorities that made up the old *Kavilto*: "We want Aldama to be the same as it is in Chenalhó and Chamula", they demanded.

The municipal council in Aldama appeared to be prepared to negotiate with the "traditionalists" and discussed the possibility of reinstating the posts that the *Kavilto* used to occupy. However, in the new agreement these traditional authorities would no longer have direct access to municipal power, but would be reduced to the category of "traditional authorities"; in other words, they would be reduced to the sphere of "*usos y costumbres*", not qualifying as a system of government, as they had done throughout most of the twentieth century. New events acted to favor the revitalization of the "traditionalists".

After having created the municipality, the municipal council began to see the usefulness of the *Kavilto*, such as their traditional attire and *bastones de mando* (ceremonial staffs that symbolized authority). In contrast to the past, when the "universal" Catholics fought against tradition and the symbols of the *cargo* system, the new municipality has sought references in order to be able to build a new identity and collective imaginary. It appears to have found them in the old town of Santa María Magdalena and thus the town hall authorities—"universal Catholics"—have begun to use their traditional indigenous dress again, something they rejected for many years.

Through contacts with other Highland town halls, the Aldama authorities have noticed the way in which these skillfully use symbols of indigenous identity as power resources in their negotiations with the state. Increasingly, on public occasions, the members of the municipal council have worn traditional costumes and carried political-religious symbols that used only to be worn by *Kavilto* members. This has irritated the *Kavilto* members as they have noticed that the municipal council only uses the *bastones*, or ceremonial staffs, on public occasions where the governor or other outside government officials are present, where they are used as cultural symbols, without a sacred role or value. In contrast, the old *Kavilto* authorities only used to use the *bastones* during religious festivities, and they decorated them in front of the gods and saints. These authorities have complained to the constitutional town hall about the political use of these ceremonial staffs. Thus, given this situation, the dress and symbols of authority and identity have been disputed in the symbolic field, which became reactivated in Aldama after remunicipalization.

Other actors began to participate, construct and affect this social field, turning it into a new space in which there was struggle to appropriate the symbolic capital that was in play. Much to the surprise of the Aldameros, the "liberationist" Catholics, who were members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), revealed their interest in taking on responsibilities in the religious *fiestas*,

something that 20 years earlier they had fought against to such an extent that they almost disappeared. This change had to do with the type of theology that was influencing the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. At the beginning of the 1990s, the bishop of San Cristóbal, Samuel Ruiz, gradually substituted liberation theology with an approach known as "autochthonous theology" or "indigenous theology", which was characterized by giving a greater role for the Mayas in the construction of the liturgy based on their own cultural precepts (Marcos 1998). With this theology, the Zapatistas made a greater effort to celebrate the main *fiestas* and consecrate even more their political struggle.

The Zapatistas' growing interest in participating in the saints' *fiestas*, which beforehand were organized only by the traditionalist Catholics, began to concern the municipal authorities. For the municipal council, which shared much with the Zapatistas on having the same religious origin, this interest shown by the "liberationist" Catholics who had turned into "indianist" Catholics, was not a purely religious issue, but a political one; in other words, it had to do with the dispute over symbolic capital, represented by the Church and the saints. They were afraid that the Zapatistas would take over the symbolic power invested in the patron saints' *fiestas*, which had been a vital element in the authority of the old *Kavilto*.

After having fought against them in the 1970s, in the new "post-Zapatista" context the traditional religious symbols acquired renewed value in the Diocese of San Cristóbal's Indian theology, which was an alarm bell for the municipal council. Therefore, on September 31, 2000, the Aldama town hall plenary agreed to participate actively in the main religious festivals, going back on the government's initial policy to disassociate itself from religious activities.

After this agreement, the Evangelical Protestants that were part of the municipal council refused to take part in these activities, but the council president–who was a "universal" Catholic–tried to convince them by arguing that such activities should not be seen as a religious act, but as a "cultural" act, that served to revive "Aldama's indigenous culture". When the president of the municipal council was directly asked about this change, which could modify the municipal institution that he himself had promoted, he responded:

> Because it is our culture. Well, it's what they tell us, to revive indigenous culture. We're realizing that in other municipalities it is like that, they are united with the authorities, such as Chenalhó, Larrainzar, Chamula, we want an agreement so that there are no divisions. The traditional mayors liked the fact that the *Kavilto* agreed that we should all accompany the images [i.e., the saints]. It is our culture and we are going to revive our culture

(President of the Aldama municipal council, personal communication, 2000).

In the last months of his term, the president of the municipal council even sent letters to government institutions to request funds to support the old authorities in Aldama, imagining the possibility of a fund that would be included in the municipal budget and be used to pay a salary to the traditional authorities and those in charge of arranging the patron saints' *fiestas*. This urgency to pay salaries to the civil and religious officials can be seen as evidence that the civil and religious *cargo* system was experiencing a crisis because there were less and less volunteers that were prepared to take on these tasks. In contrast, the Zapatistas, who had taken on autochthonous theology as one of their principal features and causes in the latter half of the 1990s, increased the number of *cargos*, revived the *fiestas* and requested that they take on responsibility for the celebrations and the church.

The municipal council sized up the Zapatista strategy and saw the important tactical role that the traditional hierarchies could play as "guardians" of the *fiestas* and the Church, and also as "guardians of symbolic power" in order to maintain the *status quo*. The council authorities wished to avoid the Church and the *fiestas* turning into the principal symbolic capital of those Catholics that adhered to autochthonous theology, which would mean a repositioning of the Zapatistas in the struggle over municipal power.

The new institutions that emerged alongside the new municipality provided the space for negotiation. The members of the autonomous municipality of Santa María Magdalena de la Paz, who remained a minority, initially rejected the jurisdiction of the new municipal government, calling it "*priista y alborista*" (i.e., pro-PRI and pro-Governor Albores) and tried to avoid it. Later, however, there were some "intergovernmental contacts". At the beginning, the Magdalenero assembly had agreed that the Zapatistas would have no right to access any services or benefits due to the fact that they had refused to cooperate in the lobbying process for the municipality. This had been considered an affront and sufficient motive to deprive them of their rights in the new municipality.

The codes of the Highland indigenous municipalities are very clear with respect to the fact that obligations come before rights. "The right to have rights" is won as a result of fulfilling obligations, and not the other way round. Therefore, as the Zapatistas did not fulfill their obligations (by cooperating with money and labor during the remunicipalization process and later with the considerable work involved in the construction of roads and buildings), they were not, therefore, considered as members of the municipality. Consequently, they did not appear in the civil register and were not permitted access to education or health services.

However, after the results of the elections in 2000, with the national defeat of the PRI, this decision was reconsidered and forced a change in the assembly agreement, which decided that if the Zapatistas "no longer distanced themselves from the government" and paid the monies owed, they would be considered members of the new municipality of Aldama. The conflict gradually began to diminish, especially after the PRI lost the Chiapas governorship elections in August 2000. With the victory of the opposition candidate, Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía, the assembly and the municipal council felt weakened and consequently began to be more tolerant of the Zapatistas. A number of events would seem to suggest this.

In June 2000, a month before the presidential elections—which the PRI lost with the victory of Vicente Fox—the municipal council commented the following with regards to the Zapatistas' participation on voting day: "We don't want to see the Zapatistas here, let them die like dogs!" But after the opposition victory, tensions appeared to dissipate and in the latter half of 2000, there was a change of attitude: "It is time for peace amongst the Aldameros", a young councilor in the new municipality commented to us.

So, when Aldama became a new municipality, the field of remunicipalization that had defined the terrain of the struggle, gradually became diluted. In the new order, different actors made renewed efforts to reposition themselves in this new social space, in which the newly formed local institutions, from where legitimate power was now exercised, represented one of the major prizes at stake. Old and new actors continue to dispute and deploy the symbols associated with the nineteenth century municipality in the construction of the new local government institutions in Aldama.

Table 3.1
Election Results, Valid Votes in Section 0398
Municipality of Chenalhó

Section 0398	1991	1994	1995	1997	1998	2000-Jul.	2000-Aug.
% PRI[a]	100.0%	65.6%	98.1%	100.0%	96.3%	95.3%	96.1%
% PRD[b]	0.0%	33.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	2.7%	3.9%
% Other parties	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	2.0%	0.0%

Source: Data taken from a database developed by Sonnleitner for the project "Democracy, Pluralism and Tradition in the Federal and State Elections in 2000 in the Chiapas Highlands", financed by *El Colegio de México* and the *Instituto Federal Electoral*. We would like to thank Willibald Sonleitner for this information, as well as his permission to use this data in this chapter.

a *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Institutional Revolutionary Party.
b *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – Party of the Democratic Revolution.

Table 3.2

Municipal Council Members
New Municipality of Aldama, Chiapas
September, 2000

Name	Post	Community of Origin	Political Affiliation	Religion
Víctor Manuel López Vázquez	President of the Municipal Council	Cotzilnam	PRI	"Universal" Catholic
Salvador Gómez Gómez	Municipal Legal Officer	Xuxch'en	PRI	Presbyterian
Sebastián Pérez Santís	1st Councilor	Xuxch'en	PRI	"Universal" Catholic
Agustín Santís Hernández	2nd Councilor	Not known	PRI	"Traditionalist" Catholic
Lucas Santís Gómez	3rd Councilor	Not known	PRI	"Universal" Catholic
Guadalupe N.	1st Substitute Councilor	Revolución Fiu	PRI	Not known
Salvador Pérez Girón	2nd Substitute Councilor	Shumka	Not registered	Pentecostalist
Juan Méndez López	3rd Substitute Councilor	Xulumo	PRI	Not known
Feliciano Santís Jiménez	Municipal Treasurer	Cotzilnam	PRI	"Universal" Catholic

Source: Fieldwork.

Table 3.3
Communities of Origin of Municipal Council Members
New Municipality of Aldama

Locality	Elected Posts[a]	Community *Cargos*[b]	Administrative Posts[c]	Total	%
Aldama (municipal seat)		2		2	9
Coco					
Cotzilnam	2	2	3	7	32
Chayunte					
Chivit					
Ico					
Juxton					
Meshaton					
Revolución Fiu	1	1		2	9
San José Fiu					
Santa Cruz		1		1	5
Sepelton					
Slumka	1	1		2	9
Tabac					
Tabilicum					
Tzeljpotobtic	1		1	1	5
Xulumo	1	1		3	13
Xuxch'en	2	1		3	13
Yeton		1		1	5
Yolohuitzic					
Yotontic					
Total	**8**	**10**	**4**	**22**	**100**

Source: Fieldwork.

a President of municipal council, municipal legal officer and six councilors.
b *Mayoles* (traditional policemen) and commander.
c Municipal secretary, treasurer, director of Public Works and local president of *Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* (Integral Development of the Family – DIF).

Table 3.4
Municipal Town Hall Elections
Municipality of Aldama, Chiapas
October 7, 2001

Municipality of Aldama	Valid Votes	%
PRI[a]	1 152	92.90
PAN[b]	88	7.09
PRD[c]	0	0.00
Other Parties	0	0.00

Source: CEE-Chiapas (2002).

a *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Institutional Revolutionary Party.
b *Partido Acción Nacional* – National Action Party.
c *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – Party of the Democratic Revolution.

Chapter 4

Remunicipalization in Santiago El Pinar: A Limited Empowerment

Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor and Jaime Torres Burguete[73]

Two fundamental elements came together in the establishment of the municipality of Santiago El Pinar. Firstly, it was the crowning moment of a struggle that had lasted 30 years, during which the "Santiagueros" had demanded the return of the municipal institution that had been taken away from them in 1921, as a result of a constitutional reform that eliminated the town of Santiago—amongst others—from the municipal map in the state of Chiapas. Secondly, it was the result of various political maneuvers on the part of the Santiagueros in the context of the armed uprising in 1994, which had a strong impact on the municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar, upon which Santiago del Pinar depended as a municipal agency.

The remunicipalization of Santiago del Pinar can be seen as part of a long episode in which local government institutions have been returned to Highland indigenous communities in Chiapas.[74] This restitution has been carried out as part of an indigenous empowerment process[75] that began when the municipalities with an indigenous majority in the Chiapas Highlands gradually began to take over their municipal town halls, simultaneously initiating a "re-indianization" of local governments (Burguete 1999). The first step in this process consisted in the elimination of the post of the "*Ladino* municipal secretary",[76] which consequently meant the strengthening of the indigenous scribes (*escribanos*), who

73 With the collaboration of Francisco Regino Álvarez Hernández in the field research.

74 The following municipalities are included in the Chiapas Highlands: Zinacantán, Chamula, Mitontic, Chenalhó, Pantelhó, Chanal, Huixtán, Oxchuc, Tenejapa, Amatenango del Valle, Cancuc, Aldama, Santiago El Pinar, Teopisca and San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

75 The term "empowerment" seeks to draw attention to processes that involve transformations in power relations. The term has been widely used in gender studies and in studies of "bottom up" development (see Wilson 1998; World Bank 2000; Sen n.d.; León 1997; and Ulloa 1999).

76 The term "*Ladino*" refers to those people that are not indigenous.

substituted this post. The next step was the displacement and later the expulsion of the *Ladinos* from indigenous municipalities, who had monopolized posts in the town hall; from then on, these posts were filled exclusively by indigenous people.

This process of restituting local government institutions to indigenous people produced—from the 1930s onwards—a particular type of town hall: the "indigenous town hall", which combined posts of the so-called "traditional town hall"[77] (the "*cargo* system", which was typically made up of a governor, mayors and councilors) with posts characteristic of a constitutional free municipality.[78] By the end of the twentieth century, 13 of the 16 municipalities in the Chiapas Highlands (over four-fifths of them) were governed by this type of "indigenous town hall" (Pantelhó, Teopisca and San Cristóbal de Las Casas being the exceptions).

The study of Santiago del Pinar permits a privileged vantage point from which to look at the balances and tensions that materialize in the coexistence of two bodies of authorities and the weight that state institutions have increasingly acquired in pushing for a constitutional town hall. On becoming a new municipality, a new town hall was set up in Santiago that replaced the previous authorities. Consequently, the "traditional town hall" was dismantled and those who worked there were subsequently assigned to the *Juzgado de la Paz y Conciliación Indígena* (Justice of the Peace and Indigenous Reconciliation) with the rank of "traditional authorities" (Prockosch 1973), thus losing their positions in local government, as we shall see below.

It is important to point out that the dismantling of the Santiagueros' "traditional town hall" should be understood in the framework of a long process that began with the introduction of the post of the rural municipal agent, who was in charge of the traditional town hall hierarchy. This rural municipal agent constituted the first authority that had legal recognition as a representative of the Santiagueros.

This is the paradox that traverses the process of empowerment amongst the Santiagueros. Whilst on the one hand, the Santiagueros won ground by slowly recovering their capacity to elect their own representatives (first the municipal agent and later the regional president, which we will look at in more detail below) and achieve their legal recognition, on the other hand, they lost ground because at the same time they accepted new forms of representation and authority

77 At the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of Highland communities—in contrast to other municipalities in the state of Chiapas—did not do away with the posts that made up their nineteenth century authority structures, posts that remain in use and are known as "traditional town halls" or "regional town halls". However, we do not wish to assert that these town halls are "traditional" because they have remained immune from change. Rather, we maintain that they have been constantly modified, adding certain posts and giving new meanings to those already in existence.

78 The institution of "Free Municipality" was established by Mexico's 1917 political Constitution, in which article 115 established that a municipal town hall is made up of a president, a municipal legal officer and councilors.

that were characteristic of national institutions, which displaced those authorities that existed formerly.

In their struggle to win control of their own local government institutions, so that their own representatives could be recognized by the state, the Santiagueros had to sacrifice their own political institutions by accepting the institution of Free Municipality; an institution set up in the new municipalities as a result of integrationist political practices that were not abandoned by the State, even after the signing of the San Andrés Accords.

Thus, in order to become a municipality, the Santiagueros had to replace their old authorities and representatives and nominate new ones that the Mexican State was prepared to accept. This was the choice that the Santiagueros had to confront in order to achieve remunicipalization,[79] and which the Santiagueros saw as a step towards empowerment, through the recovery of their municipal status. But such a process of empowerment gave rise to its own contradictions.

It should be pointed out, however, that these contradictions are shared by the majority of indigenous Highland municipalities, where their control over the choice of their own municipal authorities has been returned to them. The empowerment of the Highland municipalities has been carried out—broadly speaking—in a paradoxical fashion, characterized by contradictions in which Highland communities have made gains and losses. On the one hand it is true that Highland indigenous populations have again taken local government institutions into their own hands (as the figures cited above confirm), but this appropriation has only been possible to the extent that the indigenous people have decided to accept certain state institutions and have allowed their traditional authorities to be subordinated to these same institutions; evidence that the Mexican State continues to pursue integrationist policies.

Given this basic contradiction, indigenous empowerment creates its own contradictions, which is why it has ended up being a sort of "limited empowerment" that is subordinated to the State. There has been a further paradox as a result of this relationship: only a few individuals have become empowered, mainly those belonging to a professional indigenous elite, who fit the profile demanded by the new institutions and have consequently filled the new posts, which has hindered broader processes of indigenous empowerment in many towns and villages.

As has been documented by numerous authors who have studied the region (Guiteras 1972; Köhler 1982; Medina 1983; Favre 1985; and Pineda 1995), in the majority of Highland municipalities, the town hall posts have been filled by bilingual

79 The "Marteños" from Santa Marta in the municipality of Chenalhó, however, did not accept this implicit condition in the remunicipalization process and preferred to keep their own nineteenth century government institutions, with the status of a locality subject to the municipality of Chenalhó.

teachers or technicians in government programs, who have played an important relevant role in the establishment of a particular type of power relationship that Jan Rus (1995) has correctly termed the "Institutional Revolutionary Community".[80]

Owing to this type of relationship, particular to the "Institutional Revolutionary Community", those town halls in the hands of bilingual teachers and technicians have largely led to a weakening of "traditional town halls"—a process that has often been characterized by open competition. The bilingual teachers and professionals have occupied various posts in the municipal government and in other institutions that have arrived in the indigenous municipalities, as a consequence of the State's greater presence in indigenous regions in the wake of the 1994 rebellion, generally causing a progressive deterioration amongst the old "traditional" authorities.

For these reasons, nowadays it can be seen that in the "indigenous town halls" the constitutional town hall tends to become strengthened, whilst the "traditional town hall" has gradually diminished. Nevertheless, despite these disputes, they continue to co-exist. This co-existence creates a terrain of struggle in which values associated with what is perceived as "traditional", "indigenous", "authentic", "true", "particular/local", "practices" and "customs", etc., represent a capital under dispute, whilst at the same time, the posts and hierarchies are in a constant process of re-signification.

Therefore, although in a historical perspective it would seem that Highland indigenous populations are experiencing a growing empowerment and one would assume that remunicipalization would contribute to this process, both have produced a field of paradoxes and contradictions, in which these populations have both gained and lost ground. These struggles and paradoxes can be observed in the case of the remunicipalization of Santiago El Pinar and constitute the central argument of this chapter. In this sense, this collaborative effort hopes to illustrate the challenges that remunicipalization gives rise to when the presence of cultural diversity is not acknowledged; that is, the challenges that are involved in the creation of new municipalities in indigenous regions when such a process is carried out without adapting or modifying state institutions.

The main part of this chapter documents how the Santiagueros progressively appropriated their own local government institutions, until they finally managed, through remunicipalization, to take control of municipal power. However,

80 Rus' model of the "*Comunidad Revolucionaria Institucional*" could be extended to include the "Institutional Revolutionary Town Hall" on the basis of the type of political relationships that inhabitants of the municipality of Chamula have built up with government institutions. This term derives from the name of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI) that was in power for more than 70 years and was characterized by its ability to establish corporate relationships with the country's indigenous populations.

at the same time, this process has been carried out in a controlled fashion by a group of Santiagueros, who have monopolized political power and representation, thus excluding others. In the first part of this chapter we trace the municipalization process from a historical perspective, looking at this process of "limited empowerment", until eventually achieving the restoration of their municipality as the final phase of this process.

Further down, we present a chronology of the remunicipalization of Santiago, stressing the leading role played by the Santiagueros and showing the alliances that they made in order to achieve their goal, as well as the political profile of those that took on posts in the new town hall. We conclude with some reflections concerning the difficulties involved in recognizing the diversity within the municipality of Santiago El Pinar.

Santiago: A Process of Indigenous Empowerment

Santiago is an old indigenous settlement located in the Chiapas Highlands region. During the latter part of the independence period, Santiago had its own municipal authorities. A decree dated December 11, 1882, which divided the state of Chiapas into 12 departments and 124 municipalities, included all the current indigenous municipalities in the Highlands, as well as the municipalities of Santa María Magdalena (today the municipality of Aldama), Santiago and Santa Marta (which is currently a municipal agency of Chenalhó) amongst others, which were part of the Central Department, with its seat in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. However, the new political constitution of the state of Chiapas, issued on February 5, 1921, brought with it a reorganization of the state's territory that reduced the number of municipalities to 59. With this new territorial organization, the majority of Highland indigenous municipalities ended up being subordinated, as "Delegations", to San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Teopisca, Chenalhó and San Andrés, which were the only Highland towns that kept their rank as municipalities, a status that they had maintained throughout the nineteenth century.

The majority of those towns affected by the 1921 constitutional reform, which removed their municipal status and powers, objected to this new territorial organization. Almost immediately they initiated a campaign for the restitution of their municipal powers, but neither Santiago nor Magdalena nor Santa Marta—nor other localities such as Cancuc—had their municipal status restored (INEGI 1996). Regarding these towns that had become subordinated to the rank of Delegations, Ricardo Pozas pointed out that it was an atypical case:

> Generally speaking, each group of Indians that makes up a *pueblo*, inhabits a defined territory that coincides with the borders of a Municipality, except the *pueblo* of Chamula which extended beyond its municipal borders and the *pueblos* of Santiago, Santa Marta and Santa María Magdalena, whose territories make up part of other Municipalities with the category of Municipal Agencies (Pozas 1987:21).

There was an attempt to resolve this atypical situation in the 1980s through the application of the category of "municipal agencies". Thus, those municipalities with distinct communities within their borders ceded some degree of autonomy to the traditional authorities of these agencies,[81] but subject to the figure of a "*Ladino* municipal agent", which acted as a link that connected these communities to a system of regional domination, as providers of labor for the coffee estates in the state.

From *Ladino* Municipal Secretary to Indigenous Municipal Agent

Despite the loss of their municipal powers in 1921, the Santiagueros kept up their traditional nineteenth century municipal authorities, which had been formally acknowledged in 1882. This local government institution was known as "*El Cabildo*"—which here we will spell as the Santiagueros themselves do: "*Kavilto*"—that was made up of a governor, mayors and councilors.[82] Over the years, new *cargos* or posts would be gradually added to this body of authorities, such as the indigenous municipal agent and the regional president, as we shall see below. These posts formed part of a "traditional" government hierarchy, but were, however, subject to the authority of the municipal agent, who in reality functioned as

81 For example, in the 1980s in the municipality of Chenalhó, a clear distinction was made between the municipal agencies and the villages and hamlets. In Chenalhó, the only municipal agencies were Santa María Magdalena, Santa Marta and Belisario Domínguez, the latter inhabited by people originally from Chamula, whereas in Larráinzar the only municipal agency was Santiago El Pinar.

82 Chance and Taylor (1987:12) characterized a colonial *Cabildo* in the following way: "Every village had its *cabildo* posts that were held for a year after elections and those higher up in the hierarchy had Spanish titles. This was how the law defined it and the annual elections had to be overseen by local priests or Spanish functionaries. These posts—for example, *gobernador, alcalde, regidor, alguacil, mayor* (governor, mayor, councilor, bailiff, major)—were hierarchically ordered and undoubtedly conferred different levels of power and prestige upon those who held them. Some of the lesser *cargos* or posts, such as *topil* or *tequitlato*, had indigenous names and dated from pre-Hispanic times".

a sort of "*Ladino* municipal secretary" and was "in charge of" keeping an eye on *Ladino* and government interests.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the post of *Ladino* secretary gradually disappeared from the majority of Highland municipalities, but it persisted in Santiago until the 1960s, and it is remembered as a period of much suffering. The "era of the *Ladino* secretary" was, for the Santiagueros, a period of exploitation and mistreatment. The sustenance of the *Ladino* secretary was the responsibility of the Santiagueros. The "*mayoles*" (a community service post equivalent to an "*alguacil*" or policeman) were those in charge of providing the secretary with food, delivering maize, beans, eggs and chickens. They also had to raise the money to pay the secretary a salary.

In the mid-1960s, the Santiagueros began to express their disagreement with the continued presence of the *Ladino* secretary. In 1968, the state government ordered the *Ladino* municipal secretary to be replaced by a municipal agent from the town itself. Miguel López, who was one of the first literate and Spanish-speaking people in Santiago, was nominated to the post. The municipal secretary refused to leave and wanted to bribe the municipal president of San Andrés Larráinzar in order to avoid losing his job, but to no avail. With the disappearance of the municipal secretary in Santiago and the emergence of an indigenous municipal agent, the Santiagueros entered into a phase of empowerment.

However, despite these changes, the life of the Santiagueros was not so different and they remained vulnerable to *Ladino* oppression. In contrast to the *Ladino* municipal secretary, who was seen as something foreign to indigenous government institutions, the indigenous municipal agent was immediately taken on and placed within the traditional *Kavilto* hierarchy, a body which had continued to function in a limited fashion under *Ladino* hegemony. This authority system lasted until 1999, when remunicipalization was to have an impact on the structure of the "traditional town hall".

The Regional Presidency: A Parallel Municipal President

The disappearance of the *Ladino* municipal secretary and the establishment of the post of indigenous municipal agent marked the beginnings of a process of empowerment that the Santiagueros had long hoped for. The removal of the municipal secretary meant a return to communitarian life, with the holding of assemblies, and the decision making process was again in the hands of the Santiagueros. But despite feeling strengthened by these changes, they continued to complain about their dependence on San Andrés Larráinzar. It was the awareness of their differ-

ences with and dependence on the "Andreseros"[83] that proved to be the motivation to continue insisting on the recovery of the municipal status that they had lost in 1921.

Early on, in 1973, only five years after replacing the *Ladino* municipal secretary, the new municipal agent presented before those who worked in the *Programa de Desarrollo de Los Altos de Chiapas* (Development Program for the Chiapas Highlands – PRODESCH) the Santiagueros' desire to have their municipality returned to them, but the response was not a positive one. On this occasion, they were not paid much attention, but the events of 1974 in Larráinzar, known as the "indigenous rebellion against the *Ladinos*" were ably taken advantage of by the towns of Santiago, Santa Marta and Magdalena, all of which used the occasion to demand the devolution of their municipal powers.

During this same period, the Andreseros had undertaken a struggle to recover their lands that were illegally in the hands of *Ladino* ranchers, thus giving agrarian struggles in the region a more radical turn (Hidalgo 1985). The government became alarmed by the possibility that this indigenous inconformity might spread and immediately began to mediate the demands, especially those of towns near to Larráinzar, where the agrarian cause was taking hold. The opportunity was again taken advantage of by the towns of Santiago, Santa María Magdalena and Santa Marta, which again insisted that their municipalities be recreated. State Governor Manuel Velasco Suárez offered them a partial solution. For these three towns, he created—illegally and without the issuing of a decree—a new post called "regional president" which was supposedly in between a municipal agent and a municipal president.[84] "The governor told us that the regional president was almost like a municipal president", one Santiaguero remembered.

In the Highland region, in municipalities such as Chamula and Larráinzar, the new "regional town hall" was applied to those authorities that made up the traditional, nineteenth century, municipal authorities, and in opposition to the legally recognized "constitutional town hall" (Pozas 1987:11). The state government took advantage of the prestige that was soon attached to this new "regional town hall" amongst Highland communities and set it up—technically illegally—in those towns that had lost their municipal status, such as Santiago. Shortly after this institution began to function, Santa Marta and Santa María Magdalena rejected this new "regional president" as a parallel authority because it implied the doubling of financial contributions (they paid the expenses of the municipal

83 "Andresero" refers to those who are native to San Andrés Larráinzar.

84 A "regional town hall" was established in Santiago, Magdalena, Santa Marta, Cancuc and Abasolo, amongst others.

agent as well as the regional president) and because it hardly brought any benefits (Álvarez 1999).

However, in Santiago the new post was accepted with celebration. The faculties of this "quasi" municipal president were recognized by the population, thus bestowing the post with legitimacy. The first thing they did was to hand over the ceremonial staff to this new "president", an artifact that the Santiagueros had preserved for more than sixty years and had been used by the municipal president between 1916 and 1920, during the brief existence of the municipality. On handing over the ceremonial staff to the regional president, they took it away from the traditional "governor", who had carried it over the previous fifty years. In order to avoid conflicts, the Santiagueros acted pragmatically, making new ceremonial staffs, which were handed over to the governor as well as the two traditional mayors. Therefore, there were no longer three ceremonial staffs, but four.

From the 1960s until the 1990s, the "regional president" was seen as a municipal president by the Santiagueros, parallel to the one that existed in Larráinzar. In contrast to the traditional authorities, the post of regional president lasted three years, the same as the municipal president of Larráinzar, with whom he competed. Furthermore, he was popularly elected (like the constitutional authorities in the other indigenous municipalities), unlike the traditional authorities, which were designated to their posts.

The Santiagueros' conviction that they had a "quasi" president was so solid that even the municipal authorities in Larráinzar were prepared to deal and negotiate with this regional president and not with the municipal agent, according to an ex-municipal president from Larráinzar. The post of regional president was filled by nine people in total and lasted 25 years, from 1974 until 1999, when Santiago was declared a free municipality.

San Andrés Larráinzar and Santiago El Pinar: A Tense Relationship

Santiago El Pinar is the smallest municipality out of the seven that were established within the framework of the remunicipalization program promoted by Governor Roberto Albores Guillén between 1998 and 1999. It has an area of 1,776 hectares, the equivalent of 17.8 km^2.[85] In 1998, when the census was carried out,

85 The other new municipalities had the following surface areas: Aldama: 2,656 hectares, equivalent to 26.5 km^2; Benemérito de las Américas: 97,920 hectares, equivalent to 979.2 km^2; Maravilla Tenejapa: 41,132 hectares, equivalent to 411.3 km^2; Marqués de Comillas: 93,261 hectares, equivalent to 932.6 km^2; Montecristo de Guerrero: 19,029 hectares, equivalent to 190.2 km^2, and San Andrés Duraznal: 2,990 hectares, equivalent to 29.9 km^2 (Gobierno del estado de Chiapas 1999).

its population was only 3,204 inhabitants, distributed between two municipal agencies and later reorganized into 11 localities, two of which had less than 100 inhabitants. Santiago borders on the east with the municipality of Aldama, on the west with San Cayetano, municipality of El Bosque, to the south with the municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar and to the north with the municipality of El Bosque.

Santiago El Pinar is 36 kilometers from San Cristóbal de Las Casas and can be reached by taking the paved road to San Andrés and continuing for 11 kilometers on an unpaved road. There is no public transport to Santiago and the private transport that is available is both expensive and slow. Santiago itself lacks almost all the basic services: schools, health centers, markets, etc. Consequently Santiago is over-dependent on Larráinzar. An argument that was frequently used to justify their demand for their municipality was the lack of support forthcoming from the municipality of Larráinzar.

The period when Santiago depended on Larráinzar is remembered with certain bitterness. The Santiagueros did not feel truly integrated into the municipality of Larráinzar and they did not participate in the religious *cargo* system nor did they occupy posts in the municipal government. Furthermore, nobody remembers a marriage between the Santiagueros and the Andreseros. The following testimony given by the ex-municipal president of Larráinzar illustrates this tense relationship:

> I'm not really sure where the people from Santiago come from. According to what my father told me, the people from Santiago used to wear different clothes … the traditional clothes changed, they didn't dress like the people of San Andrés, and they dressed differently, very much differently. But according to what my father said, the people from Santiago don't like to work, they're just layabouts, they like to steal, and take things from people's houses or block the roads, steal and take stuff. That's why they separated from Larráinzar, they formed a separate group, they set up a community and began to buy their saint who's called Santiago the Apostle. The people from Santiago are different, they can't occupy an official post in the municipality, they have other customs, other traditions. They can only govern in their own town. The people from Santiago have had a few posts in San Andrés, I think they've been councilors, fifth councilor I think, but they can't be constitutional authorities, nor municipal presidents, nor legal officers, these posts can only be filled by natives of the town of San Andrés (Ex-municipal president of Larráinzar, personal communication, 2000).

Furthermore, from the perspective of the Santiagueros, the authorities in Larráinzar were indifferent to the Santiagueros' problems. The Santiagueros considered this situation to be unfair because, as a municipal agency of San Andrés, they contributed communal labor and money, for which—they assumed—they deserved some sort of benefit, but it did not work like that. Larráinzar is made up of 44 villages and a municipal agency (Santiago). Despite its supposed superiority when compared to the villages, in reality the municipal agency of Santiago was last on the list when it came to receiving public investments in the municipality.

In 1998, before Santiago got its new municipality, its infrastructure was limited to two primary schools, two kindergartens and two basketball courts–one in Santiago itself and the other in the village of Choy'o. It had a small piped water system and a limited electricity supply, as well as unpaved roads that connected Santiago with Larráinzar and with the villages of Choy'o and Chiquinch'en, although the latter road had no surfacing at all. The Santiagueros complained that this very limited infrastructure had been the result of their own efforts and not those of the municipal authorities in Larráinzar.

Given their dominant position, the authorities in Larráinzar had also been less than fair in the imparting of justice, and in resolving conflicts between Santiagueros and Andreseros. From the point of view of the Santiagueros, the Andreseros had taken advantage of their hegemonic position by taking control of the best lands that belonged to the Santiagueros. Lacking capital, the Santiagueros had not invested in coffee plantations in order to make the most of the lowlands in the *ejido* and the Andreseros benefited from this situation. Through a mechanism for the lending of lands that were called "*baldíos*",[86] the Andreseros asked to borrow land from people in Santiago. On investing in coffee plantations, those from San Andrés attempted to ignore the rights of the Santiagueros and refused to pay them the agreed rent, whilst at the same time continuing to occupy the lands. They even used violent means to intimidate the Santiagueros, whilst the authorities in San Andrés conveniently ignored the situation.

Conflicts over land ownership and the fact that there remained some ex-*baldío* lands that now had property titles in territory belonging to the Santiagueros again had an impact on the municipalization process. The majority of Andreseros contested the inclusion of certain lands in the municipality of Santiago El Pinar, thus providing a new source of tension and problems for the new municipality, which have yet to be resolved. On finishing this piece of research, the limits of the new municipality had still not been clearly defined.

The tensions between the Santiagueros and the Andreseros grew when the San Andrés town hall refused to sign the "*acta de cabildo*" (municipal council min-

86 In this case, "baldío" means a vacant plot.

utes), which accepted the separation of Santiago to constitute the new municipality. But despite this opposition, the Santiagueros continued to insist. In order to consolidate their position, the Santiagueros began to form alliances and make the most of their strategic geopolitical position, as well as establishing loyalties with the main players in the remunicipalization program.

In the situation created by the Zapatista uprising and the acute polarization that this conflict created in the heart of San Andrés, the Santiagueros kept their lines of communication open with the political authorities and repositioned themselves in order to be able to negotiate the return of their municipality.

Corporate Remunicipalization

The Santiagueros remember that before 1998, they had made at least three attempts to turn themselves into a municipality. The first was in 1973, a year before the rebellion against the *Ladinos*, which ended up, in 1974, with the establishment of the regional presidency. The second appeal was made in 1978, when they presented a formal request to President José López Portillo on his visit to Zinacantán, and to those in charge of the Development Program for the Chiapas Highlands (PRODESCH), now known as the *Secretaría de Pueblos Indios* (Secretariat of Indian Peoples – SEPI), and to the state governor. Some political actors in Santiago referred to a third application that was made to Governor Patrocinio González Garrido in 1990, encouraged by the restitution of the municipality of Cancuc in August 1989 (Burguete 2000). This third application was also refused with the state government claiming that there were not enough funds to create more new municipalities.

Thus, with so many past refusals, the remunicipalization proposal of Governor Roberto Albores Guillén was the chance that the Santiagueros had been waiting for since 1974, when they were given a regional president that functioned as a sort of parallel municipal president. Without having been initially considered as a candidate for remunicipalization (which is why it did not appear on the list of the 33 new municipalities offered by Governor Albores), Santiago El Pinar came to see the restitution of its municipality. But what were the motives that led the State Remunicipalization Council to consider the case of Santiago El Pinar? And what were the networks that the Santiagueros constructed or reinforced in order to achieve the desired result?

One relevant reason was the role played by Santiago in the armed conflict in the Larráinzar region. This town ably knew how to take advantage of its location within this municipality and offer its loyalty to the state governor's political and military project. Its key location within Larráinzar, the most emblematic Zapa-

tista autonomous municipality (as it was the birthplace of the Accords concerning Indigenous Rights and Culture, was used by the Santiagueros in order to collaborate with the government and hinder the growth of political forces that supported the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN) thus contributing to the weakening of the autonomous municipality of San Andrés Sacamch'en, which even a group of Santiagueros had joined.[87]

After 1995, with the establishment of the autonomous municipality of San Andrés Sacamch'en, the Santiagueros gradually positioned themselves in spaces from which they had previously been excluded. Zapatismo had made considerable headway amongst the Andreseros, but had had less of an impact in Santiago. It is possible that the history of confrontations between the Andreseros and the Santiagueros had acted to strengthen organic ties amongst the Santiagueros, thus ensuring greater cohesion. This was perhaps the reason that Zapatismo did not have the impact in Santiago that it did in San Andrés.

The Santiagueros minimized their internal differences and kept tight ranks with regards to their main goal: the return of their municipality. In contrast, the Andreseros, split into two factions: Zapatistas and supporters of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI), thus weakening the hegemonic block that had been kept up against the Santiagueros in the past. The municipality of Larráinzar found itself at the center of a political dispute and the government feared the expansion of the Zapatista rebellion in the municipality. The Santiagueros were particularly useful for the PRI supporters in San Andrés, especially in the context of elections as a source of votes. The Santiagueros tactically used the weakness of the PRI supporters in San Andrés, who now represented less than half of the electorate. Since 1995, the Andreseros that supported the EZLN had taken over the town hall in Larráinzar and thus maintained their power without the PRI supporters being able to do anything about it. Consequently, the constitutional authorities were forced to rent a private house, establishing alternative headquarters. Until October 2001, when this collaborative chapter was finished, the Zapatista Andreseros still had the town hall under their control, which remained the headquarters of the autonomous municipality of San Andrés Sacamch'en.

This scenario gave the Santiagueros an opportunity to offer their political support to the PRI in exchange for positions of power. The electoral situation in 1997 favored such a trade off. The Andreseros needed the Santiagueros in order for the town hall to remain in the hands of the PRI in the 1997 local elections, which were

87 The Zapatista autonomous municipality of San Andrés Sacamch'en de Los Pobres functioned as a parallel municipal authority in the same territory as the constitutional municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar.

held to choose municipal presidents and local congressmen. The PRI supporters reckoned that without the pro-PRI votes of those in Santiago, their party would lose the elections.

Section 0685, which corresponds to Santiago El Pinar, showed itself to be atypical in the municipal elections of that year. This section was the only one within the municipality of Larráinzar where the PRI vote resisted the Zapatistas. In 1994, 84 percent of the voters in Santiago voted for the PRI compared to an average of 50 percent in the rest of the municipality, and it was the only section where polling booths were not burnt. In 1997, 100 percent of the votes in Santiago were for the PRI, as can be seen in Table 4.1, which reveals the extent of PRI loyalty amongst the Santiagueros, who maintained their support, despite the PRI being defeated in half of the polling booths in the municipality (Sonnleitner 2001).

The very high number of votes that the PRI received in Santiago is surprising, especially at a time when political pluralism had supposedly arrived in the Chiapas Highlands (Viqueira and Sonnleitner 2000). The voting behavior of the Santiagueros in elections that also decided the composition of the local congress strengthened their negotiating capacity. But the Santiagueros did not support the PRI for free, they named their price. They put the pressure on and obtained three direct benefits that they had been demanding before the elections. On the one hand, they got, for the first time in their tense relationship with Larráinzar, their first councilor in the municipal town hall and also managed to reduce the budget of San Andrés Larráinzar and redirect these funds to Santiago El Pinar so that the latter received—also for the first time—resources in order to be able to pay salaries to its local authorities. Furthermore, they surprisingly managed to make a Santiaguero the general secretary of the PRI Municipal Committee. This extraordinary change in the Santiagueros' position in local politics was explained by an ex-municipal president in the following way:

> In 1998, those in Santiago occupied for the first time in San Andrés the position of first councilor, because they had threatened not to carry on voting for the PRI. In Santiago, the majority of people are PRI supporters. There existed the risk that if they did not vote for the PRI, and if the Zapatistas voted for the PRD,[88] then it was certain that the PRI would lose the municipality. Those in Santiago said that in the 1997 elections, they were going to vote for the PRI only if they fulfilled certain requests, and if they didn't do this, they would vote for other parties. They took their proposal to the PRI and managed to get the post of first councilor. They also managed to get other forms of support, and this is why they also managed to get their new municipality. The government was very afraid and the San-

88 *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – Party of the Democratic Revolution.

> tiagueros have always guaranteed votes for the PRI, they're tightly linked to the CNC [National *Campesino* Confederation] and for that reason they won (Ex-municipal president, personal communication, 2000).

Loyalties were being negotiated. Requesting from state Governor Roberto Albores Guillén a budget of 60 thousand pesos in order to pay the salaries of the Santiago "regional authorities", the Santiagueros wrote the following in a letter dated March 4, 1998:

> We also take this opportunity to let you know that as Regional and Traditional Authorities, we have been exercising our functions since 1852, and not, as many think, only since the armed conflict of January 1, 1994. We also have nothing to do with the Autonomous Town Hall and do not divide our municipality, as we are one hundred percent PRI supporters. We have been authorities since the last century. Yours sincerely, Regional President and Municipal Agent (Letter addressed to the Governor, March 4, 1998).

The post of general secretary of the PRI municipal Committee, which the Santiagueros had obtained, gave them the chance to access information from which they had previously been excluded. At the same time, it put them in a privileged position to create a network of power relations that would allow them to again negotiate their votes in exchange for political favors that would assist their remunicipalization project. The then general secretary of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Larráinzar described the importance that this was to have in achieving the remunicipalization of Santiago:

> The thing is that Santiago wasn't on the list of the municipalities that the Governor was going to create; that is why they didn't ask us to nominate a remunicipalization commission. As I found out in Tuxtla that the Governor was going to create new municipalities, because I'm the general secretary of the PRI in Larráinzar, that's how I found out, when I arrived at the PRI monthly meeting in Tuxtla, there they told me that they were going to create more municipalities in lots of places, that's what they said. So I came to tell my people what I had heard, the people here in Santiago in order to let them know. Then we went to ask the SEAPI[89] to see if it was really true. First we went to talk, we didn't make any applications. They told us that it was true, that there were going to be more municipalities. We went back to

89 SEAPI stands for *Secretaría para la Atención a los Pueblos Indios* (Secretariat for the Attention to Indigenous Peoples).

> Santiago and spoke to the people, we got together with the old folk to see what they thought about the creation of a new municipality, about how we are going to do it, how we should talk, how we should move and organize ourselves. We informed them about it and the people said that it looked good. We went back to the SEAPI offices, and spoke to VM. He asked why we wanted to be a new municipality, we explained to him that we are a bit different to the people in Larráinzar, that we have different traditions, different clothes, different *fiestas*, we told him about the authorities we have here, the Governor, the mayor, the legal officer, the councilor, the *mayoles*, *martomas*, *mayordomos*, *alférez*, captains, such as the commissioner, the scribe, the committee and we told him that we have a regional president and also a ceremonial staff that says "municipal president". We told him all about the traditional, religious and regional authorities that there are here, and he believed us when we said that we were already almost a municipality. I think that is why they gave it to us (Former general secretary of the PRI in Larráinzar, personal communication, 2000).

From the PRI office, the Santiagueros created their network of relationships. The upcoming presidential elections in 2000 gave them another chance to negotiate their position. Some local actors mentioned various commitments that the Santiagueros had to fulfill in order to guarantee the establishment of the municipality, promising to vote according to what was required of them. PRI leaders in Larráinzar estimated that Santiago's votes in the PRI's internal elections to choose a presidential candidate would be important. In December 1999, they claimed that in these internal elections the candidate for the party nomination, Francisco Labastida, won in the municipality thanks to the mobilization of his supporters in Santiago El Pinar. The PRI supporters in the rest of the municipality of Larráinzar supported the other candidate, Roberto Madrazo.

According to some of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)'s supporters in San Andrés, the inhabitants of Santiago were the most "hard-line" PRI supporters in the municipality, linked to the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasant Confederation – CNC), which was affiliated to the PRI. They said that it was this organization, along with Governor Albores, that supported Francisco Labastida in the party's internal elections, and not the PRI supporters in Larráinzar. The same source indicated that the municipalization of Santiago was a punishment for Larráinzar for the votes that they had given to the other party candidate for the nomination, Roberto Madrazo. But beyond these determining factors in the municipalization of Santiago, Larráinzar's opposition to this process was also clear. That was why the Santiagueros believed that such

accusations reflected the anger felt by the Andreseros on the Santiagueros' rising influence.

Whilst the Santiagueros were organizing themselves and extending their network of power relations in order to achieve remunicipalization, the Andreseros were attempting to find ways to obstruct it, although it was now too late. The most that they could do was to effect a maneuver to delay handing over their *Kavilto's* official approval of the separation of Santiago from Larráinzar.[90] After the Larráinzar town hall repeatedly refused to hand over this "*acta*" (official document), staff from the Remunicipalization Commission presented themselves in a *Kavilto* meeting (with the documents prepared) with the idea of obtaining, under pressure, the signatures of the Larráinzar town hall in order to force them to accept the municipalization of Santiago.

Militarization and Remunicipalization

In a context of war and indigenous rebellion, the municipalization of Santiago worked in the government's favor, facilitating the military control of this region, particularly the part next to the autonomous municipality of San Andrés and the area that connected it to the autonomous municipality of San Juan de la Libertad, situated in the constitutional municipality of El Bosque, which was an area under the influence of the Zapatista military camp in Oventic. From the military point of view, the establishment of new municipalities in the region was seen as a necessity. The agencies of Santa María Magdalena (today the municipality of Aldama), Santiago and Santa Marta were a sort of gray area, where there was no significant military control.

The municipal authorities, upon whom these agencies depended, were not really active players in the main developments in this region, consequently the State was weak. State institutions lacked influence, which was why military and

90 In order to establish new municipalities, the State of Chiapas Municipal Law (*Ley Orgánica Municipal del estado de Chiapas*) establishes the following in article 12: "The municipalities will have a territory that corresponds to the limits that have been recognized up until today. The state Congress will have the right to alter their territorial area and to suppress existing municipalities and create another in their place when it serves public interest and complies with the formalities established in the second and third paragraphs of article 63". The second and third paragraphs of article 63 state the following: "The municipalities have legal character. Under no circumstances will they be able to incorporate or segregate a municipality without approval, within 60 days from the date that the issue has been submitted for consideration, and in line with the relevant law. Abstention will also mean approval. This process must have the previous consent of the State Congress after having heard from the interested town halls".

police presence became the principal methods of political control. The Chenalhó municipal authorities were effectively absent from Aldama and Santa Marta, in the same way that Santiago had been effectively abandoned by the authorities in Larráinzar. Precise military territorial control could not be achieved because of the lack of an institutional structure.

Therefore, immediately after Santiago was established as a municipality on August 30, 1999, the "Municipal Public Security Council" was set up by the *Kavilto*.[91] This council was to have control over all municipal territory. The local authorities were given new vehicles in order to oversee their new territory. Through the authorities present in the various villages within the municipality, which now had the status of municipal agencies, the Santiago municipal authorities took on the task of putting together a detailed register concerning all their inhabitants, including their political leanings and religious preferences, as well as the movements of the Zapatistas and supporters of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) under their jurisdiction. The importance of Santiago in the military geography of this region had been taken note of before remunicipalization. In 1996, in a letter, the Santiago authorities had requested the state government authorities to post a police detachment in the area.

Although Zapatismo had been visible in this region from 1994 onwards, when some Santiagueros and Andreseros openly identified themselves as support bases for the EZLN, 1996 turned out to be the most conflictive year. Armed skirmishes between PRI supporters and Zapatistas in Santiago led the authorities to approach the municipal president in Larráinzar so that he would request that the Secretariat of National Defense post an army detachment in the area. Santiago consequently became the location of a military camp. Beforehand, the Santiagueros had also requested a detachment of State Public Security Police. A member of the Santiago authorities described how the policemen arrived at the *ejido* assembly building and how the army detachment established itself at the main entrance to the town of Santiago El Pinar:

> In 1996, the Zapatistas wanted to take over the [municipal] agency and to establish an autonomous municipality around Santiago, where inhabitants

91 This municipal council is the smallest of all the detachments belonging to the State Council for Public Security, which was created on May 29, 1996. It forms part of the National System of Public Security, established by law on December 11, 1995. In one of the clauses that defines the composition of this Council the following is established: "With the purpose of preserving the practices and customs of indigenous municipalities, the Municipal Councils for Public Security are integrated into both the constitutional and traditional authorities, as well as with the representatives of the indigenous communities that make up the municipality" (see Cabildo Municipal de Santiago El Pinar, "*Acuerdo del H. Cabildo Municipal de Santiago*" [Agreement of the Municipal Council of Santiago], Chiapas, August 30, 1999).

> from San Juan El Bosque, Chamula, Chenalhó, Zinacantán, Tenejapa and San Miguel Mitontic were concentrated. But the municipal agent and regional president as well as the traditionalists decided to ask for help. The situation calmed down, they weren't able to realize their plans for the autonomous municipality, but the [Zapatista] sympathizers weren't satisfied. In 1996, they tried to intimidate locals by firing off rounds at night in front of the *ejido* assembly building. As the military had established itself in Ninamó village, which is 2 kilometers from the center, they withdrew. In 1997, the Zapatistas again caused problems, this time over the elections for municipal presidents and local congressmen, blocking roads so as to not allow the polling booths to be taken away and burning some polling booths in the community of Bach'en in the municipality of Larráinzar. To safeguard the people again, the authorities decided to request, through the SEAPI,[92] the presence of the state public security [police force], taking 65 high caliber used shells, which had been fired in front of the *ejido* assembly building. On seeing the proof, this institution [SEAPI] helped by requesting that the public security police establish themselves in the town. This was in the month of July 1996 when the police set themselves up in the *ejido* assembly building and from then on all has been quiet in town because once or twice a week they do the rounds on the roads between Larráinzar, Santiago and Chiquinch'en (Anonymous member of Santiago authorities, personal communication 2000).

The police and military presence in Santiago hindered the development of political pluralism in the municipality. The threatening presence of these forces was a significant factor in reducing support for the Zapatistas and in imposing the municipalization agenda over and above the Zapatista demands for autonomy.

Changes and New Meanings in the *Cargo* System

In contrast to what occurred in the municipality of Aldama, where the municipal council was able to establish itself on the basis of internal political pacts between various actors so as to include religious and ethnic pluralism in the municipal government, in Santiago, the social fabric was fragile and popular participation weak. This was reflected in the exclusion of political and religious opposition groups from the emerging municipal council.[93] The result was that the new posts remained

92 *Secretaría para la Atención a los Pueblos Indios* – Secretariat for the Attention to Indigenous Peoples.

93 Such as the *Juzgado de la Paz y Conciliación Indígena* (Justice of the Peace and Indigenous Reconciliation), the *Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* (Integral Development of the Family – DIF) and the

in the hands of the same people that had been dominant in local politics before Santiago became a municipality. Thus, Sebastián Rodríguez Gómez, who held the post of regional president, became the president of the new municipal council. Whilst the municipal agent in Santiago, who served as the regional president's number two, became the legal officer in the new municipality.

It is important to mention that the criteria used to assign the various posts were carried out on the basis of a sort of "division of the spoils" amongst those that had lobbied for the new municipality. Given that Santiago was not originally included in Governor Albores' project, the new municipality was uncertain. The lobbying process thus required considerable investment in both time and money. For this reason, the municipal posts were seen as a kind of reparation for the expenses that had been borne by the lobbyists.

But the birth of the municipality did not include everyone and in fact did not "reward" all those that had been involved in the process. It is conspicuous, for example, that the traditional authorities have not formed part of the town hall and they have not even been "ratified" in their posts. The Santiagueros' demand for a new municipality, which dated from the 1970s, was justified through the struggle to have their own system of local authorities recognized. But the opposite occurred. The new municipality meant a new set of authorities—president, legal officer and councilors—that displaced the old *Kavilto*. With remunicipalization, the traditional authorities were not legally recognized as authorities in Santiago, but were placed within the *Juzgado de la Paz y Conciliación Indígena* (Justice of the Peace and Indigenous Reconciliation, an institution that arrived with remunicipalization) in order to assist with the exercise of justice.

Neither did the new town hall include political dissidents who had expressed themselves through their support for the EZLN or the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). All the posts in the new town hall were taken by people who claimed to belong to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Thus the political opening for which the EZLN and other groups and organizations had fought for decades was not able to be realized.

The case of Santiago reveals the challenges that multi-party politics face in the region and makes us reflect on the importance of actors and processes that emerge from the struggle between political parties, which could change some of the ways in which local power is articulated. But we also have to be wary because it could all be an illusion; it is not a change that occurs mechanically, but must be encouraged by other democratizing dynamics and on the basis of a different sort of relationship between the government and indigenous political actors. There exists evidence that would seem to support such concerns. George Collier (2001) has shown how, in the case of Zinacantán, multi-party politics do not necessarily mean the replace-

municipal offices of the PRI and the National Peasant Confederation (CNC).

ment of elites. In contrast, it is often the same people in power, acting intermittently between one political party and another. Thus, in the case of Zinacantán, local leaders have moved from the PRI to the opposition—whether it be the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN) or the PRD, or a new party—without altering the nature of the clientelistic relationships that they maintain with government officials. This difficulty, which hinders the replacement of elites, can also be observed in Santiago. Despite remunicipalization representing an important change, it has not translated into a renewal of leaders nor of power relations.

Therefore, whilst the democratization process should not be disparaged (Viqueira and Sonnleitner 2000; Sonnleitner 2001), there exists the risk that the model of an "Institutional Revolutionary Town Hall", which was born with the political regime created by the PRI, may remain in place. Even though the PRI has been dislodged from the state government, town halls have been won by opposition parties and the multiparty system is commonplace, old clientelistic and corporatist practices resist their demise and re-emerge in different forms.

We must, therefore, continue to reflect upon possible scenarios for the new municipality, as well as upon how the progress made in multi-party politics will be able to have an effect in Santiago in the construction of new types of power relations, amongst Santiagueros themselves and with the state.

Conclusions: The Challenges of Indigenous Empowerment

Santiago's recovery of its municipal status took place in a contested environment. Although one has to acknowledge the agency of the Santiagueros, who were persistent and acted strategically in order to take advantage of the political ups and downs in San Andrés, it cannot be ignored that it was all possible because the Santiagueros took advantage of the government's remunicipalization program, whose aim was to detain the expansion of Zapatismo and indigenous autonomy, and to weaken the armed movement in general. The remunicipalization of Santiago was possible because it was built on power networks that depended on clientelistic relationships and were counterinsurgent in nature. This is why this process did not contribute to the construction of new power relations between the State and the indigenous population, as had been established in the San Andrés Accords, the document that supposedly guided the remunicipalization process in Chiapas.

The case of Santiago shows the weakness of this type of indigenous "empowerment" and how it does not substantially alter the nature of power relations with the State, nor within indigenous societies themselves. As could be seen, remunicipalization in Santiago suffered from serious structural difficulties that ob-

structed the redistribution of power and did not look to challenge the *status quo*. We have also cast light on some of the challenges that indigenous empowerment and autonomy face if there is no substantial change in local systems of power, which are based on corporatist relationships and the mediation of *caciques*,[94] and are observable in Highland indigenous town halls, as described by Jan Rus (1995) with his model of the "Institutional Revolutionary Community".

As the case of Santiago El Pinar illustrates, the indigenous empowerment that has occurred in the twentieth century through the re-indianization of town halls in the Highland region, has in fact been a process led by the State, resulting in a limited empowerment because it has been carried out on the basis of a single local government design and corporatist relationships. It thus weakened those indigenous government institutions already in existence, whilst at the same time subordinating the emerging institutions. The government bestowed legality upon those municipal institutions and *cargos*, and supported them through the distribution of funds, that were in the hands of individuals that guaranteed corporatist loyalty with the then ruling party, the PRI. A network of loyalties was thus recreated upon the basis of the municipal institutions that guaranteed the centralism and intervention of the state in the decisions of these towns. Power was handed over to indigenous populations, but not to all of them, only to those *cacique* elites and collaborating groups that kept up loyalties that, although they contested the State to some degree, did so without fundamentally questioning the nature of the relationship between the State and indigenous peoples.

On not fundamentally altering this relationship, the process of indigenous empowerment faces serious limitations. If we acknowledge that empowerment supposes the construction of empowered subjects, understood as collective subjects that access power through the control of their own local government institutions, then this would mean that these institutions should at least be culturally appropriate. But this did not occur in the remunicipalization process under review here. For this to have happened, it would have been necessary to effect a State reform beforehand, altering constitutional article 115 in order to incorporate the principle of diversity into local government institutions, organizational forms and political representation. Changes should also have been made in the ways in which the relationships between the State and indigenous populations are mediated, thus establishing a pact that seeks to replace notions of domination (state-led clientelism and corporatism) with others based on clear rules of representation, recognized as legal by both the state and local institutions as pillars of local power.

As we have seen in this text, many of the changes in the relationship between the nation-state and indigenous populations that would involve certain empow-

94 "*Cacique*" is a term that refers to local "bosses" that often mediate local relations with the state.

erment are yet to be realized in Chiapas. The remunicipalization that was implemented in the state was carried out without previously making changes neither in the nature of the Mexican State itself nor in the character of the municipal institution. The case of Santiago and the new municipality of Aldama, which we look at in another chapter in this volume, offer elements of analysis that show how remunicipalization in indigenous regions will only contribute to processes of empowerment if the formation of the new municipalities is accompanied by a package of reforms that acknowledge the principal of diversity in municipal institutions, establishing legal models for "autonomous municipalities" and "autonomous communities", which modify the rules concerning the character of local authorities, thus opening them up to a range of possibilities with regards to electoral systems. If this diversity of electoral and local government systems were to be legally recognized, this would open up ways of building a consensus amongst the various actors and the possibility of creating new frameworks for government institutions, appropriate to the cultural specificity of indigenous realities in the Chiapas Highlands and to their demands for diversity, pluralism and democracy.

Table 4.1
Election Results for Section 0685-Santiago Municipality of San Andrés Larráinzar

Section 0685	1991	1994	1995	1997	1998	2000-Jul.	2000-Aug.
% PRI[a]	96.6	14.3	100.0	100.0	100.0	90.5	83.7
% PRD[b]	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.6	16.1
% Other parties	3.4		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.2

Source: Data taken from a database developed by Sonnleitner for the project "Democracy, pluralism and tradition in the federal and state elections in 2000 in the Chiapas Highlands" financed by *El Colegio de México* and the *Instituto Federal Electoral*. We wish to thank Willibald Sonnleitner for this information as well as his permission to use this data in this chapter.

Note: Section 0685 corresponds to the present municipality of Santiago El Pinar. The figures represent valid votes.

a *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Institutional Revolutionary Party.
b *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – Party of the Democratic Revolution.

Chapter 5

Disputed Spaces and Clientelistic Networks in the Formation of the Municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa

Xochitl Leyva Solano and Luis Rodríguez Castillo[95]

In this chapter we describe and analyze local and regional political processes and the *disputes*[96] that occurred during the establishment of the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa. Various political groups in the Selva Fronteriza region[97] played a part in these processes and disputes, intervening in the struggle to appropriate, control and manage the government's remunicipalization program, which was supposedly legitimized by the San Andrés Accords, signed by the Federal Government and the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN) in 1996.

The transformations that took place in the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa are the result of these disputes between different groups that can be broadly characterized—according to their political affiliations—as "pro-autonomy Zapatistas/neo-Zapatistas"[98] and "pro-government". These groups' distinct political

95 We would like to thank Jorge Morales Nájera for his assistance in carrying out interviews.

96 Following Weber (1984:31-32), what we term *disputes* are the social relations of a struggle. Turner (1966:239), on the other hand, points out that disputes "have a life cycle, which is systematized by routines, procedures and symbols that establish the nature of its successive phases … or situations". Franz von Benda-Beckmann (1989) points out the strategic use of disputes as mechanisms of social control, whilst Marc Galanter (1981) emphasizes its strategic character to exert pressure and seek alternative resolutions to conflicts.

97 What we term the *Selva Fronteriza* region is the strip of land in the south east of the country that borders with neighboring Guatemala. The region of study is pluriethnic as Tojolabals, Tzotzils, Tzeltals, indigenous Guatemalans and *mestizos* all inhabit this region.

98 Here, we take up Leyva's proposal (2001), who recommends that we differentiate between the actions of the EZLN and those of its support bases, be they actions carried out by citizens, organizations and movements that become "Zapatized" and end up forming one (or various) networks of alliances and political coalitions that act in their own ways and in their own time but

and ideological positions help us to understand why two different notions about political and territorial reorganization emerged in the Selva Fronteriza region that were not just distinct, but in open opposition. On the one hand were the "pro-autonomy" groups, who attempted to set up the "rebel municipality", as well as establish an "autonomous region" that shared certain features with the *Regiones Autónomas Pluriétnicas* (Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions – RAPs), which were ideas that had the approval of the *Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinas de Chiapas* (Chiapas State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations – CEOIC). On the other hand, there were the "pro-government" groups who took advantage of the offer made by the state governor, Roberto Albores Guillén (1998-2000), thus adding to the demand for the establishment of new municipalities in the region.

These different political and administrative projects entailed, apart from the division of municipal territory, distinct ways of envisaging and running the municipality. This led to a transformation in the spaces for social and political participation and to a reconfiguration of local and regional power groups. How did this take place? The principal aim of this chapter is to address this question. In doing so, we use a processual and network analysis approach,[99] starting with the idea that the ebbs and flows in the various remunicipalization projects described here form part of broader predicaments associated with the "Chiapas conflict", as well as the ups and downs that can be identified within what might be called the *Mexican political transition*.

We follow Alberto Aziz (2003:5) when he points out that "the country's political life has been radically transformed but … important institutional reforms are still required for us to be able to say that Mexico is a consolidated democracy". "We have", he says, "an incipient and fragile democracy that has experienced a drawn out development and has, particularly in the last two decades of the twentieth century, made important progress in breaking the authoritarian system through a combination of confrontations and periods of reform that started in the municipalities and extended to the presidency itself (Aziz 2003). In this

always in line and in sympathy with Zapatista demands. Leyva calls these "neo-Zapatista social movement webs".

99 In this chapter, we make use of both processual analysis and network analysis in order to offer a more profound account of the interplay between structure and process, and institutionalization and informality, without losing sight of the individual's capacity for agency. Network analysis allows us to describe and analyze the exchange of goods, services and information that occurs within networks of interpersonal social relations, and from the various positions that are occupied in the system (Boissevain and Mitchell 1973; Boissevain 1974). We refer to the concept of a network of social relations in order to observe the scale of levels of articulation (Adams 1975) and the particular character of the relationships between a leader and his or her followers (Wolf 1977), as well as the horizontal social categories that end up constituting factions (van Velzen 1973; Mitchell 1973, 1980; Nicholas 1977).

chapter we want to show, from local and regional perspectives, how the municipalization process of Maravilla Tenejapa is not unconnected to some of the more significant aspects of Mexico's transition to democracy, such as the design of democratic institutions, the mores of political culture, old school corporatism and its clientelistic networks, and the arrival of minimum electoral rights.

In the first part of this chapter we explain how the settlement of Maravilla Tenejapa turned into a key location in the Selva Fronteriza region, describing how the clientelistic networks of certain leaders and groups were sustained by disputes over access to *ejido* land and public services, in order to demonstrate that remunicipalization was a *political arena*.[100] In the second part we give an account of the remunicipalization initiatives prior to that of Governor Roberto Albores Guillén and we go over the pro-autonomy projects that occurred before 1994. In the third part, we analyze the particular nuances acquired by the "Zapatista" and "governmental" remunicipalization options. In the fourth section, we briefly review the transformations experienced by the networks, the clientele and political factions through the elections held in the municipality of Maravilla in 2000 and 2001.

The *Ejido* and the Formation of Clientelistic Networks

To fully understand how the municipality today known as Maravilla Tenejapa came to be successfully established, we have to look back to the political history of the *ejido* of the same name. The *ejido* Maravilla Tenejapa was founded in 1973 by Tzeltal Indians who came from the municipality of Tenejapa, located in the Chiapas Highlands (see Map in Introduction, p.35). This *ejido* received its presidential resolution on July 17, 1980 and was granted 2,456 hectares. In the following two decades, Maravilla Tenejapa became the center for health and education services, the commercialization of coffee and the distribution of consumer goods. It thus constituted a *key location* in a regional frontier *hinterland*, which included not only Mexican *ejidos*, but also some settlements in Guatemala.

The fact that the community was entirely Tzeltal was turned into hegemonic power and subsequent intolerance toward dissidents by local leaders, which meant that the settlement gradually turned into a node of corporate alliances of a single type. It is worth mentioning, for example, that workers from the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National Indigenist Institute – INI), the Department for Indigenous Education in the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Secretariat of Public

100 Remunicipalization can be understood as a *political arena* in that it constitutes a field of political action in which actors struggle for a public objective (Swartz 1972); in this case, for a new municipality.

Education – SEP) and the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasant Confederation – CNC), worked in the Selva Fronteriza region right from the beginning in order to guarantee the local hegemony of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI).

In the municipality of Tenejapa (the Highland region), Fernando Cámara (1966) and Andrés Medina (1991) ethnographically documented how, through the constitutional town hall and the post of municipal secretary, the PRI sought to control certain municipalities and absorb them into broader political activities (Cámara 1966:142; Medina 1991:182). Thus, for those who came from Tenejapa and colonized Maravilla, it was not unusual to look to "the party" for support. The party (i.e., the PRI) and the government were seen as the same thing, a view that was reinforced by the ways in which land was distributed in the Selva Fronteriza region. The government recognized the existence of state lands (*terrenos nacionales*) but the access to them required that they be subjected to *ejido* status.

Once the settlers had initiated their applications, it was common for members of the CNC to turn up at the same time as technicians and engineers from the *Secretaría de Reforma Agraria* (Secretariat of Agrarian Reform – SRA), in order to ensure the new *ejido* members' affiliation to the PRI. Thus, access to *ejido* land was used by local leaders as a way of co-opting new settlers, which, in turn, sustained the corporate organization and forms of political representation. For example, those that applied for *ejido* lands still maintain that "thanks" to these relationships, they managed to get the governor to back their agrarian application, which was formalized by César Valls Cervantes on July 20, 1979 (SRA, RAN 2841-DOT, document dated July 20, 1979). But, if that was not enough, the area of land granted to them was extended—they say—"thanks" to the local agrarian leaders' personal contacts, leaders who were given guidance by PRI representatives.

Along with this particular instrument of regulation and control, other state agents were also present in the region. Bilingual teachers were of particular importance because, despite holding no formal post, they have been key actors in the recruitment of the PRI's political clientele. For example, in Maravilla Tenejapa, a teacher called E. Maldonado has played a key role as one of the most conspicuous political and cultural intermediaries in the region. Maldonado worked informally as the secretary to the *ejido* commissioner and was, from 1982 onwards, the founder and advisor to the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union and has been the mediator between various *ejidos* and the Secretariat of Agrarian Reform (SRA) and the National Peasant Confederation (CNC).

Further afield, Maldonado's personal contacts were based on his membership of section VII of the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* (National Union of Education Workers – SNTE) and his close relationship with the most important leader of the teachers' movement at the end of the 1970s, Manuel

Hernández, with whom Maldonado founded the regional section of the *Solidaridad Campesino Magisterial* (Peasant Teachers' Solidarity organization – SOCAMA). It is important to emphasize that this state organization was the result of an important civil movement that emerged as an alternative organization to those offered by the state party, but later it affiliated itself to the CNC, thus associating itself with the PRI. Apart from the prestige Maldonado acquired from being a teacher and a leader of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union, he had also had considerable success in lobbying for public works in the settlement of Maravilla, such as the health clinic, the school boarding house and the primary school. These constructions were a central part of community demands in the region and, particularly, of leaders in other communities that competed to obtain the same services.

We can say, therefore, that since the mid-1980s, the inhabitants of Maravilla Tenejapa had managed to successfully insert themselves in the state party's clientelistic networks and exchange political loyalties for public services. This explains, to a large degree, why in 1994 Maravilla expressed such intolerance toward those who supported the EZLN and later expelled some of them. It also explains why a military checkpoint was set up, why the 12th Infantry Battalion later established itself in the area and why the state governor's PRI remunicipalization proposal was immediately accepted and talk began to spread concerning the emergence of a "paramilitary group" linked to the *Movimiento Indígena Revolucionario Anti-zapatista* (Anti-Zapatista Revolutionary Indigenous Movement – MIRA).

The installation of the 12th Infantry Battalion[101] in the settlement of Maravilla reveals the prompt and effective way in which the state party networks functioned. In an *ejido* assembly held on June 16, 1996, the *ejido* members in Maravilla Tenejapa "agreed" to donate 28.60 hectares to the Mexican Army for the establishment of a military training camp. This could be seen as a simple assembly agreement were it not for the fact that from June 5 of the same year there already existed plans and measurements of the area, although it had not yet been donated nor formally requested. Moreover, "the *ejido* members" in Maravilla were the first to receive compensation of around 59,000 pesos in exchange for their lands after the publishing of an expropriation decree in the Federation's Official Gazette (*Diario Oficial de la Federación*) on March 6, 2000. Curiously, in this decree, Maravilla Tenejapa is referred to as belonging to the municipality of Las Margaritas when it had been a free municipality in its own right since 1999. The speed

101 In 2000, the 12th Infantry Battalion consisted of 553 Mexican army troops, eight armored vehicles, five jeeps and two trucks for transporting the troops. It also had a training and operations center (with an office building and dining space), as well as a residential unit with gardens and volleyball and basketball courts and with four buildings of three floors, each containing 24 apartments; each apartment had three bedrooms, a living-dining room, kitchen and bathroom.

with which the compensation money was paid out and the error in the decree were not accidental, but showed the urgency that existed "from above" to consolidate political alliances and the nature of the links between local, regional and state PRI supporters. In fact, a SOCAMA leader told us the following without any qualms:

> The presence of the army was part of a *strategic plan* to put in place services for the *ejido* in preparation for its role as municipal seat (EM, personal communication, Comitán de Domínguez, October 6, 2000. Emphasis added).

The municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa, which was decreed on July 15, 1999 by the LX state Legislature, was made up of 30 localities and had a surface area of 411.3 km². To the south, it borders with the Republic of Guatemala; to the east with the Lacandon Community; to the north with the municipality of Ocosingo and to the west with the municipality of Las Margaritas. In 1998, according to the census carried out by the State Remunicipalization Council and Commission, it had a population of 7,172 inhabitants, a figure that rose in 2000 to 11,147 inhabitants according to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Computing (INEGI 2001). It is worth adding that, in the same year, the National Population Council included Maravilla Tenejapa within the category of Chiapas municipalities that had "a very high degree of marginalization" (INAFED 2003:26).

(Re)municipalization and Pro-Autonomy Initiatives

It was in 1984 that the Selva Fronteriza region first presented a demand regarding municipalization. O. Blancarte, the commissioner of the *ejido* La Fortuna Gallo Giro, and J. Macías, in charge of *ejido* security, headed the first meetings with their peers in order to discuss an initiative to establish a municipality and managed to involve 38 communities. The then municipal president of Las Margaritas, A. López Guillén, commissioned a teacher, M. Hidalgo, to follow up this request. But whilst they were putting together the relevant documents, representatives from the *ejidos* of Gallo Giro, Nuevo San Juan Chamula and Jerusalén argued about where the municipal seat would be situated. The differences of opinion meant that the *ejido* authorities requested the intervention of the indigenous attorney's office, which proved unable to resolve the problem. Subsequently a decision came "from above" and the request was considered null. The brother of one of those involved had the following to say about this affair:

> After putting together all the documents [i.e., formal community agreements], Señor Hidalgo left everything in the hands of the indigenous attorney's office ... but the municipal president tried to placate him … "What do you want? We'll give you a tip [i.e., money] and then go"—they said to my brother. That was how they sorted it out, they wanted to resolve everything with cash (LM, personal communication, Comitán de Domínguez, November 29, 2000).

The petition to establish a new municipality in 1984 was considered to be justified by the fact that the municipal seat was so far away and also because the *ejidos* felt "abandoned" by the state and federal authorities. It is thus somewhat curious that in this period, the political leaders of Maravilla Tenejapa did not fight for the municipal seat to be in their community. In fact, the three *ejidos* that did attempt to do this ended up playing leading roles in this first municipalization demand because they turned into intermediaries between their communities and the Secretariat of Agrarian Reform (SRA).

The *ejido* commissioners that led the municipalization demand and argued over the location of the municipal seat were part of the same network of political alliances to which the Maravilla Tenejapa leaders belonged, only in a different position. It is important to emphasize that the political leaders of the *ejidos* in question did not have personal contacts with the leader of the Peasant Teachers' Solidarity (SOCAMA) or with any other leader that had a state-wide presence. In other words, amongst themselves they competed on an even footing, but it was not like that with the leaders in Maravilla Tenejapa, who were better positioned within the regional and state networks. Nevertheless, these first flirtations with remunicipalization in the Selva Fronteriza were contained by the authoritarianism of the very political system to which all these groups belonged.

We have thus illustrated how, during the first few years of colonization, through the *ejido* commissioners and authorities linked to the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) and bilingual teachers connected to the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), and through promoters belonging to the National Indigenist Institute (INI),[102] a degree of PRI hegemony was imposed in the region, which was reinforced by the effects of national agrarian policy during the presidency of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976). Echeverría, in his efforts to "renovate the rural sector" and make the *ejido* "an economically viable project", stressed the need to re-

102 From 1952 onwards, the National Indigenist Institute (INI) began to train young indigenous people as educational promoters who would take on the task to "Hispanicize" speakers of indigenous languages. At the same time they involved them in the promotion of various productive projects and "cultural diffusion". By doing this, they turned them into cultural intermediaries and political leaders who would mediate relations between the State and indigenous communities.

organize the rural population in order to create production models that produced "better fruit". Access to federal loans and credits became conditional upon the creation and membership of legally constituted associations. We can situate the emergence of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union within this context, but also other types of organizations that have experienced splits and renewals along with changes in the nature of their struggles: from the demand for land to requests for production projects; from promoting a regional development plan to demands for democracy and autonomy.

The emergence of second level associations[103] in the different sub-regions of the Lacandon Forest was a factor that led, on the one hand, to a strengthening of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), but it also led to the promotion of projects that differed from PRI clientelistic guidelines.[104] For example, the *Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos* (Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants – CIOAC), founded in Las Margaritas in 1977 by M. Ruiz, emerged as a political organization and gave birth to a number of associations which operated in the region as organizations of producers (we are referring here to the Tierra y Libertad *Ejido* Union, the Pueblos Tojolab'ales *Ejido* Union and the Yajk'achilb'ej *Ejido* Union). In October 1987, various work groups and *ejido* unions came together to form the *Frente Independiente de Pueblos Indígenas* (Independent Front of Indigenous Peoples – FIPI), which, with time, would launch a struggle for autonomy with a "grammar" or discursive logic based on the free determination of Indian peoples (Ruiz 1994; Mattiace 1998; Hernández Arellano 1999; Leyva 2002; Ruiz and Burguete 2003; Chirino and Flores n.d.).

These organizations favored an assembly-oriented system in the region and the nomination of community and regional representatives, who encouraged the establishment of the Tojolabal Council, a body that respected the traditional communitarian hierarchies and attempted to take decisions with a mechanism known as the "spider's web", which consisted in "thinking and deciding in a circular, not vertical, way". However, the fall of the "great Tojolabal power" occurred because of criticisms from the generation below who were against traditional gov-

103 The "first level" organizations are those which bring together individual members of the same *ejido* or community. The "second level" ones group together individual and collective members and their organizational level reaches a regional level whilst the "third level" associations set out to have a state or nationwide level of representation and organization.

104 We refer to the *sub-regions* of the Lacandon Forest in the same way as Leyva and Ascencio (1996) do. At the beginning of the 1990s, in the Cañadas Ocosingo-Altamirano sub-region, the various *ejido* unions, *Sociedades de Solidaridad Social* (Social Solidarity Societies – SSS) and *Asociaciones Rurales de Interés Colectivo - Unión de Uniones* (Rural Associations of Collective Interest - Union of Unions– ARIC-UU) stopped the CNC from establishing their corporate networks in this region. In contrast, in the Marqués de Comillas subregion, the *ejido* unions strengthened their relationship with the CNC for many years and the dissidents decided to label themselves as a "movement" (for more details on this sub-region, see Neil Harvey's chapter in this book).

ernment and from the CIOAC itself, whose leaders did not tolerate an "Indianist autonomist" stance (Hernández Cruz 1999:187).

Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, it is important to point out that this "Tojolabal government" has been seen as the model that inspired, some years later, the Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions (RAPs) (Mattiace 2002:105), paving the way for the growth of second and third level pluriethnic organizations. Such was the case of the organization "TojTzoTze Li Maya" which at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s brought together Tojolabals, Tzotzils and Tzeltals. TojTzoTze Li Maya began to organize itself by working with a group of health promoters and later extended its activities to include production projects and transportation. After the Zapatista uprising, it began to involve itself in the training of the indigenous population in human rights, women's rights and the rights of Indian peoples. These activities were done through establishing a Social Solidarity Society (SSS), which ended up playing a significant role in the municipalization process and in the re-structuring of local and regional alliances.

The Zapatista and Neo-Zapatista Autonomous Option

In 1994, the ideological and organizational influence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in the Selva Fronteriza region was limited by the PRI clientelistic networks. The local population knew of the presence of the Zapatistas before January 1, 1994, but agreements were made in order to maintain the peaceful coexistence between the different political factions. However, the war declared by the EZLN entailed the armed presence of the EZLN in the forest as well as that of the Mexican federal army. This ended up exacerbating communal differences because in each community there existed groups that, to greater or lesser extent, expressed their positions and differences with reference to the two factions that were in conflict. Therefore, there existed groups that supported or sympathized with the EZLN, whilst others sympathized with the Government and the Mexican Army or supported the PRI.

The Zapatista armed uprising thus marked the beginnings of a historical transition, understood as a period of intense changes in all social fields that gave way to a new historical chapter for the municipalities in the Lacandon Forest. The periods of change in the Selva Fronteriza can be grouped together in the following way: the period of colonization and agrarian conflicts (1960s); the period of definitive settlements with the formal recognition of land ownership and an increase in organizational efforts (1970s and 1980s); later, the growth and diversification of organizations (1980s and the beginning of the 1990s); and then the "Zapatista conflict", the establishment of *de facto* autonomies, which provoked important political changes,

and the establishment of municipalities by the Zapatistas and neo-Zapatistas, as well as by the Chiapas state government and the state party.

In this last period, the political transformations and disputes were linked to attempts to build two distinct projects: on the one hand, there was the autonomist option promoted by the EZLN, its support bases and groups of sympathizers that, through the establishment of the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad, sought alternatives ways of decision making and political representation; and, on the other hand, the option that sought to align itself with governmental remunicipalization through the framework of a constitutional free municipality, based on the territorial and administrative reorganization of the municipalities of Las Margaritas and Ocosingo. Both options existed side by side in the region until the dismantling of the municipal seat of the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad on May 1, 1998. The defenders of each of these municipalization projects justified their action by reference to the San Andrés Accords.

As we have already mentioned, before 1994, the EZLN had a limited presence in Maravilla Tenejapa, whilst in the Selva Fronteriza region as a whole, its presence was not publicly acknowledged. For this reason, the setting up of a "rebellious municipality" was a challenge for local Zapatistas. The *ejido* authorities (mostly linked to the PRI clientelistic structure) permitted the EZLN "to get on with their own thing" and limited themselves to sending messengers to meetings to inform on promised "assistance" from the new autonomous "authorities". Many of the *ejido* authorities, on discovering that it had to do with acts of "rebellion and resistance against the Government", declined the invitation.

Consequently, intra-communal tensions became more pronounced and the situation more polarized, owing to the concern that the armed conflict was going to spread. Many of those who did not sympathize with the Zapatista movement left the region. One year later, between March and April 1995, on returning to their *ejidos*, they found varying levels of resistance on the part of sympathizers with the EZLN. Taking advantage of the fact that those who did not sympathize with the Zapatistas had left the region, the "municipality in rebellion" extended its power and influence over some parts of Las Margaritas, setting up a municipal seat in Amparo Aguatinta and turning it into the autonomous municipality Amparo Aguatinta. But despite working to consolidate the municipality Tierra y Libertad, with the political support of all the *ejidos* situated from Tziscao (municipality of La Trinitaria) to Boca de Chajul (municipality of Ocosingo), in practice the Zapatistas only managed to achieve the support of dispersed groups of sympathizers in the Selva Fronteriza region.

Throughout 1994, the efforts of the Zapatistas to set up a new autonomous political and territorial unit were based on the outright rejection of any government interference, on demands for the recognition of traditional normative sys-

tems (based on "*usos y costumbres*") and on the activation of mechanisms of communal and regional consensus. The independent regional civil organizations soon supported the Zapatista demands for an autonomous municipality and turned the town halls into their main weapon in the local struggle. This fact became evident between January and April 1994, during which 17 municipal town halls were taken over in the state of Chiapas. Linked to this, the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations (CEOIC) declared, on October 12, 1994, the existence of *de facto* autonomous regions. On February 26, 1995, this project was named Pluriethnic Autonomous Regions (RAPs), and in 1996 the RAP Tierra y Libertad was set up, whose sphere of influence included the constitutional municipalities of Las Margaritas, La Independencia, La Trinitaria and Frontera Comalapa, thanks mainly to the support of organizations like CIOAC-Fronteriza, FIPI and TojTzoTze Li Maya. From this moment on, we can refer to the construction of a neo-Zapatista remunicipalization perspective that had overtaken the EZLN and which involved the region's civil organizations.

On February 24, 1997, the *ejido* authorities that joined the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad declared the following:

> Given the corruption we have suffered ... under the bad government and given the oppression that this government exercises through *caciques* [i.e., local bosses] that call themselves authorities ... from today onwards we only recognize "Tierra y Libertad" as a municipality because its authorities were chosen democratically by the people, therefore we adhere to its statutes and municipal policies (*Declaración de autónomía y a la libre determinación* [Declaration of Autonomy and Free Determination], Paso Hondo, municipality of Frontera Comalapa, February 24, 1997).

Two years earlier, in October 1995, the declaration of *de facto* autonomies, the take-over of town halls and the lack of response to the Zapatista demands, had not appeared to make for an easy election process. In the 1995 elections, the PRI lost control of around 24 percent of the municipalities in the state.[105] Furthermore, the election results were rejected by EZLN on December 19, 1995. The regional Zapatista support bases made it known that they did not recognize the PRI authorities in the municipality of Las Margaritas and turned the rebel community Amparo Aguatinta into an autonomous municipality of the same name. All this

105 The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won 84 municipalities, the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD) won 18 municipalities, the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN) took five municipalities, the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT) won two municipalities and the *Partido del Frente Cardenista de Reconstrucción Nacional* (Party of the Cardenist Front of National Reconstruction – PFCRN) took one municipality (CEE-Chiapas 1995).

brought with it a climate of hostility and polarization because, as we have already mentioned, the internal refugees, who were not Zapatistas, returned to the region accompanied by a strong institutional back-up, led by the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (Secretariat of Social Development – SEDESOL) and their "Cañadas" program run by the *Centros de Atención Social* (Social Attention Centers – CAS).

The Social Attention Centers were intended, formally at least, to "raise the living standards of the people", "generate employment for the population", and to "attend to the needs of internal refugees". In May 1995, a Social Attention Center was set up in Maravilla Tenejapa, made up of representatives from different government departments. This caused further polarization in the communities, as sympathizers with the EZLN, pro-autonomists and non-refugees rejected the intervention of the representatives from the various government agencies. Meanwhile, those refugees that had returned to the area requested the "intervention and support" of the Mexican Army and Government, thus reinforcing, in the eyes of the Zapatistas, their pro-government stance and their participation in the government's counter-insurgency strategy. From the Zapatistas' point of view, the money channeled through the Social Attention Centers was being used for political ends in the region. All this hindered the establishment of agreements and communitarian consensus; too often, intolerance and expulsions won the day.

During this period, some analysts and members of civil organizations talked not only about two parallel autonomy projects, but about three: that of the Government, that of organized "civil society" and that of the EZLN (Mattiace 1997, 2002; SIPAZ 1998; Hernández Cruz 1999). From our point of view, the second and third were virtually indistinguishable, containing different levels of pro-autonomy grievances that overlapped at different times and in different spaces. Firstly, the demand for communitarian autonomy insisted that every community be able to carry out its own elections and remove its authorities on the basis of "practices and customs" ("*usos y costumbres*"). Secondly, the demand for municipal autonomy sought to establish the municipality's right to manage its own financial and natural resources; and thirdly, regional autonomy, in which the grievances revolved around rights of a political, ethnic and cultural nature in a fourth level of government.

The convergence between the pro-autonomy political project of the EZLN and that of "civil society" generated a municipal-regional structure, with different intermediaries that connected representatives from civil organizations with the communities; this structure was called "Autonomous Region Tierra y Libertad". At this autonomous level, the *Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena – Comandancia General* (Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee – General Command – CCRI-CG) and the *Consejo de Representantes Comunitarios* (Council of Communitarian Representatives) were the "maximum authority". It was these bodies that "applied the law of commanding by obeying", in line with the peo-

ple's project to achieve a "democratic, free and just" government (C.R., personal communication, Peña Blanca, September 2000) and which coordinated the workings of the agents, participation advisers, area coordinators and promoters. The naming of these authorities was carried out through forms of social organization particular to *ejidos* and those civil organizations involved in the process; that is, through assemblies and consensus building.

Whilst the Zapatistas and their sympathizers in the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad sought to cover all aspects of municipal jurisdiction, their activities were focused mainly on self-government and self-management. The most important areas were the administration of justice and the management of the civil register. With the former, they made use of internal systems in order to control and sanction those who broke the law, seeking, through some sort of communal service, to compensate for the damages suffered. The application of the Zapatista law in the autonomous municipality was seen as legitimate by its followers as it resided in the authority of local leaders.

Given the scarcity of economic resources and the fact that the autonomous municipality was not constitutionally recognized, the rebel authorities were not able to resolve the local demand for public services. Originally, it was thought that these services were going to be provided by using resources that came from a broad international solidarity movement, but this support never arrived in this region because international aid concentrated itself in those places that managed to capture international attention after the Acteal massacre, which took place in 1997. But it would be unfair to say that the authorities of the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad did not carry out any public works; they did, but such projects were largely financed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were operating in the region and who sympathized with the Zapatista pro-autonomy project.

The structure of autonomous government, which included representatives from the different Zapatista influenced communities, allowed the consolidation of a pro-autonomy movement between 1995 and 1998 thanks to the political convergence of Zapatistas and neo-Zapatistas. But this process was curbed by the dismantling of the autonomous municipality and the campaign of PRI Governor Roberto Albores Guillén, which was based on the handing over of funds for productions projects; funds that were seen by the Zapatistas and pro-Zapatistas as part of the campaign of "low intensity warfare". The functioning of the autonomous municipality also came under pressure when tensions emerged between the EZLN, the council of community representatives and the council of social participation. This occurred because the autonomous authorities had suspicions that some of the NGOs were receiving funds from the Government. The Zapatistas' criticisms of these NGOs hardened in an atmosphere of military harassment and

presence, which intimidated many of the *ejido* representatives that participated in the autonomous municipality.

The autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad was not recognized by either the Mexican Government or by local PRI supporters, who entered into direct confrontation with the Zapatistas and their followers. But, what is more is that in May 1998, the Chiapas PRI government began to dismantle this municipality, justifying their actions by claiming that two Guatemalan refugees had been "kidnapped" by the autonomous council authorities (Speed and Collier 2000). "More than 1000 individuals" participated in this operation, amongst them Mexican troops, state judicial police, highway patrol police and immigration personnel, who "detained 61 people", arguing that the United Nations had requested the intervention of the Mexican Government to ensure the safety of the refugees. This version of events was denied by a representative from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Mexico, Carlos Zaccagnini (cf. Concejo Municipal Autónomo Tierra y Libertad, May 2, 1998; CDHFBC 1999a; Pérez and Martín 2000).

On May 4, 1998 the Zapatista autonomous municipal council, now operating underground, declared the following:

> Clear proof that we are not against the Guatemalan refugees is the fact that amongst those arrested in the community of Amparo Aguatinta there are a number of Guatemalans that were there without any problems, happily working inside the autonomous municipality … The Mexican Government uses an international body as an excuse to justify their war against the indigenous people of this country. Here we can clearly see that the Government is the one that wants foreign intervention, not the Zapatistas (EZLN 1998).

In 1998, what remained of the autonomous council publicly declared their decision to continue carrying out their governmental tasks, but, given the tension caused by their dismantlement, it was extremely difficult to do this. The efforts of military intelligence in the region meant that the Zapatista autonomous municipality had to keep moving its headquarters, which weakened the workings of the municipal council to such an extent that the community of Amparo Aguatinta, previously center of the autonomous council and one of the localities most identified with the pro-autonomy cause, found itself in a process of political fragmentation and social polarization that led to a breakdown in the political bases of both Zapatistas and PRI supporters.

Seen from a distance, we can say that the autonomous council was linked to popular, civilian and internationalist grassroots and was ideologically committed to the principle of "commanding through obeying"; that is, committed to

mechanisms of community consultation. However, in practice, there was also a "*hard line*" element, which was the result of attempting to put autonomy into action in the context of a political and military conflict and as part of the Zapatista military structure. This military dimension in the municipality remained latent until it was criticized by the EZLN itself in communiqués issued between July and August 2003. Before then, the Zapatistas and pro-Zapatistas used only to emphasize the political and civic dimensions of the autonomous municipality, saying that it was created

> ... on the basis of majority consensus and in line with the San Andrés Accords. Indigenous peoples and civil society nominated their authorities so that they could attend to the most urgent problems in the region … The principle aim of the municipality was to show the government that, with or without resources [from the state], it is possible to seek ways to develop sustainably … to show the government how it is possible to administer justice by taking into account the voice of the people and by letting the people ultimately decide on the development and mandate of their authorities (Anonymous, personal communication, Santa Martha, October 9, 2000).

Some analysts, on only considering this dimension, claimed that the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad was one of the rebel municipalities that had achieved a greater level of development and unity (Lomelí 1999). However, as we have explained, the tensions between the non-governmental bodies and the Zapatista authorities, and within the Zapatista support groups themselves, were in evidence and had an effect on the strength of the regional autonomous municipal project.

The Government's Counter-Insurgent Option

After the state government had dismantled various autonomous municipalities (see the Introduction to this book), the federal and state governments' remunicipalization proposal gained ground. Thus, on May 28, 1998, Governor Roberto Albores Guillén formally presented the remunicipalization proposal, which included the establishment of 33 new municipalities. This proposal suggested a number of places in the region being considered here, such as Maravilla Tenejapa, El Edén, Guadalupe Tepeyac, Santiago Guelatao, Amparo Aguatinta and Bajucú, to which were added requests from local committees in Nuevo Huixtán, Nuevo San Juan Chamula, San Isidro and San Vicente El Encanto.

The establishment of the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa was led by the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union, an organization affiliated to the Peasant Teach-

ers' Solidarity organization (SOCAMA). This was no coincidence; M. Hernández was a member of the Congressional Remunicipalization Commission as well as a congressman for the PRI and founder of SOCAMA. Hernández had a solid network of personal contacts in the region led by E. Villegas, leader of SOCAMA-Selva, and the teacher, E. Maldonado. The latter, as we have already mentioned, was an adviser to the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union and the Social Solidarity Societies "Las Flores de Maravilla", "Mujeres de Guadalupe", "Las Cañas", "Río Jataté" and "San Antonio Los Montes" (in the municipality of Las Margaritas) and other affiliated work groups. It is important to clarify that some associations were located in the municipality of Las Margaritas and others in Ocosingo.

The Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union was born on November 13, 1982 with the participation of 13 localities in the municipalities of Ocosingo and Las Margaritas. Maldonado, originally from Chanal and a residential teacher in the Maravilla Tenejapa primary school, has played a prominent advisory role in this *Ejido* Union since its foundation. In April 1989, the *Ejido* Union registered itself with *Registro Agrario Nacional* (National Agrarian Registry – RAN) but ended up being represented by only 12 members because various *ejidos* did not have the legal documents in hand that proved their agrarian status. Towards the end of the 1980s, the Union joined the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), which occurred at the same time as a state level division within the SOCAMA, producing the SOCAMA-Verde, associated with the PRI and led by M. Hernández, and the SOCAMA-Roja, led by A. Espinosa and J. López, who linked themselves to the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT) (Hidalgo n.d.). SOCAMA-Verde has been the faction with a greater presence in the Selva Fronteriza region.

Although the original government remunicipalization proposal was only to affect the region considered to be the heart of Zapatismo, the SOCAMA-Selva was already promoting the idea in its assemblies. In July 1996, a local lobbying committee for remunicipalization was set up in Maravilla Tenejapa. This included A. González as president, E. Maldonado as secretary and E. Valenzuela (president of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union) as treasurer. The president of the committee told us the following:

> At that time, the Zapatista brothers agreed that they would have to see in the region and the communities, see which were the most strategic places and the more peripheral ones … It was again agreed with the community authorities that they should lobby for what would become the new municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa (AG, personal communication, Maravilla Tenejapa, September 21, 2000).

The then governor of the state of Chiapas, Julio César Ruiz Ferro, through Decree 136 issued on May 3, 1996, had nominated a special commission in Congress for the remunicipalization and delimitation of the state in accordance with the San Andrés Accords. Through an initiative of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD), this commission began to assume its functions almost a year later, in February 1997. The commission argued for the need to carry out a "popular referendum", holding a meeting on March 3 with members from the town hall of Las Margaritas and on March 8, a plenary meeting was held in Las Margaritas. On March 22, a further meeting was scheduled in Maravilla Tenejapa and on April 19, another was held in El Edén. In this last community, sympathizers with the EZLN obstructed the holding of the "referendum".

The Remunicipalization Commission, on a visit made to Maravilla Tenejapa on March 22, 1997, received the support of SOCAMA leaders, E. Maldonado and E. Villegas. From the government point of view, there was no doubt that Maravilla Tenejapa offered the best environment in which to promote remunicipalization thanks to a solid network of political relationships based on the SOCAMA-Selva and its associated organizations. Nevertheless, from the very beginning of the process, differences began to surface between the government project and the ways this project was being understood in the communities. Whilst the Congressional Commission only acknowledged the participation of 34 communities in the meetings, SOCAMA and the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union continued to assure people that they would be able to bring together 45 representatives from *ejidos*, villages and ranches in the region.

The process was not a simple one. From their first visit to Maravilla Tenejapa, the Remunicipalization Commission was rejected by hundreds of those who attended the meeting, openly showing their disapproval of the government project and their support for the autonomous municipality of Tierra y Libertad. The meeting appeared to get briefly out of control when the Zapatista contingent marched around the sports field with placards against the "*gobiernistas*" (i.e., those who supported the government). Some Zapatistas took the floor and stated:

> We wish to take care of our own affairs, to be those who define the type of development that we want, the way in which we apply justice and the way in which we use our natural resources in our territory (quoted in Aubry 1997:2-3).

The unexpected presence of the Zapatistas in the region, who had traveled to Maravilla Tenejapa, obliged the members of the Remunicipalization Commission to intervene and make reference to some public works that "it had been agreed to give them". In a clumsy speech, they approved what most had expected: that the "conditions" for remunicipalization would be defined by the Technical Commis-

sion in the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Aubry 1997). The president of the Remunicipalization Committee in Maravilla Tenejapa claimed that this meeting was "part of the protocol" and subsequently confirmed what everyone already knew, that some "community representatives" would read some pre-written speeches. But this not only infuriated the Zapatistas and pro-Zapatistas, but even caused splits between PRI supporters, particularly between the president of the Remunicipalization Committee and the president of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union, who were unable to agree upon who would read the official pre-written speech.

The Peasant Teachers' Solidarity (SOCAMA) and its affiliated organizations in the region limited their meetings to their supporters and members, avoiding open assemblies and tightly associated themselves with M. Aguayo, technical secretary to the Remunicipalization Commission, appointed to attend to the process in Maravilla. Thus, on July 25 1997, an assembly meeting was held with representatives from 34 communities in which they presented a formal request for the establishment of the municipal seat in Maravilla Tenejapa itself; a request that was handed in to the commission on July 28. The central role played by the SOCAMA-Selva in all this was no coincidence, but expressed the need that some local actors had to carry on working within the old structure of intermediaries, in which each person had their place within a hierarchical structure. Regarding this, an activist from the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union commented as follows:

> The leaders of the *Ejido* Union helped us to position ourselves and that's how we gained confidence with the congressmen, with two congressmen from the organization with which I was getting involved: they were a federal and a local one. The first step was to knock on the door *up above* and the federal congressman gave the order, he spoke to the local congressman and told us "be confident about this, as we know Samuel pretty well and he's always given us support". Another leader, J. Narváez, was directly commissioned *from above* and he always accompanied Castañón and myself. They introduced us in the various offices and helped us out with the necessary documents (AG, personal communication, Maravilla Tenejapa, September 22, 2000. Emphasis added).

In this manner, J. Narváez told them that the order had come "from above" so that the municipal council in Las Margaritas would give its support to San José El Edén and the assembly's official approval ("*el acta*") was issued on August 26, 1998. This obliged local people to speed up the handing in of their various documents and assembly agreements that supported Maravilla and to get an appointment with Castañón, which took place in mid-September. Noé Castañón, trusting in the power of SOCAMA to bring people together, issued instructions to "pro-

ceed immediately" with Maravilla's application, leaving the other applications to one side. Thus, on December 20, 1998, the commission was informed that, on the state governor's orders, the process of turning Maravilla Tenejapa into the municipal seat should be ready before the end of 1998.

Thus in accordance with this procedure, on December 24, the lobbying committee visited the municipal president of Las Margaritas, A. Levi Guillén, a PRI supporter, in order to ask for the municipal council's official approval of the territorial and administrative division of the communities that would form part of the new municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa. Initially, the municipal president of Las Margaritas refused to give them this official approval. The president of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union candidly told us the following concerning this:

> It was December 24, and the municipal president told us that he could no longer get hold of his councilors and, in any case, two of them had expressed their disagreement with the separation of Maravilla, and thus the letter couldn't be issued … We explained to him that we had come on behalf of a state government commission, on behalf of Castañón, to which he answered that he was sorry but he had no way of getting in touch with him. So we rang him [i.e., Castañón] and we told him that the municipality didn't want to give us the letter that was required and we passed the telephone to the municipal president. Noé then told him: "I'm not asking what your councilors think about it; what I'm asking from you is that you send me the letter that gives your town hall's agreement, or who is it that really governs in Las Margaritas? Are you in charge or your councilors?" Immediately the municipal president ordered his secretary to type up the letter and right there in front of us they signed it and they sent it by fax to the Remunicipalization Commission (EV, personal communication, Guadalupe Miramar, September 20, 2000).

Now with the document in hand, 87 employees of the commission, along with 120 youngsters "recruited" by the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union carried out a door-to-door census between the 26 and 28 of December. Concerned about possible disturbances in the area, the government workers requested the assistance of the Mexican Army. One soldier stated the following: "… we tried to ensure that everything went smoothly and without hitches and so we accompanied the Commissions in certain communities that we knew might prove antagonistic". Although those who carried out the census indicated that the interviews were done in the 47 communities that had signed the official document, other sources maintained that the survey was only carried out in 35 communities and that there were problems in involving "all" the communities in the census.

During 1998, the resistance against the state government's remunicipalization program had grown. In Monte Flor, Salto de Agua and Plan del Río Azul, the *ejido* commissioners were against the process. In order to convince them, the government agents offered the commissioner in Plan del Río Azul "some financial assistance" ("*un recursito*") so that he sign and stamp a letter that approved the remunicipalization with the seat in Maravilla. That was not everything. Other *ejidos* that eventually ended up within the new municipality already had a number of people who were against the plan and their inhabitants were divided; this was the case with the villages of La Cañada, Nueva Sabanilla, Flor de Café and Amatitlán.

At the beginning of 1999, the government remunicipalization process continued on track, essentially directed and controlled by the technical secretary (M. Aguayo), who restricted himself to issuing exact instructions regarding the steps that had to be followed. It was him that "informed" the inhabitants of the region that Maravilla Tenejapa would be the new municipal seat, and thus he was "in a hurry" to prepare a work tour of this region for the governor. During this trip, the governor would hand over the draft constitutional reforms and a copy of the "organic" municipal law (i.e., the legislation that defines the character and structure of municipalities in Chiapas) for the benefit of the new municipalities. It was the same Señor Aguayo who urgently requested that a municipal council be put together before the governor's tour so that it could accompany him on his visit.

In response to Señor Aguayo's haste, the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union set up an assembly meeting for its *ejidos* on April 11, 1999, but representatives from only 14 communities arrived, and the meeting had to be postponed until the following day, the 15. At this meeting they discussed the mechanisms for the election of the municipal authorities. After around three hours, they arrived at the conclusion that the most viable way would be for the authorities of every *ejido* to call an assembly meeting and for each one to nominate a communal representative, who would then have to present himself to a second round of votes in a "closed" assembly meeting to be able to take on a post in the municipal council.

Despite the clarity of the agreed method, a number of conflicts emerged during the process of choosing the municipal council. For example, the president of the lobbying committee told us how, during a night time meeting, a few days before the ceremony with the governor,

> they wanted to involve us in a situation where we would show our balaclavas and say that we were repentant Zapatistas … But this was a very delicate issue. The government wanted it to be seen that the municipality had been achieved and that, thanks to this, there were Zapatista deserters in the region … Right from the beginning we weren't prepared to accept this and I

> told him: "No, our struggle is not against the Zapatistas, it's for the municipality. And how are we going to pretend that we are Zapatistas when we're not? Doesn't that mean that something is wrong"—I told him—"because I don't agree, I didn't really take part" He answered me: "Don't answer back, because what I'm saying is the way it is, it's not about what you want" (AG, personal communication, Maravilla Tenejapa, September 21, 2000).

The question of handing over the balaclavas led to other meetings with leaders from communities linked to the EZLN, who kept up a fairly good relationship with the promoters of remunicipalization. The general consensus of the meetings was to not involve themselves in the handing over of the balaclavas. However, when the ceremony with the governor was coming to an end, the president of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union took out a black plastic bag and approached the governor saying that he had a special gift for him. The governor opened the bag, removed some balaclavas and the press took photographs that they published under the headline "repentant Zapatistas". This had a series of repercussions that cast a further shadow over the elections for the municipal council. The Zapatista reaction was to reveal these as "fake deserters" and there appeared painted sheets on the properties of the leaders of the remunicipalization committee with the following words: "A Zapatista doesn't lie, fake deserter watch out for your life". However, in those communities that belonged to the PRI clientelistic network, tensions rose and anyone suspected of belonging to or sympathizing with the EZLN was warned or run out of the community.

In the midst of all these problems, the council elections could not wait any longer and on April 19, 1999, the task was again taken up. On the afternoon of the same day, M. Aguayo called a meeting that was held at midnight in the offices of the civil registry. The *ejido* authorities from Maravilla Tenejapa were there; that is, the *ejido* commissioner, the head of *ejido* security, the adviser to the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union and the person in charge of the civil registry. At this meeting, M. Aguayo stated that the municipal council should be made up of the "select work group" present on the occasion. Those in attendance opposed this, arguing that the elections should be held democratically and that nobody from the *ejido* authorities of Maravilla Tenejapa could be nominated in order to avoid problems with the other *ejidos*.

In line with what was agreed, they were going to have to hold community assembly meetings in order to elect representatives, but the democratic process was obstructed. The person in charge of the civil registry in Maravilla Tenejapa, in alliance with M. Aguayo, visited some of the villages in the area, embarking on a sort of political campaign "giving away soft drinks, beer and alcohol". Although they had already agreed that this particular public official could not be

elected, the *ejido* Salto de Agua gave him a recommendation letter that proposed him as a candidate to the municipal council. This situation and other similar ones violated the agreements made in the meeting of the so-called "select work group".

Hard facts confirmed a number of people's suspicions about the existence of prior agreements between people "from above" to favor this particular public official and the National Peasant Confederation (CNC). For example, on April 25, 1999, when the assembly meeting was held to elect the municipal council of Maravilla Tenejapa, E. Maldonado (one of the advisers to the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union) was nominated by the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) to attend a meeting in Mexico City, whilst E. Villegas (one of the leaders of the SOCAMA-Selva) was called to the Chiapas state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, for a meeting with the state leader of his organization (M. Hernández). In this way, the presidents of the remunicipalization committee and the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union found themselves without the back up of their regional leadership and without the chance to be elected or to challenge the process.

Aguayo persuaded a certain P. Sandoval to spread the idea that the municipal council should remain in the hands of the original and most loyal local representatives of the CNC, and not in the hands of anyone who had bosses outside of the popular section of the PRI, directly alluding to the teachers in SOCAMA. With this going against them, members of the *Ejido* Union took control of the "discussion panels" and apparently achieved control of the assembly meeting on the day of the election. It was E. Valenzuela, president of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union, who took charge of the assembly meeting. However, the final result of the municipal council elections was not encouraging for the *Ejido* Union. Its leaders felt used and marginalized, which caused more conflicts between the local promoters of the municipality and those from the Remunicipalization Commission. From the point of view of the *Ejido* Union members and SOCAMA, the result was manipulated by the Commission workers, who acted in league with groups aligned to the CNC in the region, headed by L. Ríos. According to E. Maldonado, the result owed itself to

> on the one hand, A. González' and E. Valenzuela's lack of political experience and on the other, the fact that M. Aguayo continued to impose himself as the pro-government person he was. The result was managed by him, as he wanted to impose his political clientele. This was how the government used *caciques* [local bosses] in the region for its own purposes (EM, personal communication, Comitán de Domínguez, October 6, 2000).

The election of the authorities turned into the perfect stage for the articulation of disputes between the various local factions of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). For example, given the progress made by the National Peasant Con-

federation (CNC), the Peasant Teachers' Solidarity (SOCAMA), in a meeting at the end of April, put together an alternative list of candidates in an attempt to displace P. Sandoval's list, made up of people from Maravilla Tenejapa, Amatitlán, Nueva Esperanza, Santo Domingo Las Palmas, Frontera Ixcán and Nueva Sabanilla. Between May and June 1999, they put together all the relevant documents that formally supported this alternative list of candidates, which was received by the state Congress on July 7, 1999. A meeting was discretely called to discuss the issue, bringing together the congressional president, the president of the remunicipalization committee, the state leader of SOCAMA, the leader of the CNC in the region, the president of the Municipal Directive Committee of the PRI in Maravilla Tenejapa and the regional leader of the SOCAMA-Selva. At this meeting, it was suggested that Congress carry out an investigation and hold a new assembly meeting of *ejido* representatives in Maravilla. This meeting, as we have said, was held at the end of July 1999. One of those involved in the preparations for the meeting commented as follows:

> We were told that we should get our people together. The assembly was held in the main square, but P. Sandoval already had his people ready, giving away alcohol to those who wanted and they came to tell us that it was a deliberate provocation. They arrived flushed with drink, pushing people around and wanting to cause problems when the commission arrived, but my people were nowhere to be seen, because we told them not to react to P. Sandoval's provocative behavior (EM, personal communication, Comitán de Domínguez, October 6, 2000).

This meeting could not be held because of the situation referred to above. Another one was arranged, to be held later in the state Congress. By this stage, the adviser to the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union, who had been put forward as a possible municipal council president, had now abandoned his ambitions to represent his people. Regarding this, he said:

> I told Castañón that I was prepared to come back into line and that I was not going to be a nuisance or cause trouble. He had already agreed with this idea and we had talked about it with the local deputy and the councilor in Las Margaritas (EM, personal communication, Comitán de Dominguez, October 6, 2000).

The conditions for the withdrawal of the candidature were set by political agreements between the state directors of remunicipalization and their local agents. An investigation was asked to be carried out concerning the municipal council elections, which had been discredited by certain irregularities in the process and by M.

Aguayo's attempts to impose his will, as well as by the fact that the *Fondo Nacional de Empresas en Solidaridad* (National Fund for Businesses in Solidarity – FONAES) promised to increase the contribution of funds for SOCAMA. Despite finally imposing some "discipline" on the matter, the bad feelings created by the location of the municipal seat and by the nomination of the council members were evident in the tensions that arose in the first days of the new municipality and which had repercussions in the type of alliances that were forged in the 2000 elections.

Once the conflicts generated by the elections had been resolved, the municipal council began to function in July 1999. This council was structured according to the traditional vision of a municipality and the strategic posts ended up being taken by people from outside the communities themselves, despite the fact that one of the popular demands for the establishment of the municipality was the need to have authorities that were "closer" to the people.

The participation of SOCAMA and the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union in the government remunicipalization process, confirms that this process depended upon the PRI corporate clientelistic network. For the members of the SOCAMA and the *Ejido* Union, the two remunicipalization proposals questioned the legitimacy of the State, the Government and its party. For opposition indigenous and peasant organizations, the most criticized aspect of the government-sponsored process was the buying of certain groups and the fact that the San Andrés Accords remained unfulfilled. They responded to the government remunicipalization process with discourses based on "a new way of doing politics" and on "commanding through obeying"; that is, by deploying a discourse of renovation with highly ethical elements, promoted by the EZLN. The clientelistic practices that in another moment might have been of minor importance or simply accepted as "normal" acquired greater significance and were at the heart of local rejection of the governmental remunicipalization.

This makes us wonder, beyond the issue of remunicipalization, about the possibility of achieving a representative citizenry based on the individual and their *agency* in municipalities like Maravilla Tenejapa, where state corporatism was the basic form of political association and action. Whilst this way of doing things was shaken by the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the change of political party in both the federal and state governments in 2000, it was also reinforced by government policy in the region after 1994 and by militarization. Regarding the latter, it is briefly worth mentioning that, between 1997 and 2000, the Mexican Army had *military bases* in Egipto, in the Santa Elena *ejido*, in Maravilla Tenejapa and in Puente Río Ixcán,[106] as well as quarters in Ixcán and Flor de Café; *camps* in Santo Tomas, San José La Esperanza, Guadalupe Tepeyac, Maravilla Tenejapa, Río Blanco, Amparo Aguatinta, Vicente Guerrero, San

106 This information is based on fieldwork.

José La Nueva Esperanza (withdrawn in 1999), Peña Blanca, El Edén, Crucero Matzam (withdrawn in 1997), Poza Rica, Rizo de Oro, La Sombra, Amatitlán, Ixcán-puente; *checkpoints* on the Rizo de Oro-La Sombra crossroads, in Guadalupe Tepeyac, San José La Esperanza, Amparo Aguatinta, El Edén, Vicente Guerrero, Poza Rica; as well a small office belonging to the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (National Migration Institute – INM) in Ixcán (withdrawn) and a police checkpoint in Amparo Aguatinta (Global Exchange *et al*. 2000).

The Reconfiguration of Networks and Alliances

The elections held between 2000 and 2001 caused new splits that allowed for a reconfiguration of the local political field. The 1999 remunicipalization process had unleashed hitherto unexpressed tensions, opened up the way for new political divisions and momentarily endorsed the PRI in the region. In the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa, in the national presidential elections held on July 2, 2000, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won with 67.5 percent of the valid votes, whilst the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), its closest rival, only received 29.2 percent. The percentage obtained by the PRI was a response to an appeal made by the party's supporters to "close ranks" in order to win the elections and thus demonstrate their "thanks" to the state government for having "given them the municipal seat and the new municipality". In July 2000, the PRI won in every constituency (*sección*) in the municipality; only in Santo Domingo Las Palmas, Flor de Café and Zacualtipán did the PRD[107] present serious competition (see Table 5.1).

Encouraged by the results, the presidents of the PRI municipal committees in Maravilla Tenejapa, Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de Las Américas took a joint proposal to the local PRI congressman, Rafael Pinto Cano, so that he might push for the reorganization of the constituencies so that the three municipalities—mostly populated by PRI supporters—would form a new electoral district. The proposal was forgotten about with the victory of the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN) in the federal elections. In the governorship elections in August 2000, the leaders of the PRI tried to limit the backlash against them by holding community assemblies that would ensure the corporate vote. At the same time, the municipal council in Maravilla Tenejapa supported the PRI in these elections, attempting to avoid the installation of polling booths in those places where they knew beforehand that the supporters of the opposition alliance (the *Alianza por Chiapas*)[108] were a majority. The municipal council, as much as the CNC faction of

107 PRD was the leading party within the coalition *Alianza por México* (Alliance for Mexico).

108 The *Alianza por Chiapas* (Alliance for Chiapas) was a coalition made up of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the National Action Party (PAN), the Labor Party (PT) and the Ecologist Green Party of Mexico (PVEM).

the PRI, SOCAMA-Selva and the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union put in place a carefully considered system of "electoral observation" on the day of the elections.

In August 2000, the PRI won again in the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa with 70.8 percent of the valid votes, although it did lose in two constituencies (*secciones*) where the Social Solidarity Society TojTzoTze Li Maya had a presence: Flor de Café and Santo Domingo Las Palmas (see Table 5.2). The changes in local political alliances have been related to the change in the Federal Government, but they have also been connected to rumors that were circulating in the region about the disappearance of the Secretariat for Social Development (SEDESOL). These rumors precipitated an alliance between representatives of the consultative councils of the Social Assistance Centers (CAS) in Maravilla Tenejapa and in Amatitlán and the *Consejo Productivo Indígena Campesino de la Selva* (Indigenous Peasant Productive Council-Selva – COPICAS A.C.), an alliance that had altercations with the municipal council and the SOCAMA-Selva. After the August 2000 elections, the previously hostile TojTzoTze Li Maya and SOCAMA approached each other over the possibility of implementing an "Integrated Development Project for the Fronteriza region". These encounters went beyond this development plan to include the negotiation of political agreements, something that would have been impossible in the years before, when the TojTzoTze Li Maya was closely related to the CIOAC-Fronteriza and the Independent Front of Indigenous Peoples (FIPI) and, as part of the State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations (CEOIC), supported the setting up of the Pluriethnic Autonomous Region (RAP) Tierra y Libertad.

Before the town hall elections in October 2001, the factional struggle within the PRI had exhausted itself, causing the regional leaders of the PRI municipal committee and the CNC to nominate a little known candidate who, nonetheless, managed to win the elections. Meanwhile, the tense relationship that these two groups—the PRI and CNC—had with SOCAMA meant further divisions within the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), as E. Maldonado abandoned the ranks of the PRI and presented himself as a candidate for the *Partido Alianza Social* (Social Alliance Party – PAS) and M. Gálvez (from SOCAMA) shifted to the National Action Party (PAN), whilst L. Martínez, from the Indigenous Peasant Productive Council-Selva (COPICAS A.C.), presented himself as a candidate for the PRD in the municipality of Las Margaritas. Meanwhile, the Social Solidarity Society TojTzoTze Li Maya strengthened its alliance with the PRD. In sum, between 1994 and October 2001, the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa ceased to be a space where organizations affiliated to the PRI (such as the SOCAMA – Selva, the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union and the CNC) were hegemonic and instead became a place where candidates from four different political parties (the PAN, the PRD, the PAS and the PRI) registered and competed.

The results of the local elections in October 2001 reflected these realignments at all levels. With the victory of Pablo Salazar in the governorship elections through an opposition alliance to the PRI, new options opened up for local political forces. Pro-Zapatista civil organizations, who had sided with the PRD, appeared to be in a better position given the general situation in the Chiapas. For example, the economic projects of these organizations stopped being obstructed by the municipal council authorities.

In the region, the PRD and its allies hoped to win the local elections in 2001, but the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) again won the day, despite the fact that, if added together, the votes for the other political parties were much more than those received by the PRI.[109] This relative victory was possible because of a number of factors. The main one has been the split amongst the political forces that five years previously appeared to be simply antagonistic. In this process, the SOCAMA split into various factions, the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union abandoned the PRI and competed in the elections alongside the leadership of the TojTzoTze Li Maya under the banner of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The regional advisor to the SOCAMA abandoned the PRI after not being chosen as a candidate for the municipal presidency, and along with some of the followers of the Maravilla Tenejapa *Ejido* Union, presented himself as a candidate for the Social Alliance Party (PAS). In this realignment of regional political forces, it is said that the Zapatistas supported the candidates from the PRD, but that some pro-Zapatistas preferred to give their backing to the candidate from the PAS. The president of the local remunicipalization committee, who supported the PRI, claimed that some of the Zapatistas "in the know" supported the PAN candidate. Irrespective of being able to prove the truth of these assertions, the rumors that circulated in the region about how people were voting and the "mass abstentionism" of the Zapatista base communities are interesting in themselves.

All this helps us to consider how, in 2001, political life in Maravilla Tenejapa and the surrounding area was no longer determined by it being a "Zapatista autonomous community" but by being a new municipality, particularly after the dismantlement of the Zapatista autonomous community and the imprisonment of its authorities. But in spite of this, the "autonomous municipality" never completely disappeared. It was not until July/August 2003, when the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) issued the call to form *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Committees of Good Government), that we again saw the authorities from the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad in the media and

109 The PRI received 721 votes; the PRD, 545; the PAN, 480; the PAS, 257 (CEE-Chiapas 2001).

in Oventic, but this time as part of the new *Caracol*,[110] called "*Madre de los caracoles del mar de nuestros sueños*" ("Mother of the snails from the sea of our dreams") (Anonymous pamphlet, August 21, 2003).

Final Reflections

In this review of the political process experienced in the Selva Fronteriza region, it becomes very clear that the pro-government groups, as much as the Zapatistas, prioritized the municipal level in their struggles. This echoes what a number of studies have already pointed out (cf. Guillén 1996; Cabrero and Mejía 1998; García del Castillo 1999) regarding the significant ways in which municipal and territorial reorganization in Mexico has been promoted from different angles in recent years.[111] In Chiapas, it was the "conflict" and the signing of the San Andrés Accords, perhaps more than national tendencies, which gave remunicipalization its particular character and made it possible in 1999. Whilst it is true that there was more to the process than a simple change in the way the state was territorially defined, as we have seen in this chapter, the remunicipalization promoted by Governor Albores did not achieve the ideals of "reconciliation, governability, development and peace" that it discursively proposed.

The San Andrés Accords, as mentioned in the Introduction to this book, were characterized by one main idea: the proposal to foster a new relationship between the State and indigenous peoples. This was to be built upon the basis of recognizing indigenous peoples' right to free determination and autonomy. The Accords contained the principles, foundations and pledges that would underwrite this new relationship. In particular, they emphasized the Government's commitment to put in place legal reforms at both a state and national level that would facilitate remunicipalization in those regions where "indigenous peoples" were present. But as we have shown in this book, not in Maravilla, nor in Aldama, nor in Santiago, did the new municipality constitute a significant space for the realization of "indigenous rights".

110 The Zapatista *Caracoles* (Snails) substituted the Zapatista *Aguascalientes*. The latter were public forums that symbolized the encounter between "civil society" and the Zapatistas. The disappearance of the Aguascalientes took place in August 2003 as part of a Zapatista political strategy that endorsed a political solution to the "Chiapas conflict", along with resistance and *de facto* autonomy given the absence of a dialogue with the Government. The *Caracol* called "*Madre de los caracoles del mar de nuestros sueños*", which is in the Selva Fronteriza region, has its center in the community of La Realidad (Lacandon Forest) and is made up of the following autonomous municipalities: Tierra y Libertad, General Emiliano Zapata, San Pedro Michoacán and Libertad de los Pueblos Mayas (Anonymous pamphlet, August 21, 2003).

111 Between 1994 and 2002, the number of municipalities in Mexico rose from 2,392 to 2,430 (INAFED 2003).

The second point to stress in our study is that it was necessary to go beyond the municipal boundaries and explore the regional and state networks of the leaders of organizations in order to understand how political contacts and favors were an intrinsic part of their municipalization and pro-autonomy projects. The hegemony of the PRI clientelistic networks, in both Maravilla Tenejapa and the region as a whole, was evident in the fact that the proposal of Governor Albores prospered, thanks to all the typical elements of the authoritarian and corporate Mexican political system: the vertical decision making of the leaders, the lack of a genuine consultation with respective constituencies, the buying of opinions, the nepotism, the moral blackmail and the future promises. As Juan Manuel Ramírez has said (2003:139, 142), in Mexico we are not yet able to talk about the end of state corporatism and clientelism, although we can say that they are difficult relationships to alter in the short term, despite being internally eroded and the fact that there exist "new legal dispositions that limit their field of action". In fact, what there is in Maravilla and various other parts of the country (cf. Ramírez 2003) is a mixture and coexistence of emerging practices of a democratic type with others that are fundamentally authoritarian and non-participative.

As we have shown in this essay, in the municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa, whilst the corporate structures have experienced a permanent crisis since the 1990s, there also exist pro-democratic forces. For Alberto Aziz (2003:18), this is one of the typical features of the "Mexican transitional system", in the sense that the "old regime and the old system has not yet gone or been eradicated, and the new regime, the new political system, has not yet settled in or become dominant". For example, we can see the decree that established the new municipalities as clear evidence of "democratic inertia" when compared to the democratizing discourses of the Zapatistas or other "independent" peasant and indigenous organizations in the region.

In this chapter we have talked about *disputed spaces* when referring to social spaces in which institutional norms and informal strategies are put into play in order to be able to impose a project of domination. We have included the disputes between formal and informal groups with distinct ideological visions and political practices. In spite of these current differences, many of the members of these groups and networks share a common history of the colonization of the Selva Fronteriza region and a similar agrarian and *ejido* history that ended up absorbing them into PRI clientelistic networks that had confrontations with the Zapatistas, who mainly expressed themselves through the authorities of the autonomous municipality and region Tierra y Libertad. In these distinct type of networks, *social corporatism* (Schmitter 1992a, 1992b) functions and is underwritten by a participative and consensual ideology, which is anti-system, anti-government and *anti-state corporatism*. However, the existence of both types of corporatism leads us to talk of *real live citizens* that do not escape from what Norberto

Bobbio calls "the unfulfilled promises of democracy", amongst which one finds the predominance of groups over individuals in political life (Bobbio 1986:17-26).

What has been presented here, however, is not just a feint reflection of larger national and international tendencies. As we have seen, the demand for remunicipalization was not something alien to the recent history of the people of the Selva Fronteriza region, although it has to be acknowledged that many things changed in this region between January 1, 1994 and the elections of October 2001. Amongst the positive outcomes of this regional process we can list the following: the people no longer have to travel so far to speak to their municipal authorities; the multi-party system has opened up the possibility of going beyond the hegemony of the state party; the political parties have a more active local role and are beginning to contest spaces with local peasant and indigenous organizations; and actors in so-called "civil society" have begun, if only hesitantly, to demand some accountability from the municipal council.

All this might help us to see the future of the new municipality in an optimistic light, despite the poverty of the municipality and the fact that the municipal council has a very limited budget to spend in Maravilla Tenejapa. This means that we have to take into account a citizenry weakened by poverty and socio-economic inequality, despite the millions of pesos jointly distributed in the region with counter-insurgency intent by the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL), through the Social Attention Centers (CAS), the "*Programa Cañadas*", the National Fund for Companies in Solidarity (FONAES), etc. A further aspect that concerns us here is the disturbing presence of the Army, which is not only present in the region, but actually has its military base in the municipal seat of Maravilla Tenejapa. This, in turn, obliges us to consider the possible "militarization of politics", understanding this not only in terms of the public presence of members of the army but also in terms of their possible transformation into important political actors (local and regional) and even parallel civil authorities.

Finally, we also wish to point to the splits experienced by the organizations (social, economic and political) of all ideological shades, the growth in political party bureaucracy (which is part and parcel of the important role they have taken on locally) and the lack of an organic link in the region between "civil society" and Zapatismo. Seen from this angle, the Government's remunicipalization program did manage to achieve, in this case, its hidden military and political objectives; that is, they managed to counteract the presence of the Zapatistas, decapitate its pro-autonomy movement and place the region and its population under firm military control.

Table 5.1
Results of the Presidential Elections
Municipality of Maravilla Tenejapa
July, 2000

Name of Locality	Votes in total numbers and percentages								
	Section Number	Alianza por el Cambio[a]	PRI	Alianza por México[b]	PCD[c]	PARM[d]	Invalid Votes	Number of Register	Total Votes
Vicente Guerrero	731	1	212	64	1	0	14	0	292
Nuevo Rodulfo Figueroa	747	0	85	3	0	0	15	0	103
La Democracia	748	4	247	25	6	2	20	0	304
Zacualtipán	755	15	153	103	4	2	15	0	292
Loma Bonita	756	0	49	1	0	1	5	0	56
Flor de Café	757	6	125	102	5	2	16	0	256
Maravilla Tenejapa	758	2	243	90	1	4	15	0	356
Santo Domingo Las Palmas	759	6	237	202	4	4	28	0	481
Total Municipal Vote		34	1351	590	21	15	128	0	2140
Percentage		1.59	63.1	27.57	0.98	0.70	5.98	0	100

Source: IFE (2000).

a Coalition made up of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN) and *Partido Verde Ecologista de México* (Ecological Green Party of Mexico – PVEM).

b Coalition made up of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD), the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT), the *Partido de Alianza Social* (Social Alliance Party – PAS), the *Partido de la Sociedad Nacionalista* (Party of the Nationalist Society – PSN) and *Convergencia por la Democracia* (Convergence for Democracy – CD).

c *Partido de Centro Democrático* (Party of the Democratic Center).

d *Partido Auténtico de Revolución Mexicana* **(**Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution).

Table 5.2
Results of the Governorship Elections
Municipality of Maravilla

Name of Locality	Votes in total numbers and percentages						
	Section Number	Alianza por Chiapas[a]	PRI[b]	PDS[c]	Invalid Votes	Number of Register	Total Votes
20 de Noviembre	723	81	937	1	17	1	1037
Montecristo Río Escondido	743	235	507	0	25	0	767
Nuevo Rodulfo Figueroa	747	5	78	1	2	0	86
Amatitlán	748	33	148	0	1	0	293
Loma Bonita	756	6	49	0	2	0	57
Flor de Café	757	70	36	0	0	0	106
Maravilla Tenejapa	758	131	223	0	8	0	362
Santo Domingo Las Palmas	759	251	134	0	7	0	392
Total Municipal Vote		826	2208	2	63	1	3100
Percentage		26.65	71.2	0.06	2.04	0.03	100

Source: CEE-Chiapas (2000).

a Coalition made up of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN), the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD), the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT), and the *Partido Verde Ecologista de México* (Ecological Green Party of Mexico – PVEM).

b *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Institutional Revolutionary Party.

c *Partido Democracia Social* – Social Democracy Party.

Chapter 6

Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas: Local Responses to Remunicipalization

Neil Harvey

What did remunicipalization mean in Chiapas? For the state government of Roberto Albores Guillén (1998-2000), the creation of seven municipalities in July 1999 and the proposal to establish a further twenty-six were a central part of the state government's policy of pacification in the state (Albores 1998). For the Zapatistas and their sympathizers, Albores' project was just another element in the counter-insurgency strategy that had been put together by the Federal Government of President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) (CIEPAC 1999). For the opposition parties in Chiapas, remunicipalization was a unilateral measure of the interim governor and the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI) majority in the state Congress. These positions reflect not only the different interests at play, but also reveal the meaning of remunicipalization for those political projects at work beyond the municipalities in question (Burguete 1998, 2000). It was logical that an initiative of this type was to provoke so much controversy, but in this chapter we are primarily interested in looking at the reactions of the people directly affected by the establishment, in 1999, of the municipalities of Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas, as a result of Albores' project. On the basis of fieldwork, we find that remunicipalization has been appropriated in different ways by the local population, producing some surprises, particularly for the government that promoted it.[112]

112 I would like to thank Domingo Hernández, Marla Allison, Maria Harvey, Sally Meisenhelder and Bernhard Kaps for their support in the carrying out of this project. I would also like to thank all those people who received me in such a hospitable fashion in Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas, as well as Xochitl Leyva, Araceli Burguete, Jorge Alonso and all those colleagues that participated in this research project. Thank you to all of these for their valuable comments on the first draft of this chapter. Some parts of this chapter have already been published as: Harvey, Neil. 2005. "Who Needs Zapatismo? State Interventions and Local Responses in Marqués de Comillas, Chiapas". *Journal*

In these municipalities two positions were clear with respect to the remunicipalization of 1999: (i) for those who promoted it at a local level, it meant a new institutional space that had to be taken advantage of, not only for local development, but also to settle political disputes; (ii) for others, the way in which it was implemented did not represent any kind of progress and simply reproduced social exclusion and authoritarianism at a local level. In this chapter, we ask ourselves why these two positions were expressed, and what this discrepancy means for the future development of local politics. My argument is that these two reactions reveal two ideas regarding politics, one more related to public/institutional life (dominated by men), and the other more related to the rejection of and distancing from this type of politics, and the search for other spaces for participation (especially amongst women's groups). Although this second type of participation has been weak in Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas, I propose that there is enough evidence to suggest that it could have an impact on institutional politics with regards to the ways in which justice is administered. On presenting the recent history of these places in this way, my intention is not to create a false dichotomy between two ways of doing politics—one institutionalized and the other more everyday—but to signal that both exist in the same social space, where frontiers are not fixed but disputed and negotiated.

This chapter is organized into six parts. The first presents an analytical framework that hopes to stress some of the most important features of the remunicipalization process. I argue that this process in fact maintains the dominant way in which politics are practiced in this region. In other words, the establishment of the municipalities allowed various organized groups, acting according to a corporatist logic, to compete with each other in order to achieve better access to government institutions and the resources necessary to meet the region's infrastructural needs. Nevertheless, this continuity in political practice has been complicated by, on the one hand, changes in the relationship between local powers over the last ten years, and, on the other, by the search for other ways of doing politics that are less dependent on relations with institutions.

In the second section, I use these critical observations to trace the historical formation of these two municipalities, stressing the central role of corporatism in the structuring of local power networks, which was affected by the emergence of new *campesino* organizations in the region during the 1990s. The third part describes how the institutional path has been appropriated by local actors and how the competition developed between different groups of local actors. The fourth part discusses the problems that both municipalities faced in their first year of office, point-

of Peasant Studies 32 (3-4) (July-October):625-646. And also in 2007 in *Rural Chiapas Ten Years after the Zapatista Uprising*, edited by Sarah Washbrook. London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 213-234.

ing out the successes as much as the obstacles, and how these are reflected in electoral preferences in the local and federal elections of 2000. The fifth section discusses the ways in which women have experienced this process, stressing their critiques and how they beg important questions concerning the ethical and political character of the new municipalities. The last section presents some conclusions about the results of remunicipalization over its first two years. I also offer for reflection a few suggestions about the way in which these new municipalities might confront new challenges and possibilities in order to create a municipal life that is more inclusive and egalitarian, thus contributing to peace with democracy in Chiapas.

Between Politics and the Political: The Institutional Path and the Particular

The context surrounding this institutionally led remunicipalization is not limited to the current political situation in Chiapas. The preference for the institutional path owes itself to a long history of practices and discourses through which the Mexican State, like many modern States, has sought to legitimize its presence within the confines of the nation. The colonization of the region we are concerned with here (and of other parts of the Lacandon Forest) obeyed this logic and where the most obvious outcome was not the elimination of poverty, but the extension of the State's conceptual and institutional apparatus. For Foucault, it is the extension of these apparatus that produces the subject, not as an autonomous and free individual, but as the culmination of a series of increasingly subtle interventions that shape his or her identity (Foucault 1979, 1980).

Other authors have used this focus to show the thousands of ways in which the institutional "development" apparatus has justified its own existence, to such an extent that it becomes impossible to think about the improvement of social conditions in, for example, the Lacandon Forest, without resorting to the discourse of "development" in some way (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994). Now, although this focus is very helpful for understanding the ways in which institutional power consolidates itself, it is also necessary to avoid over-determinism and to leave open the possibility of these subjects resisting and responding to other discourses that present themselves in everyday life. We are dealing with a distinction that can be made between "politics" and "the political" (Slater 1998:386-7; Mouffe 1993). Whilst "politics" are expressed in the continual effort to impose order on social life, "the political" refers to the conflicts and asymmetries that make politics possible in the first place, even though politics can never manage to achieve an ultimate order and thus finish, once and for all, with the political. In order to recognize this impossible institutionalization of

social life (Jelin 1998; Melucci 1998), it is important to value the particularity of each experience, such as those associated with "development", or, in the case in hand, with remunicipalization. In this sense, the work of Derrida is relevant because it signals the way in which the meaning of a text never presents itself as finished and reducible to an origin or a founding moment (Derrida 1973).

If there is no final authority, all history can be deconstructed, allowing for the possibility of knowing and practicing other forms of being that have been suppressed and marginalized by the belief in an origin or "logos" (what Derrida calls "logo-centrism"). What resists logo-centrism is difference, expressed in the multiple ways in which everybody responds to their social environment. For Derrida, it is necessary to value these "particular experiences", without falling into a defense of fundamentalisms or subordinating oneself to grand ideologies and their institutional apparatus (Derrida 1992, 1996).

In this way one can think about the possibility of various re-readings of history and thus propose other horizons that have been hidden by decisions that have given a particular form to current social structures. In the case being considered here, particular experiences inhabit the institutional structure of the new municipal governments, always negotiating the construction of the government apparatus and politicizing it beyond political parties and elections. If we look at it this way, we avoid the problem of having to establish a rigid separation and confrontation between two totally divided structures (public/private). The deconstruction of these dichotomies is the aim of my analysis, in order to be able to show that inside remunicipalization there exist new challenges and possibilities for making communities and regions more inclusive and egalitarian.

We can start by pointing out that, in Mexico, as in any country, the relation between the decentralization of power and democracy presents specific challenges for the construction of more inclusive municipalities. Tonatiuh Guillén refers to various contradictions that continue to limit the democratization of local spaces.[113] Firstly, he points out that the very structure of the municipality is not adequate to its task and cannot respond effectively to the diversity of local interests. In open contradiction to what Guillén calls "the diversity of the local", municipal elections are still dominated by national political parties, thus limiting the participation of independent candidates and giving too much power to state and national party leaders in local administration. A second problem is the lack of democratic controls on the actions of the municipalities, which provokes a greater distancing between authorities and citizens. In more general terms, one can speak of a gap between institutions and everyday life, which

113 Comments made by Tonatiuh Guillén on the Panel on Remunicipalization in Chiapas, CIESAS-Sureste, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, August 31, 2001.

takes place in all the spheres of political life, including that of the new municipalities. This distancing is the paradoxical outcome of political reform in Mexico. If on the one hand democracy has allowed citizens to be able to choose their governors in a freer and more transparent way, government institutions themselves, and their forms of management, continue to be far from democratic. Guillén presents it thus: "Articulated in extreme terms, electoral democracy only expresses our freedom as citizens to choose an authoritarian government" (Guillén 1999a:134).

Municipalities are important for the understanding of these contradictions and tensions in the democratization of Mexico because they represent local spaces where citizens tend to be more critical of the ways in which government is exercised; in other words, at a local level, the contradiction between electoral democracy and the lack of real democratic control over municipal administrations is more obvious. This contradiction is exaggerated by the excessive power held by municipal presidents within town halls, and the lack of continuity in development programs between one administration and the next, turning each three-year term of government into an improvised renovation of the municipal administration (Guillén 1999a).

It must be added that the most common type of social organization in Mexican rural areas is corporatism, understood as an agglomeration of social interests in *campesino* organizations or *ejido* unions that function as privileged interlocutors in the management of government departments' resources.[114] In the formation of local political groups, corporatism structures power networks in such a way that it permits the State greater control over the actions of subjects. In the Marqués de Comillas region, the *ejido* unions have exercised this role, monopolizing the channels that permit access to state institutions, thus limiting the development of a more independent role for citizens. *Campesino* movements that established themselves in the 1990s opened up new options for the channeling of demands, and contributed to the weakening of traditional corporatism, but they tended to reproduce the political practices of the corporatist model, which, as we shall see, manifested itself in the ways the two municipalities were governed.

114 The *ejido* is one of the principal forms of land ownership in Mexico. It is distinct from private property because it is the outcome of a government land grant (or *dotación*) to groups that have applied for land and it is managed collectively through an *ejido* commission, which defines the use of the *ejido* lands amongst the members of the *ejido*. With the passing of a new agrarian law in 1992, for the first time the legal sale of *ejido* lands was permitted, providing the *ejido* assembly was in favor. The *ejido* unions are organizations that bring together more than one *ejido* in order to be able to promote joint actions in a particular region, such as the commercialization of agricultural products. They have therefore occupied a key role in political networks in rural areas.

The Regional Framework: Colonization, Corporatism and Social Differentiation

The municipalities of Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas were established in what was formally considered a single sub-region of the Lacandon Forest, known as "Marqués de Comillas". For the local actors who lobbied for re-municipalization, their main reason for asking for the establishment of a municipality was the considerable distance between this region and the old municipal seat in Ocosingo. This distance, they said, made any kind of bureaucratic process or application very difficult, as well as causing a feeling of being left out when it came to the granting of public works programs and other municipal services. As we shall see later on, the original proposal was to establish just one municipality that included the 38 *ejido*s that made up this region, but because of conflicts about where to put the new municipal seat, it was decided to establish two municipalities: Marqués de Comillas with the municipal seat in Zamora-Pico de Oro, and Benemérito de las Américas with the seat in the town of the same name.

The name "Marqués de Comillas" belongs to Claudio López Bru, a Spanish marquess, who in 1887 received a land concession in the state of Guerrero from the government of Porfirio Díaz (González Ponciano 1995). The *marqués* was not able to occupy his new property and in 1905, just ten years after the final treaty on the frontier between Mexico and Guatemala, he received titles to the area now known as Marqués de Comillas. In the era of Porfirio Díaz, this region was characterized by the extraction of precious timbers for export. Various foreign companies founded logging camps that cut mahogany trees, using the labor of indigenous peoples from the central Highlands (Los Altos) and the northern part of the state, who worked under deplorable conditions. For example, between 1880 and 1890, there were logging camps on the banks of the Lacantún and Chixoy Rivers, whose names still denote the new settlements, such as Pico de Oro, the municipal seat of Marqués de Comillas.

The *marqués'* lands remained unoccupied until 1934, when the Federal Government expropriated them, thus giving rise to a legal challenge on the part of lawyers working for the daughter of the Spanish *marqués*, but it never succeeded. Finally, in 1955, the property was declared "state lands" (*terrenos nacionales*). Due to its isolation, the region continued to be uninhabited for many years. It was not until the 1970s that the first colonizers began to arrive.

The region as a whole, which now makes up the two new municipalities, has an enormous strategic importance for the political and economic life in Chiapas. On its southern and eastern sides, the region is defined by the international border and the Salinas River, and borders the Guatemalan departments of Alta Vera-

paz, El Quiché and El Petén. Towards the west, it is separated from the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve by the Lacantún River. It has an area of 200,790 hectares—around 10 percent of the Lacandon Forest—and 92 percent of the region is flat; the few hills that do exist are in the southwest of the region. The entire region is classified as *ejidal*. Despite the exploitation of forestry resources, in 1996 around 65 percent of the area was forested, 17 percent corresponded to forest regrowth areas (*acahuales*), 7 percent to pasture for cattle, and a little under 3 percent of the area was devoted to agriculture. The main activities are agriculture, cattle ranching and forestry. From 1987 onwards, there has been greater interest in the conservation of the forest in Marqués de Comillas, although many of the conservation and sustainable development programs have failed due to a lack of financial and technical support on the one hand, and, on the other, because of the way government institutions have failed to incorporate the needs and experiences of the local population in their policies.

One factor that distinguishes this region from others in Chiapas is its heterogeneous social and cultural composition. Before the 1970s, it was an uninhabited zone and very difficult to reach, but from 1970 onwards the Federal Government began to promote the colonization of the region through "New Ejidal Population Centers", made up of land applicants from various states, initially Guerrero and Michoacán. At the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, other *campesinos* arrived from the states of Veracruz, Tabasco, Oaxaca and Hidalgo, as well as from Chiapas itself. In contrast to the Cañadas of Ocosingo, Altamirano and Las Margaritas, the colonization of Marqués de Comillas did not result in a majority indigenous population, although some *ejidos* continue to belong to a single ethnic group. On the contrary, the majority of inhabitants are *mestizos* from various states in the country, including Chihuahua, Zacatecas and even Mexico City,[115] who, on the whole, arrived with more resources at their disposal than the indigenous peoples that populated the Cañadas, although they had to endure many problems in the first few years (illness, lack of roads and basic services, etc.)

In fact, the heterogeneity of the population obliges us to recognize the diversity of experiences when considering local reactions to the remunicipalization process.[116] Immediately after colonization, the new *ejido* came to be controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), through two *ejido* unions that func-

115 In Benemérito de las Américas, 51.64 percent of the inhabitants are from Chiapas; 47.96 percent come from other states, whilst 0.4 percent are foreigners. In Marqués de Comillas, 67 percent are from Chiapas and 33 percent from other states (Consejo y Comisión Estatales de Remunicipalización del estado de Chiapas 1999a and 1999b).

116 Concerning the history of colonization and development in the Marqués de Comillas region, see de Vos (1988), Durán *et al*. (1988), González Ponciano (1995), Gutiérrez and Herrera (1995), Aripe, Paz and Velázquez (1993), Bray (1997), Neubauer (1997), Harvey (1998b), Cortez (1998), Saldívar (1998), O'Brien (1998) and Villafuerte Rosales (1999).

tioned according to the traditional corporatist style: the *Ejido* Union Julio Sabines, with its base in Zamora-Pico de Oro, and the Fronteriza del Sur *Ejido* Union, mainly made up of *ejidos* that ended up being a part of the municipality of Benemérito de las Américas.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Marqués de Comillas began to gather strategic importance for the Mexican Government for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the arrival, en masse, of Guatemalan refugees and the closeness of the civil war in neighboring Guatemala forced the Government to strengthen its presence on this frontier through colonization and the construction of a new frontier road (which was not completed until 2000). A further reason was the exploration of oil reserves in the region by *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX). Between 1984 and 1989, 12 exploratory wells were sunk. But because of financial difficulties, PEMEX did not make much progress in the extraction of the oil and the wells were sealed before withdrawing from the area in 1993.

In the mid-1980s, another official concern emerged, this time due to the accelerated deforestation caused by the rapid and uncontrolled colonization of the region, the extension of cattle-raising and the selective cutting of trees with commercial value, such as mahogany and tropical cedar. In 1987, an initial attempt was made to establish a sustainable development plan for the region, but it was not given enough time to have an effect because in 1989, the Federal Government, supported by the state government, imposed a forestry ban in order to curb criticisms from the international community. However, this ban did not take into account the needs of the local population in Marqués de Comillas. One important outcome of this was an increase in the levels of social and political conflict in the region, often between *ejido* members that attempted to carry on selling their timber and the police that confiscated it and imposed fines. It was because of these conflicts that, in 1991, an organization called the *Movimiento Campesino Regional Independiente* (Independent Regional Peasant Movement – MOCRI) was formed, made up of dissidents from the old Fronteriza del Sur *Ejido* Union, most of whom were young men with some experience of *campesino* struggles in their home towns.

The MOCRI was affiliated to a national agrarian movement called the *Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala* (National "Plan de Ayala" Coordinating Committee – CNPA). The MOCRI-CNPA soon became the most radical organization in the region, using tactics such as the occupation of government buildings, road blocks, marches and protest meetings, in order to demand solutions to economic and social problems. In 1994, the MOCRI-CNPA was, at a local level, the social organization that most identified with the causes of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN), although it did not share its strategy of armed struggle. This same year, the MOCRI-CNPA gave its support to the opposition candidate for the state governorship and took part

in the declaration of new rebel municipalities, creating the *Municipio Rebelde y Autónomo José María Morelos y Pavón* (Rebel and Autonomous Municipality of José María Morelos y Pavón) with its base in the *ejido* Quetzacóatl, 2nd section, which is now part of the municipality of Benemérito de las Américas. It is worth mentioning that the rebel municipality was never consolidated owing to a number of factors, such as accusations of corruption against one of the main leaders, the militarization of the region from 1995 onwards and the government's proposal to establish a new municipality through institutional channels. The most serious problem was the division, in 1997, of the MOCRI into two separate organizations, one known as the MOCRI-CNPA, and the other as the *Sociedad de Cooperativas de Marqués de Comillas* (Marqués de Comillas Society of Cooperatives). The latter organization did not participate in the government sponsored remunicipalization process, preferring instead to devote itself to agricultural and forestry activities and business.

Another important piece of background to the remunicipalization was the weakening of the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union. What occurred in this case was that in 1993 a considerable number of younger men from the *ejidos* situated on the banks of the Lacantún River and in the central part of the region joined some new producer groups known as *Sociedades de Solidaridad Social* (Social Solidarity Societies – SSS), that had been promoted and supported by government workers from the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (Secretariat of Social Development – SEDESOL), which forms part of the Federal Government. In 1995, when the forestry ban had been partially lifted, the Social Solidarity Societies accepted to participate in a new sustainable development plan, under the control of a special department in the *Secretaría de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca* (Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries – SEMARNAP). This new connection led, in 1997, to the creation of a *Consejo para el Desarrollo Sustentable de la Selva de Marqués de Comillas* (Council for the Sustainable Development of the Forest of Marqués de Comillas – CODESSMAC), which brought together Social Solidarity Societies working in forestry from a dozen *ejidos* that belonged to the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union. Despite many economic and institutional obstacles, CODESSMAC has continued to try to find markets for tropical species. In political terms, CODESSMAC has opted for negotiation over confrontation. It has not suffered from divisions as severe as those of MOCRI, but there has been considerable dissatisfaction amongst many of its members about what they have actually been able to achieve. CODESSMAC has attempted to base its independence on economic progress, but has encountered serious difficulties in the sale of its timber and in attracting new capital investments for local infrastructure. During the remunicipalization process, its leaders and advisers supported the proposal that the municipal seat be in Benemérito de las Américas because of its higher level of

development and infrastructure, apart from being a place that was outside of the control of the leaders of the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union.

The deterioration of corporatist control, which took place in the case of the two official *Ejido* Unions, had an effect in the sphere of party politics and elections. If before 1994 the region was considered a bastion of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), in recent years there has been a notable swing towards the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD), which was clearly evident in the state and federal elections that took place in July and August, 2000 (see Table 6.1). Therefore, the idea to create a municipality occurred in a context of political conflict and a counter-offensive on the part of institutions, which were able to make the most of weaknesses in the independent social movements in order to design an official project "from above". It was logical that the government would attempt to use remunicipalization to strengthen the power of the PRI in the different regions being affected. In the case of Marqués de Comillas, this meant a return to the local power networks that had been questioned in the 1990s, because of the emergence of independent organizations and the growing electoral competition represented by the PRD. Therefore, one can interpret remunicipalization as a new attempt to channel the various expressions of social discontent (individual articulations of what I have termed "the political") through a new institutional process, which also meant a transfer of funds–though not sufficient–from the state government to local actors.

The Local Appropriation of Remunicipalization: The Institutional Path

For those local people in Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de Las Americas who promoted the process, remunicipalization was necessary mainly for the following reasons:

- The problems associated with the distance from the old municipal seat in Ocosingo, which implied considerable expenditure in both time and money in order to carry out any bureaucratic process, including birth and marriage certificates.
- Because of this distance, the communities in this region had always been ignored by federal, state and municipal institutions.
- Therefore, the communities have many needs that have not been attended to, which has meant high levels of social and economic marginalization and a considerable lack of confidence in the Government.

Given this situation of abandonment and marginalization, the idea of having their own municipality became a central demand for the leaders of the *campesino* organizations (for the "official" ones, as well as the "independent" ones) and for an influential group of local PRI activists. Despite their differences (discussed below), those who lobbied for remunicipalization from this region shared the same goal of gaining independence from Ocosingo, which they finally achieved on July 28, 1999, when the municipalities of Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de Las Americas were formally constituted. From then on, the inhabitants of these municipalities have hoped to attend to, in more efficient ways, the many needs of the region, such as roads, access to electricity, rural satellite telephones, schools, clinics, potable water, drainage, housing, security, agricultural and forestry development, markets and employment.

The demand for remunicipalization in the region had existed since 1980, when the interim governor at the time, Juan Sabines Gutiérrez, proposed the establishment of a municipality in Marqués de Comillas. But due to the lack of communications and services during the first few years of the colonization of the region, the proposal faltered. Later, in the first two years of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's six-year term (1988-1994), the need for a new municipality was again brought up. A working group was established by the municipal authorities in Ocosingo that tentatively began to sketch the area of the new municipalities. Afterwards, in 1993, the *ejido* authorities in Zamora-Pico de Oro began to look at the need that this area had for becoming a free municipality.

But it was not until 1994 that remunicipalization began to have a real possibility of taking place, owing to the political situation produced by the Zapatista uprising. One of the proposals put forward by the Peace Commissioner, Manuel Camacho Solís, was the establishment of new municipalities in the "conflict zone", which would include the Marqués de Comillas region. The PRI candidate to the state governorship, Eduardo Robledo Rincón, took up the proposal that Benemérito de las Américas be the new municipal seat in this region. On hearing rumors about this possible remunicipalization plan, some people began to put together their own proposals and look for ways of attracting the attention of functionaries in the state government. From this moment, it was possible to identify two different strands of opinion regarding where to establish the municipal seat in this region.

The first to act were those in the *ejido* Benemérito de las Américas. In March, a rumor began to circulate that the government wanted to push ahead with remunicipalization. With this new situation, the first application was made by the *agente municipal* (municipal agent), Pablo Sánchez, with the approval of the first group of lobbyists for the cause, made up of José ("Pepe") Meza Cruz, Mauro Berlín and other *ejido* authorities. It was Pepe Cruz who wrote the first formal

application to the state government in April 1994, thus demonstrating their interest that Benemérito de las Américas become the municipal seat.

In the following month, in the *ejido* Zamora-Pico de Oro, the first lobbyists called a meeting for May 4, with the participation of *ejido* authorities and municipal agents. This group was made up of *ejido* authorities, along with militants from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union. Amongst these, it is worth mentioning Luis Hernández Dávila, Julio Hernández Leyva, Juan Marroquín Pérez, José del Carmen Olan Martínez, Humberto Hernández Canseco and Sotero Hernández Canseco. All were united by the desire to have a municipality with its seat in the *ejido* Zamora-Pico de Oro. In the May 4 meeting, 22 *ejido* authorities of the 38 *ejidos* in the area supported the proposal that the municipal seat be in Zamora-Pico de Oro. This desire was formally expressed in the first application from this *ejido*, in a letter dated May 12, 1994, written by the PRI representative, Julio Hernández Leyva. At the same meeting, Sotero Hernández Canseco, who represented the *ejido* Zamora-Pico de Oro in the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union, was nominated as the head promoter or lobbyist for the new municipality. It is important to mention that the authorities from Benemérito de las Américas decided not to accept an invitation from the Zamora-Pico de Oro group to attend this meeting.

Each group sought a direct connection with the state government. In the case of Benemérito, Pepe Meza was able to take advantage of an old friendship with a government undersecretary, Mario Bustamente Grajales, whom he had known before arriving in Benemérito, when he was the leader of a local association of bus drivers in the municipality of Reforma (in the north of Chiapas). At that time, Bustamente was the state leader of this association, and through this government connection, the Benemérito group of lobbyists was able to get their application to the right desks in the state government.

It is important to mention that each group had its own strengths and weaknesses. The Benemérito group had the PRI candidate in their favor, as he supported the idea of Benemérito as municipal seat. However, this group lacked the strong organization needed to sustain their application. On the other hand, the Zamora-Pico de Oro group found itself in the opposite situation: they did not have the support of the official candidate, but they did have much greater support from the *ejido* authorities (22 of the 38 in the region). Once Eduardo Robledo Rincón was elected in August 1994, the main challenge for the Zamora-Pico de Oro group was to overturn the proposal to locate the municipal seat in Benemérito.

Given this context of competition for the municipal seat, Robledo's government called the authorities from the region's 38 *ejidos* to a meeting at the Lion's Club in Ocosingo on February 5, 1995. At this meeting it was decided to leave the

deliberation over the location of the municipal seat until the following assembly, which was to take place at the Pico de Oro crossroads on March 12 of the same year. During the time between these two meetings, the Zamora-Pico de Oro lobby group organized assemblies in the 22 *ejidos* that supported their position. On March 11, the authorities from these 22 communities got together in order to endorse their support and formally receive a donation of 30 hectares from the *ejido* Zamora-Pico de Oro for the construction of the new town hall. It is important to mention that, at this time, three *ejidos* were still involved that would, in the end, remain outside of the remunicipalization process: Loma Bonita, 13 de Septiembre and El Ixcán. Despite this group's organizational efforts, at the March 12 meeting, Benemérito de las Américas was chosen as the new municipal seat. The Zamora-Pico de Oro group complained about the pressure tactics employed by their rivals in Benemérito, and later issued a legal appeal.

The government remunicipalization proposal was not specified until May 1996, when, by government decree, the *Comisión Especial para la Reforma Municipal, la Redistritación y la Remunicipalización* (Special Commission for Municipal Reform, Redistrictization and Remunicipalization) was created by the interim governor, Julio César Ruiz Ferro. The same 22 *ejidos* that had supported Zamora-Pico de Oro expressed their continuing support for this group of lobbyists in the same month. In March 1997, the Special Commission programmed a series of meetings with the negotiating groups, and called all the groups in Marqués de Comillas to meetings in three towns in the area: Benemérito de las Américas, Nuevo Orizaba and Zamora-Pico de Oro. Meanwhile, however, the make-up of the lobby group from Benemérito de las Américas had changed since 1995. Despite the support of the governor, Eduardo Robledo Rincón, the lobbyists now had less support from the *ejido* authorities in the region. The initial momentum lost force in 1995 and it was not until 1996 that another lobbyist, Tomás Meza, president of the Fronteriza del Sur *Ejido* Union, began again to lend support to the idea of Benemérito as the municipal seat. However, his efforts still suffered from a lack of sufficient support from below.

This difference with regards to those negotiators and lobbyists in Zamora-Pico de Oro principally owed itself to the make-up of local political groups. Whilst in Zamora-Pico de Oro, the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union managed to consolidate a power network amongst the *ejido* authorities in the first communities that settled on the banks of the River Lacantún, the Fronteriza del Sur *Ejido* Union never managed to take root amongst the *ejidos* that had been established more recently. The population of Benemérito de las Américas was much more diverse and less attached to *ejido* political structures; businessmen, construction workers, service providers, as well as a significant floating population are all present in the town. In contrast to Zamora-Pico de Oro, the lobbyists from Benemérito were not

able to take advantage of a ready-made corporatist structure, as was the case with the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union. Consequently, it had to establish itself through a wide variety of local organizations. This absence of a united front placed the Benemérito de las Américas group at a disadvantage between 1994 and 1996.

Given this situation, some of the Benemérito group reacted by calling a meeting in the local Mexican Institute of Social Security Field Hospital on April 12, 1997. The main lobbyist at that time was Galdino Alonso, a delegate from the *Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Especializados en el Estado de Chiapas* (Labor Union of Specialized Workers in the State of Chiapas – SUTECH), which brought together the workers involved in the construction of the *fronteriza* road. This meeting initiated what the lobbyists called the "Rescue Operation" (*Operación Rescate*), in other words, the "rescue" of the proposal favoring Benemérito as the municipal seat. A "Pro-Municipal Political Council" (*Consejo Político pro-Municipio*) was established, with 30 representatives from social organizations. The leadership of this council was composed of Galdino Alonso (secretary), José Luis Hernández Cruz (from the PRI), as president, and Pepe Meza, as treasurer. The council also had political advisers, such as Pablo Gómez, a PRI militant. The composition of this council reveals the social and political differences between Benemérito and Zamora-Pico de Oro. In the council, there participated not only the *ejido* authorities from Benemérito de las Américas and the Fronteriza del Sur *Ejido* Union, but also local inhabitants, including younger men, a women's committee and indigenous persons, along with the local Cattle Union, the Business Union, teachers, the National Union of Social Security Workers, the Workers' Union of the *Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* (Confederation of Mexican Workers – CTM), the Taxi Drivers' Union, the Transport Union and local committees of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The noteworthy exceptions were the leaders of the Independent Regional Peasant Movement (MOCRI), who favored the proposal of Zamora-Pico de Oro (which will be explained below).

Once this Political Council was established, the competition with the lobby group in Zamora-Pico de Oro grew considerably, although ironically the wider situation in the state became less favorable with regards to the whole remunicipalization process. In the second half of 1997, the remunicipalization policy lost momentum because of the resistance presented by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in the "conflict zone" and also because of the criticisms of the opposition parties and the *Comisión Nacional de Intermediación* (National Commission for Mediation – CONAI), who considered the official plan to be a unilateral measure that would work against the achievement of peace and reconciliation in Chiapas. Given this context, the lobby groups in both Zamora-Pico de Oro and Benemérito de las Américas had to wait for more favorable conditions,

but they did not waste a moment in their local struggle to strengthen their power bases. In the case of Zamora-Pico de Oro, the *ejido* again donated lands for the possible new municipal buildings, and the lobbyists continued to hold assemblies and to remind the state government of their demands. They complained about the lack of attention they were receiving from Julio César Ruiz Ferro's government, but they kept up their levels of organization at a local level.

The Benemérito group, on the other hand, recognized that they lacked sufficient presence in the area in order to be able to compete with the network of *ejido* authorities associated with the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union. For this reason, it took advantage of the creation, in mid-1997, of another regional entity, the *Consejo Consultivo Regional* (Regional Consultative Council), created by the Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries (SEMARNAP), in order to bring together the main social organizations in the area under an assistance program for productive and sustainable projects. Although this new entity did not have a real impact on the promotion of sustainable development, it did represent a very important space for the clash between the two remunicipalization lobby groups. In this council's third meeting, held in the *ejido* Boca de Chajul in June 1997, the Benemérito group managed to have José Luis Hernández Cruz nominated as the president of the council board. This position morally strengthened the Benemérito group's standing for the rest of 1997, although, as we have mentioned, it did not have an impact in the promotion of sustainable development in the region.

A new situation opened up after the Acteal massacre on December 22, 1997. On this day, 45 members of a civil organization known as "Las Abejas" were killed in the community of Acteal, in the municipality of San Pedro Chenalhó, in the Chiapas Los Altos region. The killers were PRI militants who had organized themselves into a paramilitary group with the idea of attacking those who sympathized with Zapatista communities, who had set up one of the more than 30 autonomous communities in the state. The PRI group had been harassing members of Las Abejas, because they did not wish to participate in violent acts against the Zapatistas. The massacre was widely condemned and resulted in the arrest of the local mayor and various minor government functionaries, although more senior government workers were not investigated, such as Governor Ruiz Ferro. Nevertheless, one of the political fallouts of the massacre was the replacement of Ruiz Ferro by another interim governor, Roberto Albores Guillén, in January 1998. Albores' counter-insurgency policies were characterized by a full frontal attack on the autonomous municipalities, which translated into a series of police and military actions in the spring of 1998, which attempted to dismantle these municipalities. At the same time, Albores injected new life into institutional remunicipalization, creating by decree in June 1998, a new government entity: the *Comisión Estatal de Remunicipalización* (State Remunicipalization Commission –

CER). This meant that local lobbyists in Marqués de Comillas again had hope of achieving their free municipality.

The principal lobbyists in Zamora-Pico de Oro continued to be José del Carmen Olan Martínez, Sotero Hernández Canseco, Julio Hernández Leyva, Luis Hernández Dávila and María Hernández Canseco. As we have already mentioned, throughout 1997, this group continued with their activities to strengthen their plan to become the new municipal seat. As Julio Hernández Leyva said: "We already had all the paperwork ready when Albores Guillén decreed the creation of the CER. We were ahead of the game". With the arrival of Albores, both groups again had hopes of achieving their municipality, but, nonetheless, neither group gave ground on the issue of where the municipal seat was going to be situated. During 1998, they defined their positions more clearly. The Zamora-Pico de Oro group argued in favor of a communal vote; in other words, the group maintained that the choice should be made on the basis of a majority vote of the *ejidos*, and that in each *ejido*, the members should arrive at an agreement about their preference. The other position, that of Benemérito, was that the vote should be individual and include those that were not members of an *ejido*. Each group had its own pragmatic suggestions for the election. The former group knew that they could count on the support of the authorities in 22 of the 38 *ejidos* in the region, but that they would lose an individual vote because Benemérito's population was larger. The latter group knew this very well and was also aware that they would be unable to break the control of the authorities in so many *ejidos.* Therefore, their only chance of winning depended on the fact that Benemérito had the greatest population density, many of whom were not *ejido* members.

This disagreement kept the two groups busy during most of 1998. The fact that the new governor, Albores Guillén, had unleashed so many hopes regarding remunicipalization via the institutional path only served to underline even more what was at stake in the region. When the external conditions gave a better chance to the Zamora-Pico de Oro group, the dispute over the municipal seat became more heated. For example, in June 1998, the Zamora-Pico de Oro group resigned from the Regional Consultative Council, directed by José Luis Hernández Cruz (member of the Benemérito lobby group). The Zamora-Pico de Oro group justified their resignation by arguing "Hernández Cruz [was] using the *ejidos* that make up this council for political ends and not for the purposes for which the council was created" (Minutes from Council Assembly meeting, Zamora-Pico de Oro, June 10, 1998).

As the tension grew between the two rival groups, other social organizations entered into the fray that had, until now, remained on the fringes of this dispute over the location of the municipal seat. Particularly important was the participation of the Independent Regional Peasant Movement (MOCRI-CNPA). As has

already been pointed out, at the end of 1994, the leaders of MOCRI-CNPA had promoted the creation of a rebel autonomous municipality, but the idea did not take hold, and instead of opting to join the rebel Zapatista municipality Tierra y Libertad (which the Zapatistas hoped to extend across the whole frontier zone), its principal leaders decided to support the demand for institutional remunicipalization.[117] Owing to an old connection with the groups that made up the Pro-Municipal Political Council in Benemérito (attached to the PRI), the Fronteriza del Sur *Ejido* Union and a few labor unions with connections to the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), MOCRI-CNPA accepted the proposal to form an alliance, in the summer of 1998, with the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union and the Zamora-Pico de Oro lobby group (MOCRI-CNPA and Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union 1998). In June of this year, MOCRI-CNPA took the same decision as the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union, resigning from the Regional Consultative Council, thus isolating the Benemérito group even more. The political agreement between the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union and the MOCRI-CNPA served to attract the support of 27 of the *ejido* authorities for a communal vote to choose the new municipal seat. This agreement was reached at the end of November 1998 and registered in the minutes from the assembly meeting (Agreement, Minutes from Council Assembly, Zamora-Pico de Oro, November 22, 1998). The Zamora-Pico de Oro group took this agreement to a meeting with the president of the State Remunicipalization Commission (CER) on November 24, and argued that the selection of the municipal seat should be decided on the basis of a vote by *ejido* members, because "we are the people who established the new settlements and are the owners of the lands that make up this region and it is within our *ejido* assemblies, on the basis of our free will and autonomy, that we decide our social, political and economic development" (Agreement, Minutes from Council Assembly, Zamora-Pico de Oro, November 22, 1998). Making their power as *ejido* authorities count and even deploying an "*usos y costumbres*" argument to defend the "communal vote", the lobbyists in this group applied pressure until the last moment in order to get their own municipal seat. The level of opposition between the two groups was such that,

117 It is worth mentioning that there existed Zapatista support bases (*bases de apoyo*) in some communities that were attached to the autonomous municipality Tierra y Libertad, which remained on the margins of institutional remunicipalization. Nevertheless, the Zapatistas, in the region I am looking at here, have not had as much presence as they have in other parts of the "conflict zone" and could not prevent official remunicipalization from proceeding. During this period, the Zapatistas in this region devoted themselves more to supporting the various political activities promoted by the EZLN, such as, for example, the carrying out of "encounters" between 1996 and 1998 in the various "Aguascalientes" and the referendum on indigenous rights held in March 1999. It is important to point out that the political differences between the MOCRI-CNPA militants and the Zapatistas became so serious that they led, in some cases, to violence, including one murder and the expulsion of various Zapatista families at the hands of MOCRI members.

according to one of the old MOCRI-CNPA leaders, the Zamora-Pico de Oro lobbyists would have preferred to remain part of the municipality of Ocosingo if the government had chosen Benemérito as the new municipal seat.

Meanwhile, the lobbyists in the Benemérito Political Council managed to maintain their unity despite a great diversity of social organizations and argued that Benemérito offered the advantages of better infrastructure, services, businesses and population that the new municipal seat required. Furthermore, they used a democratic discourse to criticize their rivals. One of Benemérito's main lobbyists, Galdino Alonso, claimed that in 2001 those who supported Zamora-Pico de Oro were not 27 communities, but 27 *ejido* authorities, or municipal agents. In other words, the people in these communities were not able to freely participate in the decision; it was simply an agreement between the actors that made up the corporatist network of the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union, with the support of the MOCRI-CNPA.

Faced with the impossibility of reconciling these two positions, on January 8, 1999, the president of the State Remunicipalization Commission proposed the establishment of two municipalities in the region: "Marqués de Comillas", with its seat in Zamora-Pico de Oro, made up of 24 communities, and "Benemérito de las Américas", with its seat in the town of the same name, and made up of 14 communities. This proposal was immediately accepted by the Benemérito group, whilst the Zamora-Pico de Oro group decided to discuss the proposal in an assembly meeting held on January 11. At this meeting, the proposal was accepted and it was agreed to create a monitoring commission, made up of seven people, amongst whom figured two of the main lobbyists: Luis Hernández Dávila and Julio Hernández Leyva. The lobby groups in both of the new municipal seats welcomed the decision to establish two municipalities, a proposal that avoided greater conflicts.

Once it was decided to establish the two municipalities in the region, elections were organized to decide the municipal councils. In both cases, the method for choosing the new authorities reflected the power of the *ejido* commissions. Rather than one person, one vote, the candidates were nominated by the *ejido* assemblies. In the case of Marqués de Comillas, the municipality was divided into five micro-regions. The first of these was the municipal seat itself, which assumed the right to name the president of the municipal council. The other *ejidos* were then divided into four micro-regions, each with a similar population. In assemblies, each micro-region nominated the other authorities; that is, the legal officer (*síndico*) and three councilors. The result was that the composition of the council was dominated by an old group of leaders who had a close relationship with the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union. The president elect was Humberto Hernández Canseco, a member of the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union, whilst the other important posts of

treasurer and administrator of public works were filled by two of the main lobbyists: Julio Hernández Leyva and Luis Hernández Dávila. The MOCRI-CNPA, through its alliance with the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union, managed to obtain for one of its members the post of legal officer; Baltazar López Vázquez, from the *ejido* Río Salina Cruz, was elected for the micro-region Centro-Fronteriza.

In the case of Benemérito de las Américas, the 14 *ejidos* held their own assemblies and nominated the same number of pre-candidates to hold posts in the municipal council. Like Marqués de Comillas, the post of president was reserved for the candidate for the municipal seat, and one of the main promoters of the new municipality, José Luis Hernández Cruz, was duly elected. The other *ejidos* were divided into four micro-regions, from which were chosen the candidates that had already been nominated in the *ejido* assemblies. Those in charge of choosing between the 14 pre-candidates were the 14 *ejido* commissions and their municipal agents. In this way, every sub-region was represented by one of the pre-candidates from its *ejidos*, who, in the end, was elected by a combination of *ejido* commissions and municipal agents. This local power network was thus made of lobbyists linked to the Fronteriza del Sur *Ejido* Union, as well as a wide range of social organizations and labor unions. As the leaders of MOCRI-CNPA had supported the Zamora-Pico de Oro group, they did not participate in the formation of the new municipality of Benemérito de las Américas.

As the municipal council elections favored those groups with links to the PRI, local leaders of the Independent Regional Peasant Movement (MOCRI-CNPA) mobilized themselves to win at least one post in the municipal council. Arguing that the *ejido* assemblies had been manipulated by PRI leaders in the municipal seat, those in the MOCRI-CNPA undertook marches and protests in the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, and occupied the state Congress' enclosure in order to demand that their candidate be included in the new municipal council. These actions achieved their aim: they created disagreements between local PRI members and gave a seat on the municipal council to a MOCRI-CNPA leader, Alejandro Estudillo Martínez. This man replaced a PRI member who had been put in charge of indigenous affairs in the municipality. The new municipal authorities were sworn into office at a ceremony held at the Government Palace in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, on August 28, 1999, and they occupied their posts in the following October.

"Children that Begin to Walk": The First Year of Municipal Government

In the municipalities of Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas, the first year was characterized by a lack of sufficient funds to attend to local needs. Many inhabitants referred to these new municipalities as "children that

begin to walk", and recognized that it was impossible to solve problems from one day to the next. Consequently, they demanded more assistance from other levels of government. Although the budget for 1999-2000 was larger than when the area formed part of the Ocosingo municipality, it was not enough to undertake large-scale projects, such as the improvement of roads.[118] The budget permitted both municipalities to embark on at least one public works project for every community. Nevertheless, all the councilors believed that the federal government should allocate more resources in order to be able to extend the electricity network and put in more potable water systems.

These new municipalities have had to face up to these difficulties in the provision of better basic services and, in some communities, they have even acknowledged the need to discuss other options that achieve a balance between the relative advantages of urban services and a valuing of the tropical forest environment. Even before remunicipalization, there had been various attempts in the new municipalities to promote more sustainable development projects. These projects included the rational management of forestry resources, intensive cattle ranching and eco-tourism. Those that have encouraged such efforts have tended to see the new municipalities not as the solution to their problems, but as an important point of contact between other institutions in the higher echelons of government. But at the same time, the new municipal authorities have continued to seek good relationships with federal government departments that have the greatest access to resources.

In fact, the behavior of local voters in the elections of 2000 obeyed this same logic, generally supporting candidates that had a better chance of gaining access to other areas of government. The political party element was in fact quite weak, as most people voted for the candidate rather than the party and this was clearly expressed in both municipalities, in both the state elections and the federal ones. The candidates for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) were severely punished, particularly in the municipality of Marqués de Comillas (see Table 6.1).

The majority vote in favor of Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía, candidate to the governorship for the opposition coalition *Alianza por Chiapas* (Alliance for Chiapas), on August 20, owed itself to a number of factors:[119] the weakness of the PRI

118 Between 1999 and 2000, the budget granted to each of the new municipalities (Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas), was around 9 million pesos. This sum becomes relevant if one considers that 4 million pesos were allocated to this area between 1998 and 1999, when these municipalities still formed part of the municipality of Ocosingo.

119 If we combine the votes in both municipalities, the Alliance candidate won by 614 votes (2,309 against 1,695 for the PRI candidate). The winning margin was considerable in the municipality of Marqués de Comillas (987 votes compared with 399 for the PRI), whilst in Benemérito de las Américas, the Alliance won 1,322 votes compared with 987 for the PRI (see Table 6.1).

after its historic defeat in the federal elections on July 2; the alliance of almost all the opposition parties into a single coalition, which made victory for their candidate far more probable; local dissatisfaction with how the PRI had run the state government; the criticisms of groups who were unhappy with the way the new municipal councils were working; and expectations that Pablo Salazar's government would allocate more resources to the region, as well as being more open to a dialogue with the *campesino* organizations. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the abstention level was very high in both municipalities and on both polling days, which reveals that electoral competition was restricted to local political groups, without the participation of the majority of inhabitants, especially in Benemérito de las Américas.[120]

In the case of Benemérito, the scepticism towards municipal politics reached a highpoint in 2001 because of the poor administration of the new municipal council. In this year, serious corruption accusations were made against the president, José Luis Hernández Cruz, and the legal officer of the municipal council, Reynaldo Moreno Hidalgo, which involved the embezzlement of funds earmarked for public works that were never carried out. In July 2000, there had already been some complaints by communities outside the municipal seat, but these accusations grew throughout the rest of that year. In 2001, these feelings ran higher than ever, resulting in the detention of the president himself and other municipal workers at the hands of *campesinos* belonging to the Independent Regional Peasant Movement (MOCRI-CNPA).

The MOCRI-Selva councilor, Alejandro Estudillo, had tried to call attention to these acts of corruption, but did not manage to convince the other two councilors until they themselves saw the evidence of embezzling funds. In 2001, the three councilors, Alejandro Estudillo, Casarín Díaz Domínguez and José Manuel Lizcano García, presented formal complaints against the president and the legal officer before the state Congress. Nevertheless, the PRI majority in the Congress blocked the investigation and carried on supporting the two accused men. This not only revealed the new municipalities' lack of independence in relation to the local congress, but also created a growing mistrust amongst the inhabitants of Benemérito regarding the real benefits of having their own municipality. Those that had lobbied for the new municipality, such as Galdino Alonso, expressed their disappointment with how Hernández Cruz had behaved, saying that they had expected him to be a good president but that it had not ended up that way. In fact, before taking on the post, the municipal presi-

120 In Benemérito de las Américas, there was an increase in abstentionism between the two elections, rising from 57 percent in the elections of July 2 to 63 percent on August 20. In Marqués de Comillas, abstentionism was less; it went down from 59 percent on July 2 to 44 percent on August 20 (see Table 6.1).

dent had already begun to dismantle the Political Council that had supported him and began creating his own power network amongst the *ejido* commissions in the municipality, thus managing to influence the assemblies of various communities so that they would choose new commissions sympathetic to his position.

These authorities were accused of complicity in the embezzlement of the municipal funds. The weakness of the Political Council became clear when it was unable to resist Hernández Cruz, soon allowing itself to be bypassed and proving unable to mobilize a popular front against the corruption in 2001. Proof of this political weakness was the fact that the election of the Benemérito's first municipal president, held on October 7, 2001, was won by the PRI candidate, Jorge Ramos Mijangos, a member of Hernández Cruz's group.[121] Although the municipal committee of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) presented a formal challenge to the *Consejo Estatal Electoral del Estado de Chiapas* (State Electoral Council – CEE-Chiapas) in order to annul the election owing to the irregularities that were reported at various polling booths, the challenge did not proceed and everything seemed to indicate that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) would continue to employ its tried and tested networks and methods to govern the Benemérito municipality in 2002-2004. This first experience of municipal government in Benemérito ended up producing considerable scepticism amongst the majority of its inhabitants, and a profound sense of disappointment amongst those who had invested so much time and work into achieving their own municipality.

The way in which the municipal council in Marqués de Comillas managed its affairs was also questioned by those groups that had not been happy about the way the municipality had been set up. On a number of occasions, these people seized vehicles belonging to the municipality in order to pressurize the municipal council into finishing public works in their communities. Nevertheless, these criticisms and demands did not reach the level that has been described in the case of Benemérito.[122] According to the second president of the municipal council, Sebastián Gómez Méndez, his administration managed to get various federal government departments to commit themselves to investing greater resources in priority pro-

121 The official results in Benemérito de las Américas were the following: PRI, 1,522 votes; PRD, 849; National Action Party (PAN), 821; Labor Party (PT), 90.

122 According to various people interviewed in Zamora-Pico de Oro, the demands and tactics of these groups in Zamora-Pico de Oro was one factor amongst others that led the first president of the municipal council, Humberto Hernández Canseco, to take his own life on June 22, 2000. Other probable causes of this tragic decision were of a personal nature. It is also possible that pressure exerted by the PRI, so that the president would support the organization of the vote for their candidates in the key elections of 2000, may have had an influence. The post of president was taken on by the councilor Sebastián Gómez Méndez.

jects that were beyond the possibilities afforded by the municipal budget. Noticeable examples were the commitment of the Federal Road Commission to invest 5,400,000 pesos for the reconstruction of the road between Zamora-Pico de Oro and Boca de Chajul and the Federal Electricity Commission to invest 11,400,000 pesos to extend the national grid to six communities along the river (Reforma Agraria, López Mateos, Galacia, Playón de la Gloria, Boca de Chajul and Flor de Marqués). But despite these achievements, the municipal elections held in October 2001 revealed that the opposition continued to be stronger than the PRI. The winner was the PRD candidate, Andrés Olan Herrera, with 966 votes. He was followed by the PRI candidate, one of the main lobbyists in favor of the new municipality, José del Carmen Olan Martínez, with 718 votes. Lastly, the candidate for the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN), Bernardo Villafuerte Rosales—the main adviser to the Council for the Sustainable Development of the Forest of Marqués de Comillas (CODESSMAC)—won 592 votes. This result revealed the stability of the PRD vote in the municipality, as well as a recovery in the PRI vote since the year before and the not insignificant support for the PAN candidate, principally from those linked to CODESSMAC.

For the PRI supporters, it was an unpleasant result–although not unexpected–because the PRD candidate, an ex-member of the MOCRI-CNPA and the Cooperative Society led by Hernán Cortés, had not been involved in the lobbying process for the new municipality between 1994 and 1999. The lobby group was left wondering how it was possible that a person that had not even taken part in the negotiating process for the new municipality had been able to win the first party political municipal election. The PRD supporters would most probably have responded by saying that the electoral result reflected the widespread dissatisfaction with the outgoing administration and that the desire for political change ("*el cambio*") had finally arrived in Marqués de Comillas.

Comparing the two municipal governments, we can conclude that in Benemérito de las Américas, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) power network managed to maintain its presence, despite the corruption accusations against the president of the municipal council, because of the protection given to it by the state Congress, along with the lack of unity amongst opposition groups and the continuation of anti-democratic electoral practices. In this case, remunicipalization did not contribute to local democratization or to reconciliation. On the contrary, it ended up reproducing authoritarianism, spreading disillusion amongst the majority of the population and risking future governability.

The experience in Marqués de Comillas has been more positive. Governability has not been eroded in the same way, and the political groups have managed to handle their differences within the arena of party politics. The PRI power net-

work achieved its main aim, that of establishing a new municipality with its seat in Zamora-Pico de Oro. In the process, the lobbyists and *ejido* authorities revealed an impressive organizational capacity. However, they could not do much to counter dissatisfactions within the communities themselves, which were expressed through participation in independent social organizations—mainly the MOCRI-CNPA and the CODESSMAC—and, of course, in voting behavior. This network continued to have a strong presence amongst the political leadership and undoubtedly helped in the remunicipalization struggle. The irony for these lobbyists was that, as they continued to adhere to corporatist practices that were both familiar and effective, the political scenario changed, leaving them with a free municipality, but without the possibilities of guaranteeing their political hegemony in the new political entity. With the change in municipal authorities, Marqués de Comillas faced an uncertain future. This is because this change may end up reproducing what has occurred in Chiapas and the rest of the country, where the new municipal authority will not be able to satisfy the very over-optimistic expectations created by its victory at the polls.

Negotiating Remunicipalization: Individual Experiences and Everyday Life

Following our distinction between "politics" and "the political", we can now consider those groups that decided not to formally participate in the establishment of the new municipalities, despite having their own perspectives on this process, which reflect their individual experiences of everyday life. We can illustrate this less "public" and more hidden side through the experiences of women's groups in both municipalities.

The majority of women did not participate in the remunicipalization process. For example, in Zamora-Pico de Oro, participation was limited to those women who were wives or relatives of the men involved in the lobby groups. These women also visited communities in order to organize support for remunicipalization, traveling to Tuxtla for meetings with government functionaries and cooking for the numerous groups of *campesinos* that came to the regular assemblies. In Benemérito de las Américas, the Pro-Municipal Political Council formally included representatives from the Women's Committee, but as we have pointed out, the president of the council proceeded to weaken the council once he had been elected. A telling fact was when the president decided to arrange that, in July 1999, his wife receive the wife of Governor Roberto Albores Guillén, thus side-lining the Women's Committee, which had been nominated to do this task by the Political

Council. This attitude led the secretary of the Political Council, Galdino Alonso, to break off his relationship with the president elect. This decision discouraged the participation of women in the new municipality.

The majority of women did not take part in the formal administration of the new municipality, except those women who participated along with the lobbyists in Zamora-Pico de Oro and the Women's Committee in Benemérito, who received a slap in the face from "their" president. For many women, having a new municipality did not alter the exclusion and violence to which they have traditionally been subjected; on the contrary, according to the promoter of a youth group, the new municipality has brought more problems and they have been excluded from the decision making process.

> Since they made the new municipality the number of *cantinas* [bars] has gone up, along with prostitution and domestic problems. They didn't pay us women any attention. I would like the municipality to be different, with the people in charge, not the municipal president or the Governor, and I would like them to consult us and there to be democracy and women to occupy municipal posts (Female youth promoter, personal communication, Zamora-Pico de Oro, July 21, 2000).

This woman bases her criticisms on her everyday experiences, where alcoholism has been directly linked to violence against women, which makes us wonder about how justice is administered in the new municipalities. A number of women brought this issue up during my fieldwork, claiming that the municipal authorities protected those who sell alcohol instead of regulating its sale and thus preventing the rise in the number of *cantinas* in the communities. Therefore, everyday life should not be considered as a separate sphere to the formal political structure. Rather, women's demands make us reflect on the ways in which justice is administered, a key element in any public administration system. For example, in July 2000, a group of 15 women got together to protest in front of the provisional offices of the municipal council and presented a petition to denounce the recent death of a woman at the hands of her drunken husband. The women not only demanded justice but also insisted that the municipal council close all the *cantinas* in the *ejido*. At this time, many men were pressuring their wives to convert parts of their houses into *cantinas* or shops that sold beer. According to the group of women that protested, these men were encouraged by families who controlled the distribution of alcohol, families that were "closely related" to local and regional power groups.

Confronted by these women's protest, the council president responded by saying that he could not close all the *cantinas* because this would encourage the

illegal sale of alcohol and thus entail bigger problems. But he did offer to regulate the sale of alcohol, limiting it to three beers with a meal, and demand that the state government health department only issue permits to those who complied with these regulations. For the women protesters, this response was inadequate, and they decided to keep up the pressure to avoid the possible corruption of the councilors and achieve a more effective control of alcoholism in the municipality. This case shows that remunicipalization has reproduced relations of domination at the local level, but it has also opened up another space where people can fight for a more dignified life and a more inclusive community. In this space, the meaning and future character of remunicipalization and its possible contributions to democracy and justice in Chiapas may end up being debated. The impact that this politicization of daily life could have is summed up in the words of a woman who coordinated a women's network in the municipality of Marqués de Comillas.

> What we want from the new municipality is, firstly, to be taken into account, to be able to have an official post in the community and to be able to take on responsibilities in the community. That's the first step, that women be considered for the posts in the municipality and in the state as a whole (Interview, Zamora-Pico de Oro, July 19, 2000).

With regards to the similarities and differences with the Zapatistas, one woman from the new municipality of Benemérito de las Américas commented that:

> [In the Zapatista municipalities] the Indians are organized and appoint and remove the authorities if they do not fulfill their duties, but [in our municipality] the authorities push aside whomever they please (Anonymous woman, personal communication, Benemérito de las Américas, July 24, 2000).

Conclusions

Remunicipalization is a process that has been appropriated and negotiated by diverse groups and individuals in Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas. I have tried to describe the impact that this initiative had for the local population, noting the different ways in which local actors participated in the process. I wanted to show the unfinished nature of any structure, opening the analysis up to an assessment that goes beyond institutional logics. In this brief conclusion, I want to underline that the plans, intentions and structures of remunicipalization have been overtaken by events, thus opening up new possibilities

and challenges for the establishment of more inclusive and egalitarian municipalities.

It is important to stress that remunicipalization has meant very different things for different local actors and the state government. For the latter, remunicipalization was part of a political strategy that had distinct aims to those of the local lobby groups in Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas. The principal objective of the state government was to counteract the Zapatista rebel municipalities by offering an "institutional path" as the only legal option to satisfy the just aspiration to have an independent municipal government. The first package of new municipalities, which included Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas, sought to test how the project would be accepted on the margins of the "conflict zone", in order to subsequently approve a second package, which would have more influence in the center of the "conflict zone".

In certain respects, it was "natural" that the governor, Roberto Albores Guillén, would choose Marqués de Comillas as a safe place to legitimize an initiative that was heavily questioned from the beginning. In this region, there didn't exist Zapatista support bases as strong as in certain other parts of Chiapas; furthermore, the independent movements were weak and the attempt to set up a rebel municipality had failed. Given this context, the government saw an opportunity to strengthen local PRI groups so that they would occupy the new municipal posts, thus reaffirming the political control of the PRI in the region. Moreover, and fortunately for Governor Albores, the remunicipalization in Marqués de Comillas could be presented as an effective answer to a genuine demand that also served to legitimize his government, which had been seriously questioned.

For the local population, all of the governor's political calculations were secondary to their own reckonings about how to gain independence from Ocosingo. Everything seemed to indicate that remunicipalization in this region occurred in order to benefit all those involved. The governor gained a bit of legitimacy through his "institutional path" and the lobbyists in Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas gained, at last, their own municipalities. If the intention of the government was to strengthen the PRI bases in the new municipalities, the result has been far more complex and contradictory. In Marqués de Comillas, the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) overtook the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in numbers of votes, in the 2000 elections as well as those in 2001. Although the old leaders of the Julio Sabines *Ejido* Union remained vital for the new municipal council, they had to confront a new wave of electoral competition. The PRD was very encouraged by the victory of Pablo Salazar on August 20, 2000, and consolidated its position on winning the first municipal elections in Marqués de Comillas on October 7, 2001. In Benemérito de las Américas, electoral competition was more conflictive and hard fought. In the elections of 2000,

electoral support for the PRI and the *Alianza por Chiapas* (Alliance for Chiapas) was almost the same and pressures were exerted before the elections and conflicts were experienced after them. According to these results, the stability of both municipalities cannot be guaranteed like it could be in the days of a corporatist relationship between the local PRI members and the state government. Stability also depends more on the ability of a range of actors to learn new ways of political practice and negotiation.

In certain respects, remunicipalization can be understood as a new attempt to impose order where there is conflict. This institutional "ordering" does not eradicate the problems that caused these conflicts, but it does divert them through new channels. However, new demands and needs are emerging that were not given priority during the remunicipalization process, because almost all efforts were devoted to the question of where to locate the municipal seat. Instead of reproducing the traditional model of the inflexible, ineffective municipality, it is important that local actors devise other ways of governing that respond to new economic, political and social circumstances.

Let us conclude with a few proposals. In the first place, it is necessary to confront the pressures of economic globalization that tend to convert rural areas into regions of migration and abandonment, rather than production and employment. The development plans designed by the Government and the World Bank for southeastern Mexico (reflected, for example, in the Plan Puebla-Panamá) present new challenges for both these municipal governments and they cannot continue to depend on the old scheme of government assistance for badly coordinated projects. In my judgment, it is necessary to help all of these communities find alternative models of development that value not only the labor of *campesinos* but also the cultural expressions of this region's heterogeneous population. These cultural identities must be made the foundation for these economic alternatives, and the local diversity must not be permitted to disappear because of the entry of the market. In other words, the region's cultural diversity should act to redefine, starting with the communities themselves, the type of regional development projects to be implemented. The history of this region is full of failed programs, precisely because of the almost total absence of links between the institutions and the needs of the communities. The new municipalities should help to create a relationship based on the institutions having a better understanding of local conditions and of the region's cultural diversity.

Secondly, faced with the population's increasing disenchantment on not seeing their expectations fulfilled, it is necessary to put into place mechanisms that ensure the democratic control of the municipal authorities. In Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas, the lack of these kinds of controls was conspicuous, and it had serious consequences, especially in the latter municipality,

provoking considerable discontent and severe governability problems. If democratization lacks these kinds of controls, it simply reproduces the same old authoritarianism, but with a new veneer of legitimacy provided by the polling booths.

Finally, the new municipalities have to open themselves up to the demands for greater participation that have come from actors that are not represented by *campesino* organizations and the *ejido* unions. I refer, above all, to women, young people and the communities furthest from the municipal seat. Greater participation would achieve a greater social integration of the population in both municipalities. If the new municipalities are going to contribute to democracy and justice, they will have to respond to these new challenges in an adverse economic climate, as well as in a political environment characterized by a lack of confidence in institutions and in the much-proclaimed "democratic change". As we have seen, the old forms of corporatist organization and the traditional model of the municipality functioned very well to accomplish remunicipalization via the "institutional path", but they are insufficient when the new challenges are democracy, justice and equitable and sustainable development.

Table 6.1
Comparison of Votes and Abstentions in Presidential and Governorship Elections

	PRI	*Alianza por el Cambio*[a]	*Alianza por México*[b]	*Alianza por Chiapas*[c]	Abstentions
Benemérito de las Américas					
Elections for:					
President	1,790 (60%)				4,186 (57%)
Governor	1,296 (49%)	221 (7%)	909 (31%)	1,322 (50%)	4,645 (63%)
Marqués de Comillas					
Elections for:					
President	499 (39%)				1,905 (59%)
Governor	399 (29%)	137 (11%)	607 (47%)	987 (71%)	1,806 (44%)
Totals for both municipalities					
Elections for:					
President	2,289 (54%)				6,091 (58%)
Governor	1,695 (42%)	358 (8%)	1,516 (36%)	2,309 (57%)	6,451 (61%)

Sources: IFE (2000) and CEE-Chiapas (2000).

Note: The percentages correspond to valid votes and levels of abstention in the elections for President of the Republic, held on July 2, 2000, and for Governor of the state of Chiapas, held on August 20, 2000.

a Coalition made up of the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN) and the *Partido Verde Ecologista de México* **(**Ecological Green Party of Mexico – PVEM).

b Coalition made up of the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD), the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT), the *Partido de la Alianza Social* (Social Alliance Party – PAS), the *Partido de la Sociedad Nacionalista* (Party of the Nationalist Society – PSN) and *Convergencia por la Democracia* (Convergence for Democracy – CD).

c Coalition made up of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the National Action Party (PAN), the Labor Party (PT) and the Ecological Green Party of Mexico (PVEM).

Chapter 7

Montecristo de Guerrero: The Unsettled Business of Remunicipalization

María del Carmen García Aguilar and Jesús Solís Cruz

As a government response to the initiative of the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista Army of National Liberation – EZLN) to create autonomous municipalities, the Chiapas state government instigated a strategy of remunicipalization that became official with the issuing of a decree by the local Congress on July 28, 1999. In its only stage, seven municipalities were created, amongst them Montecristo de Guerrero, a municipality at a considerable distance from the so-called "conflict zone" and with a predominantly *mestizo* population. Its inclusion was the result of an intersection between the socio-political situation created by Zapatismo and a historical struggle for the recovery of municipal powers that were lost in 1933.

Montecristo de Guerrero, and its struggle to recover the municipality, provides an opportunity to look at a particular regional reality and at local power structures that are common to the majority of Chiapanecan municipalities. Minor towns such as Montecristo are often excluded from municipal decision making processes and have experienced a centralism and authoritarianism that, as Guillén (1996) has pointed out, are characteristic of the Mexican political system at all levels of government. This centralism and authoritarianism, which is frequently articulated through the unequal distribution of economic resources and public posts, has led to regular local applications for the creation of new municipalities. This option, however, does not necessarily guarantee an equitable distribution of resources and jobs at a local government level and it also brings with it the risk of political fragmentation. It is important to mention other alternatives under consideration that are demanding, at a municipal level, the formulation of a parallel agenda to state reforms (Guillén 1996).

Once constitutionally recognized, the new municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero has faced some serious challenges. Not only were the old territorial

limits not recognized, but its territory, extremely small and without a basic social and economic infrastructure, has a considerable population dependent on agriculture. The challenges that the wider context presents are also considerable. These derive not only from broad economic reforms and changes, but also from demands for the democratization of political life and of government itself, which involves state reforms, the active and plural participation of citizens and substantial changes in the character of the government's relationship with society.

In this chapter, we try to put on the record the tensions, possibilities and limitations that came into play with the implementation of the remunicipalization decree. On looking at the dynamics of this particular local society, we soon came up against a history of material deficiencies and a non-democratic political culture. Likewise, when looking at the dynamics created by government strategy, we had to acknowledge a history of authoritarian and centralist practices on the part of the state executive and a considerable gap between local realities and the formal objectives of peace, internal reconciliation, governability and development. On looking at the first year of the new municipality's government, we had to account for problems of a structural and functional nature that demand broader consideration.

In this framework, we maintain the view that local aspirations for development, which ideally raises the quality of life and work of the population, will only be fulfilled in a context of democratic governability. This, in turn, demands not only a reconsideration of the relationship between the three levels of government in their political and financial dimensions, but also a profound reconsideration of the political ambitions, relationships and spaces that national development strategies have been constructing. Undoubtedly, some of these are the basic aspirations of the old and new municipalities in Chiapas, that today find themselves confronting—and internalizing—economic and socio-political pressures in a complex global environment.

Territory and Regional Power

Montecristo de Guerrero is part of the Frailesca region, which is made up of the municipalities of Ángel Albino Corzo, La Concordia, Villa Corzo and Villaflores. During the colonial period in Chiapas, the Dominican friars and the Franciscan order built churches and large *haciendas*, or estates, with many production centers, particularly in the Cuxtepeques Valley. For example, in 1778, the Jaltenango *Hacienda* was one of the most important cattle estates run by the Dominicans in Chiapas. From the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the development of the Cuxtepeques Valley, and its links with the Sierra

Madre region, was defined by the transformations and innovations in the structure of production. The valleys, particularly what we now know as the Frailesca region, were affected by the emergence and rapid development of coffee estates which, because of their productive specialization, were linked more to the Sierra region and the Chiapas coast.

In this mountainous territory, a small village called Montecristo was established in 1890.[123] Its first inhabitants were families from the municipality of Siltepec and neighboring Guatemala (Pereyra n.d:13). On the margins of the large *haciendas*, its identifying links were with the Sierra Madre, a region that, along with the Soconusco, was characterized by a capitalist economy based on coffee. The availability of national territories meant that a considerable amount of land, owing to its marginal quality, had not yet caught the interest of the companies contracted to divide land into plots. This led to an agrarian structure based primarily on small and medium sized properties, which would co-exist alongside the large German-owned estates (Del Carpio 1988).

From 1910 onwards, the more prominent members of Montecristo initiated procedures for the creation of a municipality with its capital in Montecristo. They paid the costs of the relevant applications, in both the state capital and Mexico City. The authorities' response was a favorable one. A decree dated May 27, 1912, approved by the then Governor Flavio Guillén, indicated that "the category of free municipality is granted to the people of Monte Cristo, made up of 7 villages, 12 estates and 4 hamlets" (*Periódico Oficial*, Decree no. 23, May 27, 1912). In 1913, the town council was formally constituted. However, given the weak links with the Chiapas state executive and legislature and the shakiness of public finances in this period, the municipal authorities restricted themselves to the most basic functions, those that guaranteed a level of social stability that allowed the business generated by coffee production to develop and prosper.

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, despite the growth in the number of small properties, the lowlands of this region were still dominated by the large *haciendas* of the colonial era. Many of the owners of these estates were absentee landlords, who lived in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. All these estates were dedicated to cattle raising and the production of basic grains, but during the 1910s and 1920s they ceased to be managed directly by their owners and were effectively abandoned due to the uncertainty caused by the revolution. This meant a lowering in production levels, which affected the local and regional economies.

123 Originally the village was called La Mesilla. In 1912, it changed its name to Montecristo. In 1931, due to the anti-clericalism of the government of the time, the village was registered with the name "Vicente Guerrero" (in honor of General Vicente Guerrero), a decision that did not consider the opinion of the village, which finally opted for the name "Montecristo de Guerrero".

The revolution and the consequent pressures exerted both within and outside of the large estates meant that emerging actors were able to free up large extensions of land which led to the setting up of new production units. During this process, the large estates perished. The arrival of the "*nacionaleros*"[124] and the threat of the redistribution of lands brought about the sale of lands to private individuals and the number of cattle ranches grew in the lowlands. These land holdings, along with new *ejidos*, ended up replacing the large estates based on hereditary oligarchies. By the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship between these new ranches, the estates and the coffee producing highland regions grew, meaning that the coffee trade moved towards the lowlands.

From the 1930s and 1940s, the Frailesca region's lowlands and neighboring areas experienced a slow but sustained economic recovery, driven, as in the past, by cattle and the production of basic grains. The exploitation of forestry resources and the expansion of the coffee sector led to the emergence of a small but enterprising group of traders and businessmen. Out of these social and economic transformations, new economic power groups emerged that would compete for regional and intra-regional hegemony.

It was because of this that Montecristo lost the status of municipality in 1933. The decree issued in March of that year by Governor Vitórico Grajales indicated the following in its first article: "The municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero is proclaimed disappeared". The legal explanations, which led the governor to take this action, mention the alarming spread of *onchocerciasis* ("river blindness"), which severely affected inhabitants in Montecristo and required preventative measures in order to save the inhabitants without damaging political and administrative activities. This meant the dissolution of the municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero and the creation of another municipality with the same jurisdiction but which included the village of Jaltenango La Paz (later known as Ángel Albino Corzo), which became the new municipal seat.

Nevertheless, apart from this official version of events, the people of Montecristo have developed various versions over the years that have served to reaffirm their cultural and identifying ties with the Sierra Madre, the Soconusco and the coast. There exist both oral and written constructions that record the sense of dispossession and institutional pressure to join the economic, social and cultural dynamics of the Central Valleys. Since then, the loss of the municipality has remained an underlying factor that, over the decades, has defined relations with the municipality of Ángel Albino Corzo.

Amongst the various local versions that explain the loss of municipal status, it is worth mentioning one in particular. Victórico Grajales, governor of Chiapas

124 *Nacionaleros* was the term used to describe *campesinos* that arrived and occupied territories belonging to the State ("*terrenos nacionales*") and subsequently requested formal recognition as *ejidos*.

between 1932 and 1936, embarked on a campaign of burning images of saints and Montecristo challenged this policy by hiding the images in a private house. Therefore, when the "saint burners" (or "devil swallowers") arrived, they did not find any images to burn. The chronicler, Francisco Díaz Alvarado, described this event in the following way:

> [I]n the year 1932, when the order came to burn the images of saints on authority of the Governor Victórico Grajales, the Municipal Judge, who was obliged to carry out such an order, set a date for the removal and burning of the images. On being informed of this, the Catholics had a meeting, headed by Manuel Pérez Chávez and Mariano Zepeda and waited for the government order to be carried out. The authorities soon realized the strength of the catholic faith and decided not to carry out what had been planned. Several nights passed and they did not proceed with the order, after which the authorities met with the Catholics and they agreed to remove the images and place them in the house of Domitila Sánchez Escobar, and to this day these images can be found in the church in front of the main square (Díaz 1991).

The Montecristo chroniclers have insisted on the unconstitutional nature of the governor's decision: the problem of *onchocerciasis* affected the whole region and not just the municipal capital. They acknowledge that, after the revolution, the town had been ruined and many of its inhabitants had abandoned their lands. With the illness, this emigration intensified, but nonetheless, they maintain that this situation affected the region in its entirety. The fundamental reason for shifting the municipal capital "had to do with the economic interests of the people in the lowlands, who had the support of the governor" (Pereyra n.d.:8).

In 1925, farmers in the region applied for a *dotación* of lands that belonged to the Jaltenango *Hacienda*. As already mentioned, the purpose was to dismantle the *haciendas* (which by then had effectively become large unproductive properties) and create ranches and *ejidos*. As one might expect, the emergence of a new power structure, with links to the lowlands and their interests, managed to dispossess Montecristo of its municipal powers, whose municipal seat was in the mountainous part of the region and had links with the Sierra Madre and the coast. The new private land owners and *ejidatarios*, as Ramírez (n.d.) points out, were members of General Tiburcio Fernández Ruiz's private army, the leader of the counter-revolutionary movement in Chiapas. This explains why Jaltenango La Paz soon assumed the status of municipal seat in Ángel Albino Corzo.

The shift of power from Montecristo de Guerrero to Ángel Albino Corzo was thus the result, in our view, of pressures emanating from this emerging power

structure, with the leadership of lowland *ejidatarios* and ranchers. It is important to emphasize that the formation of this new regional power structure, in contrast to the past and to other regions in Chiapas, was the product of independent actions of individuals from the private production and business sectors accompanied by a revolutionary institutional discourse and the Federal Government's policy of land distribution. The latter created collective properties and a local power structure based on the *ejido*, although it was subordinated to the political guidelines set by state and national state party corporate organizations.

In keeping with the post-revolutionary era, the dispute for political power occurred in struggles over the local control of the state party corporate apparatus and over the control of state and federal institutions that were responsible for the application and regulation of agrarian and agricultural policies. The control of regional political development remained in the hands of these leaders and a local bureaucracy, which acted as a mediator in the relations between the local population and central government. In the case of the Frailesca region, local power groups organized themselves around common interests between those who embraced the policy of land distribution and those who supported private property. It was therefore a question of avoiding the uncontrolled conversion of lands into *ejidos*, but at the same time being able to make the most of a national and state political system that defined itself as revolutionary by promoting the cause of the dispossessed masses. On the other hand, the reorientation of the coffee trade routes, that turned the new municipal capital into the center of this business, clearly assisted in the accumulation of capital by minimizing the costs and time involved in the transportation of coffee (Viqueira 1995).

The Struggle for Municipal Powers: Swimming Against the Current

> When they took away the municipal powers, we organized ourselves and began a struggle to recover what belonged to us. Nevertheless, our applications, which were always made following the law to the letter, did not succeed. It seemed as if we were swimming against the current. … (Interview with PS, September 2000).

For Montecristo's first settlers, the enormous human and material cost committed to the municipal project at the beginning of the twentieth century was wrecked by an unconstitutional act. The tacit proposal, which was handed down to the following generations, was to construct enough social capital that would allow this social unit to cohere and articulate itself politically around one cause:

the recovery of municipal powers. In order for the state and national authorities to be convinced of the legitimacy of this demand, they considered it necessary to promote the economic and social development of the town, which they did at the margins of the municipal authorities in Ángel Albino Corzo. One of the first actions, for example, was the construction of the region's first landing strip. Another tactic intended to promote the development of Montecristo and neighboring villages was to directly approach representatives of the state executive and legislature, requesting their intervention in the municipal capital and other institutions in order to receive material support with roads and tracks, as well as with basic services in education and health.

Those who lived through these experiences speak of a struggle that demanded what they considered only to be fair. But it brought with it many problems, especially with those in the municipal capital. This explains why this municipal struggle, even when it had the backing of the local population, was originally an initiative of the more prominent members of local society, who created a kind of "secret association", which later evolved into a committee, responsible for the negotiations.

> It was not easy. The meetings were held in private so that nobody else knew about these negotiations. Later the public came to know about them, but even then they continued to be carried out in secret. You could call it an association but it was hidden. At the beginning we were only four people, afterwards others joined and later we held an *ejido* meeting where we let it be known what we wanted and there the negotiating committee was set up (Anonymous, personal communication, August 2000).

The inhabitants of Montecristo and the villages and estates involved in the municipal struggle were swimming against the current. Over the preceding three decades, Ángel Albino Corzo had managed not only to turn itself into an important center in the coffee trade, but also into a place that attracted migrants, with a road infrastructure that communicated with the municipalities in the Frailesca Region and the state capital. Montecristo, on the other hand, had not managed to achieve a significant improvement in its own social and economic development. At the beginning of the 1980s, government studies carried out with a view to municipal reform began to acknowledge the situation in which many municipalities found themselves. Ángel Albino Corzo centralized services in the municipal capital, whilst effectively abandoning the communities in the mountainous region of the municipality. For example, apart from its landing strip, Montecristo remained very poorly connected to the rest of the state.

This pattern of social and economic development based on the unequal distribution of public resources—limited in themselves—meant that Montecristo's municipal demands were unlikely to be satisfied. Nevertheless, the persistence of Montecristo's inhabitants was impressive. On April 15, 1987, a Civil Association was set up to organize the application and negotiation processes with the state authorities in order to request the category of "Free Municipality". In November of the same year, the leaders of the association sent a document to the municipal president in Ángel Albino Corzo, in which they listed the reasons why they were petitioning for the reinstatement of municipal powers: the economic crisis and the difficulties the population faced in traveling to the municipal capital, around 46 kilometers away. The lack of resources and the distance between Montecristo and the municipal capital meant that most of the population had difficulties accessing various political, administrative and health services. The inhabitants also maintained that their demands were constitutionally valid given that "Article 29 of the Constitution, Paragraph XXVIII, instructs that it is possible to open a new municipality in one that has already been established".

In 1987, the inhabitants of the *ejidos* of Montecristo de Guerrero, Puerto Rico, La Paz, Toluca, Laguna del Cofre and Ayutla presented an official application but the municipal president of Ángel Albino Corzo ignored it. The ensuing tensions developed into violence and during this period the Montecristo *ejido* commissioner was murdered. The following comments were made to us regarding this event:

> In fact, the murder of the late Beyaner Díaz, who was commissioner in Montecristo and one of the promoters of the municipality, was paid for by one of the lowland bosses (*caciques*), when he was municipal president of Jaltenango. We are all aware of this. He himself, the *cacique*, threatened Beyaner, saying "perhaps this business of the new municipality will come to pass, but you will not be around to see it". Not long after, they killed the poor man (Anonymous, personal communication, August 2000).

From 1991 onwards, perhaps as a result of this regrettable event, the struggle for a new municipality became broader and increasingly fuelled by public demand. In the official documents, an unprecedented activity of negotiation and applications began. In that year, they sent a letter to the then president of the state Congress, Elmar Seltzer Marseille, in which they requested "the recovery of this place's powers as a Free Municipality, as 58 years ago these powers were transferred to a place called Jaltenango la Paz" (Document sent to the president of the Chiapas State Congress, July 5, 1991).

The response to this application arrived three months later, notifying them that their request would be dealt with in the next sitting of the Congress. That same year, those *ejido* commissioners, who wished to form part of the new municipality, each sent letters to the state governor listing the reasons for their request.[125] In 1992, it was the women's turn to ask for the intervention of the congressman representing the III Electoral District, whom they officially informed about the lack of resources available to families and the difficulties experienced in traveling to the municipal capital to apply for or receive basic services that they needed. These women asked this congressman to lobby in their favor and support their application for municipal status in the state Congress.

By 1993, these demands for the reinstatement of municipal powers were backed up by an increasingly broad organizational structure and had the majority consensus of the town of Montecristo, as well as eight *ejidos* and a small village. The civil association became the "Civil Committee in Favor of the Reinstatement of Powers as the Free Municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero" and the applications began to be made to an increasing number of institutions. The committee began to lobby political actors in popularly elected positions, as well as key institutions, such as the local Congress, the State Committee of the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI), the state Governor, the president himself and workers' organizations like the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (National Peasant Confederation – CNC) and the *Congreso Agrario Mexicano* (Mexican Agrarian Congress – CAM). In a letter to José Rueda Aguilar, president of the state Congress, dated September 8, 1993, they wrote:

> All the *ejidos*, rural and municipal authorities and inhabitants of this town ... are in common agreement and give their support to all the applications that the Civil Committee is making in order to recover the municipal powers of this place ... It was agreed ... that we wish to belong to the municipality that we lost.

Towards the end of 1993, the applications and corresponding documentation were in the hands of the state Congress and the Secretary of State, as well as in those of the leaders of corporate and party organizations. However, the lack of real attention to their municipal demands was reaching breaking point. Those making the demands began to put more weight on the unwritten rules of the political game when, in January 1994, the sudden appearance of the Zapatista

125 In the documents we went through, we found letters from the *ejidos* Puerto Rico, Laguna de Cofre and Nueva Independencia and a letter signed by more than 50 small property holders, in which the name of each property is specified.

Army of National Liberation (EZLN) took them by surprise and, as a campaigner pointed out, "We never imagined that an opportunity would arise that would make our demands a reality".

The Last Stretch: The Zapatista Opening and the Remunicipalization Decree

Historically, Montecristo society had always stuck to legal and institutional rules and regulations. The economic and social transformations that had been endured and the domination of collective property over private property did not entail a lack of respect for other forms of ownership, which led to a relative stability and the absence of conflicts, itself nothing to scorn at in a region where conflicts, lack of consensus and social mobilization are the rule. A symptom perhaps of this stability is that, until January 1994, there were no independent *campesino* organizations. The only autonomous civil organization, which harnessed the political energies of the population, was the "Civil Committee in Favor of the Reinstatement of Powers as the Free Municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero". Although not very active, we also registered a small number of organizations connected to government programs, affiliated to the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) and the official party (the PRI).

The EZLN uprising came as a surprise to this mountainous region. Although this event occurred in a distant part of the state, both geographically and culturally, it was immediately received sympathetically, particularly because of "the pleasure it gave that somebody had at last called a halt to the corrupt political system and to authorities that don't attend to the people's demands". Nevertheless, the most significant links with the EZLN movement occurred when the latter announced the creation of autonomous municipalities. From then on, as local people commented, information concerning the actions initiated by the EZLN began to spread and it was decided to send a representative to San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

> [W]ith the idea of finding some respite, as all the doors seemed to be closed in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, I went to San Cristóbal de Las Casas. They had invited me and it seemed they might put me in touch with *Sub Comandante* Marcos. First I had to go to the church in San Cristóbal where Father Samuel received us and it was him who told me not to worry and that he was in a good position to help me and that I should leave him copies of the documentation I had with me and *Comandante* Marcos would be informed. It was there that I realized that Father Samuel had the same ideas as *Sub*

> *Comandante* Marcos and so I began to have confidence in him and he sent me to photocopy all the documents. I left him a package and he told me: "Don't worry son, we're going to do everything possible to support you, so that your municipality becomes a reality" (Interview with the secretary of the Civil Committee in Favor of the Reinstatement of Powers as the Free Municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero, September 2000).

In this context, Montecristo broke temporarily with its history of pacifism and decided to establish a "rebel government". The interviews we carried out confirm the enthusiasm and certainty initially felt in having a "rebel and autonomous government". Nevertheless, the local political culture, the fact that leaders of organizations in San Cristóbal promised support that was then not forthcoming, as well as the intensity of political events ended up having an effect on local society and consequently on the course of local events. The "rebel" government did not last long as many felt uncomfortable being "in opposition" and it was decided that this was not a correct course of action.

Nonetheless, although they did not continue with the strategy of an autonomous municipality, the Zapatista movement still meant that their demand was just and legitimate and they began to lobby state and federal institutions again. In a totally distinct political climate, the local Congress responded for the first time to the application made by the authorities of seven *ejidos* and one village.

> First. – With regards to the creation of a new municipality ... the participation of the relevant government departments is necessary, so that in their respective areas, they carry out at the same time, in all localities, and where they deem necessary, geographic and economic studies, in order to determine the political and administrative viability of these communities to constitute a municipality ...
>
> Third. – As soon as these studies are available, this Commission will issue a corresponding opinion; and will let it be known to a meeting of the legislature so that, if it is approved, the municipality in which it is proposed to group together these communities will have the opportunity to be heard. In the same way, the remaining formalities that article 60 of the local Political Constitution establishes will be met (Fiftieth Legislature of Congress, June 29, 1994).

But by September 1994, progress had been far from satisfactory. The bureaucratic procedures put into motion by Congress were virtually paralyzed and, faced with insistent lobbying, the local Congress had only decided to give Montecristo

de Guerrero the rank of municipal delegation, and had promised them the establishment of a civil registry, an Inland Revenue tax office, a municipal judge and a police station. In an assembly held on September 25, 1994, the *ejido* commissioners from Montecristo, Nueva Independencia, Plan de Ayutla, Laguna del Cofre, Puerto Rico, Toluca, La Paz, Jerusalén and representatives from the hamlets Vista Alegre and El Paraíso agreed to continue supporting the campaign. But two years passed and the studies that were supposed to define the viability of the free municipality had not been carried out, nor had the town hall in Ángel Albino Corzo been formally informed that Montecristo now had the status of municipal delegation.

The last stage was still to come. On May 28, 1998, in the newspaper, *La República en Chiapas*, the inhabitants of Montecristo saw the proposal of Governor Albores Guillén to define 33 territorial areas that might become municipalities, with the idea of relieving tensions, promoting reconciliation and strengthening mechanisms of governance. Although this proposal was directed mainly at municipalities in the "conflict zone", those lobbying in Montecristo saw this initiative as a perfect opportunity. A letter was sent to Governor Albores Guillén, which explained the history of their "wronged" town and recounted the pioneering efforts that they had made in 1910 to achieve the status of Free Municipality, whilst mentioning the unconstitutional decree that had removed their municipal status. In the letter, the local inhabitants described to the governor—in a somewhat exaggerated fashion—the long and tiring path that they had pursued amongst the institutions in order to see their legitimate request acknowledged. After their justifications, the inhabitants of Montecristo asked to be included in the remunicipalization project and reiterated their history of respect towards institutions.

The government's decision ended up being a positive one for Montecristo and as the municipal president of Ángel Albino Corzo, Sócrates Galeno Rivera, recognized: "There was no way of changing things, although we opposed it. The order had already been given and it had to be faced up to". Effectively, the authorities of the municipality from which they took the territory to create Montecristo, ended up by issuing a letter of consent, accepting the segregation of a part of its territory for the establishment of the new municipality. A political situation, in which the Zapatistas openly rejected the government's proposal in the "conflict zone", obliged the state government to revert to traditional clientelistic and authoritarian practices and to consider the demands of areas far away from the "conflict zone". Such was the case with Montecristo.

In April 1999, the governor of Chiapas announced that he was placing under the state Congress' consideration a package of seven possible municipalities, including Montecristo de Guerrero. The technical-judicial study for this new municipality registered 22 communities made up of 12,914 people. On July 14, 1999,

state Congress commissions approved the governor's proposal to create seven municipalities. A few days later, a decree was issued that created seven new municipalities, including Montecristo de Guerrero. At the same time, the following articles were amended: Article 3 of the Chiapas State Constitution, Article 11 of the Municipal Statutes and Article 12 of the State Electoral Code (Gobierno del estado de Chiapas, *Periódico Oficial*, No. 41, July 28, 1999). On August 11 of the same year, the state Congress approved the naming of the town councils and on August 18 the new authorities were sworn in.

The Ups and Downs of Remunicipalization

The authoritarianism and vertical nature of the links between the state powers–executive, legislative and judicial–and municipal powers, represent one of the key features that dominated in the formation of the new municipalities. The political situation and the leading role of the state executive allowed it to omit an important number of processes that, according to political and administrative norms, require the participation of various state and federal government departments.[126] The State Commission for Remunicipalization not only acted according to whim, changing legal requirements, but also proved itself to be fairly authoritarian, placing the municipalities that were going to lose part of their territory and population in very difficult circumstances.

In the case of Montecristo, the legal requirements that demanded the concurrence of state and federal institutions as a legal step for the creation of a municipality, took second place. The technical secretary directly took responsibility for the formalization of the socio-economic and legal-technical bases in such a way that the constitutional decision to create the municipality was immediately justified. These authoritarian actions opened a space for conflict between the new and the old municipality. The documents signed by the town hall of Ángel Albino Corzo, where they made known that they were in agreement with the partition of their territory for the creation of a new municipality, ended up being the last procedure, when it should have been one of the first basic requirements. Those who were there at the time commented that a commission from Montecristo arrived at the town hall to pick up these documents, but the municipal president refused to sign them. They had to make a telephone call to the president of the

126 The creation of a municipality requires economic studies, carried out at the same time in different places, and others that justify the political, economic and technical viability of the new municipality. These studies must be carried out at the request of the state Congress and by federal and state institutions, amongst which are the *Secretaría de Gobierno* (State Department), *Secretaría de Hacienda*, (Tax and Revenue Department) and the *Secretaría de Obras Públicas y Comunicaciones* (Department of Public Works and Communications).

State Commission for Remunicipalization who ordered that the documents be signed. In the end, the president conceded, but not without commenting: "Well, there's nothing else I can do, this is a project in process, so I'm going to sign".

During the interviews we carried out in the field in 2000, some of the members of the town hall in Ángel Albino Corzo maintained that they had not been consulted and that their views were not taken into account, despite the fact that it was clear that the partition of its territory would mean a "cut in its budget". The municipal secretary in Ángel Albino Corzo maintained that they never agreed to the partition: "We received the order to issue a document where we accepted the creation of the new municipality, but we were never approached or consulted neither by the institutions in charge of the process nor by the commissions created in Montecristo for the remunicipalization process".

The political climate predominated and favored inconsistencies that put into question the rationale of the government's strategy. For example, in the remunicipalization proposal, the new municipality of Montecristo appeared as having an area of 190.29 km² that included 15 communities with a population of 10,326 inhabitants.[127] Nevertheless, in a document specifying the minimum requirements, 22 communities[128] were registered with a population of 12,914 inhabitants. It is clear that they added other places to those already mentioned in order to justify the government project.

This makes us wonder how the municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero ended up in terms of territory and population. In 1912, it was made up of villages, estates and hamlets, whose area was the same as that of Ángel Albino Corzo, excepting the village of Jaltenango La Paz, which in this period belonged to the municipality of La Concordia. In 1987, the application for the reinstatement of municipal powers was made by the authorities and representatives from the *ejidos* Montecristo de Guerrero, Puerto Rico, La Paz, Toluca, Laguna del Cofre and Plan de Ayutla. In 1993, two more *ejidos* and a hamlet joined: the *ejidos* Nueva Independencia and Jerusalén and the hamlet El Paraíso. In 1994, it continued with the same number of *ejidos*. Nonetheless, when the request for the municipality then became a government decision, the *ejidos* Nueva Independencia and Plan de Ayutla withdrew, and still belong to Ángel Albino Corzo.

127 The following communities are mentioned: Montecristo, Palenque I, Palenque 2, Reforma, Vista Alegre, Llano Grande, Laguna del Cofre, Puerto Rico, Emiliano Zapata, La Lucha, Toluca, Ojo de Agua Candelaria, Paraíso, San Nicolás and Sayula (Consejo y Comisión Estatales de Remunicipalización del estado de Chiapas 2000c).

128 On top of the communities already mentioned, they added Monterrey, Las Mercedes, Jerusalén, La Paz II, Montebello, Altamira, La Paz I and Trementina (Consejo y Comisión Estatales de Remunicipalización del estado de Chiapas 2000c).

The tensions with the municipality of Ángel Albino Corzo did not, it appears, ever turn into violence, although it is probable that members of the town hall in Ángel Albino Corzo managed to convince some leaders and active members of some *ejidos* or localities to remain within the borders of its municipality. Therefore it is not coincidental that the *ejido* Nueva Independencia, at the last moment, rejected forming part of the new municipality, perhaps because the municipal president of Ángel Albino Corzo, elected in 1995, came from this *ejido* and put pressure on his home community. Something similar happened in the *ejido* Plan de Ayutla, probably because this community gives access to Nueva Independencia and Las Delicias.

On the basis of official information, we were able to detect two points of concern. For example, the relationship between population and territory is worrying. In 1995, the surface area of Ángel Albino Corzo, 1,910.1 km², contained 24,094 inhabitants (Secretaría de Hacienda 1999). In contrast, the new municipality of Montecristo, with an area of 190.28 km², according to the remunicipalization documents, had a population of 12,914 inhabitants. This would mean that the former lost 50 percent of its population but only 9.8 percent of its territory. If the State Remunicipalization Commission's figures are correct, it means that the new municipality has a very high population density and severe limitations of space for the natural growth of its population, which will imply considerable pressures in the distribution of its already scarce natural resources.

Another fundamental problem that the new municipality has to face up to is the underdevelopment of certain highly marginalized localities. On revising the socio-economic studies carried out by the Remunicipalization Council in different places in the new municipality, we realized the following. With regards to education, the figures revealed that the level of illiteracy was 29.8 percent and the percentages of the population of school age that did not attend school were alarming: 46 percent at a pre-primary level, 9 percent at the primary level, 56 percent at a secondary level. Twenty communities, out of a total of 22, lacked facilities for secondary education. In the field of basic services and healthcare, the situation was also not promising: only 13 localities had running water and all of them lacked drainage systems. Less than 5 percent used flushing toilets and the latrines and septic tanks that did exist, had technical problems. Although the majority of homes had electricity, only one community had street lighting. Only two localities had telephones and 11, radio transmitters. No communities had street cleaning services or a public market and only seven communities had graveyards. No community had paved streets and only two had public parks. Montecristo also lacked the most basic institutions and government services: land registry, civil registry, tax office, municipal judge, police station and post office (Consejo y Comisión Estatales de Remunicipalización del estado de Chiapas 2000c).

In territorial terms, the municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero is certainly not the one that existed in 1912. Today, its territory represents not even 10 percent of its original territory. Moreover, with the passing of time, the land tenure pattern has experienced important changes as a result of demographic pressures. One of these transformations has been the loss of dominance of medium sized properties (from 150 to 200 hectares). Today, it is essentially collective property, in the form of *ejidos*, along with some smaller private properties that have come to characterize the land tenure pattern: 86.22 percent of the total land holdings are *ejido* property and the remaining 13.78 percent, small private properties. A significant fact, which places Montecristo at a disadvantage, is that the old coffee estates that until the 1930s belonged to the old municipality do not form part of the new municipality's territory. This means that it is practically impossible for Montecristo to obtain its own tax revenues or incentives for productive investment. Therefore it is yet another Chiapanecan municipality dependent on federal resources.

An analytical exercise comparing the old and new municipalities of Montecristo helps us to understand the nature of the transformations experienced by Montecristo society and its power structures. Medium sized property holders, who had historically monopolized local leadership, were gradually replaced by the growing number of *ejidatarios* whose power was rooted in the *ejido* authorities. This new composition in the local power structure is evident in the membership of the first municipal authorities, which were named by representatives from *ejidos* and villages, although those who fought for the new municipality were prominent members from the town of Montecristo, many of whom came from the old guard of medium sized property owners. The formation of the first municipal council was therefore in the hands of the *ejido* authorities and those that had lobbied for the new municipality. The voting process to choose the candidates was collective, in *ejido* assemblies and under the responsibility of the *ejido* commissioner.

The Difficult Task of Governing

As much in the lobbying stage of the remunicipalization proposal as in the final stage, the then Governor Albores Guillén reiterated that the new municipalities would receive important financial resources for the construction of tracks and roads, basic services and assistance in production. The new municipalities, it was said, would be given productive projects, new schools, the construction or extension of clinics, as well as the opportunity to access various programs in the agricultural sector, which would allow them to stimulate the socio-economic devel-

opment of the municipality upon a solid foundation. These commitments were received optimistically by local leaders who hoped to establish a new municipality. They believed that public resources would arrive directly and resolve the notable lack of economic and social infrastructure in the majority of communities. With this view the Montecristo municipal authorities began the difficult task of governing. However, the municipal authorities have since been vigorously questioned by the local population, who have not seen substantial changes in the exercise of government and, in particular, have not received responses to their demands.

Before such criticisms, in an interview, the municipal council gave us their own evaluation of the exercise of government. They described a complex situation, in which both functional and structural problems have served to delay not only the possibilities of bestowing a leading role on this level of government in the essential tasks within local development, but also to specify the ideal workings of a municipality as the first level of democracy. However, without wanting to generalize this situation, we do believe that the most important limitations that the government of Montecristo has had to confront are shared by many municipalities in Chiapas, especially those that have been established recently.

The municipal council's self evaluation hinted at three essential aspects. The first made reference to a series of tensions between the municipal council and the surrounding localities and a clear disgruntlement on the part of those who had not seen their demands satisfied. This situation, which also occurred in the municipal capital, placed the municipal council in a difficult and delicate situation, as it was beyond their real abilities to respond to the majority of the demands they received. Nevertheless, at the same time, the overly high local expectations were a result of the commitments, offers and proclamations made by the governor and the State Commission for Remunicipalization.

The second aspect made reference to the lack of technical and political capacity of those who were governing. For the majority of local people, those who made up the municipal council were incapable of carrying out administrative duties and local management; "It's just the same", they said. This situation, caused by an over-estimation of the abilities of the leaders and a political situation in which everything suddenly seemed possible, was confirmed and analyzed by those who were in the council. For example, in a very direct way, they recognized that they were not literate people or specialists in public administration and that they had made a lot of mistakes:

> [W]e've made mistakes, partly because of the novelty of the whole thing. We do what we can and we do have the will to serve the public. It must be said that we don't have much say in how to use our budget, a lot of money

> is already earmarked and those who decide are the authorities above us. On top of that, you have to remember that all the *ejidos* and villages are represented in the council, but the people that are chosen don't always have the necessary knowledge about government issues (Anonymous, personal communication, September 2000).

The third aspect referred to how the local population and key social and political actors have behaved. The participation of ordinary citizens, who had been both active and instructive during the lobbying process for the new municipality, strongly contrasts with their behavior after achieving their goal. Once the first posts were nominated in the new municipality, there was very little encouragement from the municipal government to involve ordinary citizens in day to day affairs. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that significant parts of the population, particularly in the municipal capital, have limited their participation to making demands or to openly criticizing the authorities when no response was forthcoming to such demands. The municipal council has therefore found itself in a difficult situation, both in terms of local administration and management and in the political field.

The intersection of these three aspects led to an unstable atmosphere and the erosion of expectations with regards to the benefits of the new municipality. For example, the fact that many promises made by the state executive were not kept, such as providing the new municipalities with an economic infrastructure and essential services, combined with the inexperience of the new municipal council and the passive attitudes of the population. An example of this situation is the attitude that local actors took with regards to public finances and their management.

The management of the Planning and Development Committee (*Comité de Planeación para el Desarrollo del estado* – COPLADE) reported that the municipal council received 1.2 million pesos in 1999. In 2000, this figure rose to 5.1 million pesos (see COPLADE 2001). In the same year a further 4.5 million pesos was contributed by state and federal sources, making a total budget of 9.6 million pesos. When the municipal authorities were asked about what had happened to these funds and how they had been spent, their answers revealed not only a lack of knowledge regarding the federal and state tax system, but also a way of managing municipal resources that was far from rational. It was difficult to get clear answers. Without detailing the amounts that the federal and state governments had designated, the local authorities claimed these were not sufficient to their task. With reference to public works, they pointed out that the most important project was the resurfacing of a road between Ángel Albino Corzo and Montecristo and between Montecristo and the *ejido* of Toluca, as well as a significant

number of small constructions and investments in education, health, basic provisions and other basic services in various places. However, they were not able to supply detailed information that gave an idea of the levels of efficiency or fairness of distribution, nor did they have a basic plan that outlined the goals that they hoped in achieve in the short to medium term.

This lack of accountability in the management of these public funds served to strengthen emerging opposition groups. In the municipal capital, the political forces represented by the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN) and the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution – PRD), whose presence began to be felt after the victories of Vicente Fox and Pablo Salazar in the respective elections for the presidency and the state Governorship, maintained that the municipal councilors effectively "didn't know how to govern a municipality and, above all, they don't give information concerning the expenditure of monies received from the federal and state governments":

> [T]here is no accountability; the only time the president held himself accountable was in front of a small group and the figures he used regarding the funds the municipal government had received are contradictory. On this occasion, they claimed they had received 2,800,000 pesos, but afterwards this amount changed, they said it was less, 1,800,000 pesos (*Cuarto Poder*, September 26, 2000).

After the second government report, given by the municipal president on December 22, 2000, the PAN and the PRD claimed they were going to formally request that an audit be carried out on the town hall. Nevertheless, the opposition parties have limited their approach to the questioning of the local administration without widening the debate to include the precarious nature of local finances, the real needs of the municipality and how such funds might be distributed. Such a discussion might have led to a reconsideration of the relationships between the different levels of government. The opposition parties succeeded in popularizing their criticisms amongst the population at large, spreading negative attitudes towards the town councilors.

These tensions with regards to the municipal council did not lead to widespread protests that ended up in the removal of the councilors. Nevertheless, the experience provides lessons that should not be repeated. Whilst it should be recognized that many of the tensions owe themselves to functional issues, we are essentially dealing with tensions of a structural nature. Constitutionally, the municipality should have an administrative structure in which the different public posts have clearly defined functions. The municipality should be a space where, with the cooperation of civil society, initiatives are taken and where issues of vital

concern to the various localities are decided. This level of government should not only function as an organism that provides services and as an initiator of local development, but should also be the focal point of the local political community. Nevertheless, the actual municipal government remains a long way from covering the expectations of this model. The vertical and authoritarian links that characterize the relations between different government powers, particularly with regard to finances, place the municipality in a subordinate position. This is responsible for weak political authority and, to varying degrees, for a lack of sufficient technical knowledge to be able to effectively assume the responsibilities of local governance that the Constitution assigns to the municipality.

The Unsettled Business of Remunicipalization: Governability and Development

The preliminary evaluation of the government remunicipalization initiative reveals the vertical and centralist nature of the decision making process that responded to a particular conjuncture of political currents that ended up threatening to weaken the authority and sovereignty of the Mexican State. It is not irrelevant, therefore, that the current government has repealed the remunicipalization decree and, in so doing, has suspended all technical and legal processes relating to the places that had applied to be included in a second phase of the remunicipalization process.

Given this, a key issue emerges regarding the evaluations that political actors–both at a state and national level–made with regards to the government's remunicipalization strategy. As pointed out in the introduction to this book, this strategy, proposed by the governor, Roberto Albores Guillén, materialized as an attempt to put a halt to the EZLN's initiative to create autonomous municipalities. There was no real discussion of the remunicipalization proposal in terms of well-defined objectives and their true viability. Officially, the scheme was a response not only to the San Andrés Accords, but also a strategy that would allow these communities to come into line with the objectives of local and national development (*Cuarto Poder*, June 16, 1999). Furthermore, for the governor of the time, Roberto Albores Guillén, this initiative was to serve as an excellent political tool for lowering tensions, promoting internal reconciliation and strengthening mechanisms of governance, thus making the running of certain government programs in these new entities more efficient. In contrast, for those political actors in opposition, the remunicipalization initiative was exclusively intended to weaken and counter the EZLN's initiative for autonomous municipalities.

Such positions were reflected in the parliamentary debate, before and after the approval of the remunicipalization decree. But as the debate was restricted by the political context, the argument that remunicipalization was a genuinely viable way of lowering tensions and promoting development and governability was not discussed, or it was simply assumed to be a positive thing. In this regard, the position of the PRD's parliamentary group is illustrative.

> The PRD is not against the creation of new municipalities or against endowing the population with spaces where they can exercise all the attributions established in Article 7 of the local political Constitution. We are, however, against the political gain made by the recognition of these new municipalities, the manipulation used to make it appear as if it were a step forward in the political and social life of the new entity and we are against the imposition of a federal strategy intended to wear down an armed, social and political movement without minding that it affects the life and development of Chiapas (Noel Rodas Vásquez, PRD parliamentary coordinator. Intervention before the Chiapas State Congress, July 15, 1999).[129]

Congress members from the PAN and the *Partido del Trabajo* (Labor Party – PT) also shared, almost in the same terms, the views expressed by the PRD. Nevertheless, beyond the confrontation between the Government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), it should be remembered that the government remunicipalization initiative, brought together an important number of places located outside of the "conflict zone". The ethnic dimension, one of the criteria for inclusion in the remunicipalization proposal, was hardly relevant in some of the new municipalities. This was completely ignored by the majority of parliamentary factions in the local Congress. The parliamentary debate did not lead to the definition of an agenda which would demand a profound revision of the problems and challenges that the new municipal governments have experienced in trying to overcome conditions of underdevelopment. Moreover, the problems of local government and their constituents were not—and nor are they now—on the political agenda in Chiapas. The remunicipalization decree could have initiated a broader discussion regarding the complexity of current territorial arrangements and municipal government.

In the case of the seven municipalities that were actually established, and particularly with Montecristo, we can identify the kind of problems implicit in the remunicipalization process. In fact, it allows us to examine the real depth and

129 Stenographic record of Rodas' intervention during the debate on the report presented by the joint commissions on Government and Constitutional Affairs, Urban Development and Public Works, Treasury and Population concerning the creation of seven new municipalities.

understandings of these changes in local civil society. A starting point is to recognize that the new municipalities are not homogenous and that they differ with regards to productive resources, population, ethnic group and culture. This defines particular dynamics in local government and society. In the case of Montecristo, the social, cultural and political contexts that have defined Montecristo's demand for its own municipality differ substantially from the other new municipalities. Montecristo, as we have mentioned, has a predominantly *mestizo* population, it is a long way from the so-called "conflict zone" and is integrated both economically and culturally with the Frailesca region. Its natural connections are with the Sierra region and the center of the state.

The Frailesca region, which includes Ángel Albino Corzo and Montecristo de Guerrero, is a territory where political *caciquismo* (or "bossism") and the principles of the post-revolutionary state attempted to find a balance between private property and collective, *ejido* property. The political leaders and "*agraristas*" (land reform activists) came to have increasing links with the state apparatus and the Institutional Revolucionary Party (PRI). The growing government intervention in the regulation of productive activities during the 1970s and 1980s made this region into the granary of Chiapas. But it also made it into a space that produced networks of clients and *caciques*, where *campesino* leaders and organizations linked to the PRI and the state corporate structure controlled, dominated and directed the changes wrought by successive presidents.

These particularities make Montecristo distinct from the other new municipalities, where ethnic diversity and the dispersed nature of political leaders and organizations meant a greater degree of confrontation with the state and federal governments, as well as open disputes over political control and strategic resources, particularly land and forestry resources. From this perspective, regional and local particularities clearly translate into particular processes with regards to remunicipalization. Nevertheless, one similarity between the seven municipalities is the institutional logic underlying the process which places the municipal government in a situation of inequality and subordination vis-à-vis the other two levels of government (state and federal). Another similarity is the fact that all the new municipalities face serious problems of underdevelopment, something common to the majority of municipalities in Chiapas, both old and new.

A detailed analysis of the remunicipalization process soon deconstructs the rhetoric of the official discourse and places us in a position to further analyze the situation from two intimately related perspectives: governability and development. In its broadest sense, governability refers to a government's capacity to exercise its power in a legitimate and efficient manner (Arbós and Giner 1993; Alcántara 1994; Camou 1995). This involves institutions responsible for carrying out administrative functions, as well as the normative and discretionary frame-

works that define political functions. These functions, in the case of Montecristo, are fused in the nature and character of inter-governmental relations and in the relations between the government and the governed.[130] On the other hand, the issue of development defines society's quality of life and work and demands a consideration of local dimensions along with larger socio-economic structures, society itself, its members and socio-cultural and organizational variables, as well as the broader contexts of the state and nation.

For local society, the municipality's essential role—sometimes its only role—is to resolve local demands for services: "Why else would we fight if not to have our municipality so that it can tackle the enormous problems we have in the communities and even in the municipal capital". This is a valid argument if it is assumed that the municipal government has real administrative and political powers with its own resources and the capacity to take decisions on how to distribute such resources. However, the realization of such a role—as a provider of services and an agent of development—is not self-ascribed. It depends, unfortunately, on larger tax and financial structures that supersede it (Ortega 1988).

The socio-economic study undertaken by the Remunicipalization Commission reveals the seriousness of the poverty and social marginalization in Montecristo, as well as its fragile economic and productive base. Furthermore, with the public funds made available to the new municipality, the usual discretionary management of these monies and the lack of clear rules as to their distribution in many municipalities have been repeated in Montecristo. If we look at the regional distribution of resources transferred to the different municipalities by government in 2000, we can see that of the total assigned to the Frailesca region, Montecristo received 3.4 percent, in contrast to Ángel Albino Corzo, which received 9.45 percent. Furthermore, the municipalities of Villaflores and Villa Corzo, which have better infrastructures and provision of basic services, managed to attract 36.6 percent and 31.62 percent respectively of the total regional budget.

Like any municipality, it was the municipal council that was formally responsible for the channeling of the funds, which came from two sources. The first was the Fund for Municipal Social Infrastructure and the second, the Federal Fund for the Strengthening of Municipalities. Nevertheless, in practice, the Planning and Development Committee (COPLADE) not only oversaw the application of these resources, but actually intervened in how they were spent.[131] In Montecristo, the

130 For Arbós and Giner (1993:13), governability is that quality in a political community according to which government institutions act efficiently within their own spaces in a way that is considered legitimate by member citizens, thus allowing for the free exercise of the executive's political will with the civic obedience of the population.

131 The considerable role played by the COPLADE in the new municipalities in defining the distribution and management of these resources was not exceptional. It is in fact common to many other municipalities.

demands for public works were put at the top of the municipal agenda, but the local authority's decision-making power was almost non-existent. It was again the COPLADE that asked local representatives to bring their applications for public works, under the illusion that the municipal council's Director of Public Works was involved.

Another common feature in Montecristo was the presence of federal and state agencies involved in various sectors of production and special programs. The activities of these agencies both inhibited and weakened the municipality's authority. A significant part of the local population ended up forming associations in order to request credit or technical assistance from organisms such as the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (Secretariat of Social Development – SEDESOL), the *Fondo Nacional de Empresas en Solidaridad* (National Fund for Businesses in Solidarity – FONAES) and the *Comisión Estatal del Café* (State Coffee Commission – COESCAFÉ). They also received support from different secretariats' programs, whose budgets were often greater than those of the municipal council. In many places in the new municipality, the enthusiasm generated by finally becoming a municipality was overshadowed by the growing interest of various groups in making direct links with those state and federal institutions responsible for directing regional development.

Generally speaking, we can say that the municipality's role in local development is restricted by larger financial structures that prevent it from independently exercising its constitutional functions as a provider of services. This situation is characterized not only by institutional limits in economic affairs and intergovernmental relations, but also by the lack of formality in daily political practice. All this places the municipal government in a very precarious situation and vulnerable to a recurring situation of ungovernability, which often results in the resignation of members of the town council. From this perspective, the key conditions of legitimacy and effectiveness that guarantee governability, and which any government should demonstrate, are clearly lacking and subject the municipalities to unstable and conflictive patterns of government. In the case of Montecristo, we can say that such uncertainty with regards to governability was definitely present–if not critical–in its first municipal administration. Therefore the government's remunicipalization strategy did not introduce any change in intergovernmental relations that might have provided a wider autonomy for the municipality.

Municipalities therefore face a number of challenges, resulting from economic restructuring, the reform of the state and social transformations. Nevertheless, these changes mean that we cannot share the optimism expressed by many political actors and commentators who maintain that a plural society automatically entails a greater degree of participation in the construction, development and

consolidation of a democratic government, a demand that supposedly comes "from below". Neither do we share the optimism of the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank, who both see local government as a school for accountability (World Bank 1991).

It is certainly the case that many local societies are experiencing many changes in various areas of daily life, which will undoubtedly have future effects on government-society relations. In Montecristo, one of the symptoms of such changes was evident in the electoral process. In the state and federal elections of 2000, local behavior illustrated the complex nature of these transformations. Before the elections, it was clear that both the municipal council and *ejido* leaders were determined to return a PRI candidate. It was assumed that Montecristo was and always had been a PRI community and furthermore owed a debt to the PRI governor, Robert Albores Guillén, who had reinstated the municipality. The firm control of the elections was evident in various ways. For example, the strict vigilance at the polling booths, in some cases, resulted in violence, which prevented official observers from carrying out their civic task. Our own presence was not welcomed and we were asked not to remain by the polling booths.

As expected, local results showed an enormous majority to be in favor of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate for the presidency. Nevertheless, the election of Vicente Fox (the candidate for the *Alianza por el Cambio*[132]) immediately provoked a change in local behavior. For strategic reasons, local political groups in the municipality agreed to allow the presence of other political parties as they thought they might be sanctioned if the new president was a member of the PAN and there were only PRI members in the town hall. Therefore, in a very short time, a lot of PRI members became part of the PAN. The lack of support for the PRD meant that this party was not formally represented. It was with the state elections for the governorship later in 2000 that the PRD came to have an official presence in the municipality as locals knew that the PRD was one of the political parties in the *Alianza por Chiapas* (Alliance for Chiapas) that placed the new governor, Pablo Salazar Mendiguchía, in power.

In the October 2001 municipal elections, locals participated more freely without the traditional corporatist control, which meant a more competitive climate, particularly between the PRI and the National Action Party (PAN). The results were revealing: victory went to the PAN by a margin of 10 votes over the PRI. It was a result that surprised the authorities and was understood as a punishment for the PRI controlled municipal council. Other relevant statistics revealed both changes and continuities in the local population's political preferences. For ex-

132 The *Alianza por el Cambio* (Alliance for Change) was made up of the *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party – PAN) and the *Partido Verde Ecologista de México* (the Ecological Green Party of Mexico – PVEM).

ample, the PRD received only 50 votes, in stark contrast to the *Partido de Acción Civica* (Civic Action Party, PAC), which received 535 votes, putting it in third place in the elections (see Table 7.1).

This change in voting preferences was also due to the broader participation of social organizations that opened up the possibility of greater civil involvement in local political processes. Organizational processes had, until then, been dominated by the agricultural sector, creating a direct link between producers and government agencies responsible for the agricultural sector. However, new autonomous social organizations are beginning to emerge. In fact, the first organizational experience of this type occurred in 1994 with the creation of the *Consejo Regional del Sur de Montecristo de Guerrero* (Regional Council for the South of Montecristo de Guerrero – CONSUR-G). This was followed by organizations like the *Organización Regional de Productores Agroecológicos* (Regional Organization of Agroecological Producers) and the *Sociedad de Café Amigable* (The Amicable Coffee Society).

Final Considerations

We can evaluate the government's remunicipalization strategy from two perspectives. The first is political: as we know, remunicipalization was a strategy that violated constitutional norms and was designed to weaken the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN)'s project to establish autonomous municipalities. The claims made for the scheme (peace, governability and development) are a far cry from how the process was really carried out. The authoritarianism and political informality involved in the case of Montecristo cannot be stressed too strongly. The second perspective from which we can evaluate the remunicipalization strategy is more complex and has to do with the problems currently experienced by municipal institutions everywhere in Mexico. This perspective obliges us to consider the wider debates that have taken place in Mexico in recent years. Political scientists have spoken of the "New Federalism" when referring to both the management functions of government in general and the nature of the problems between the different levels of government in the federal system.[133]

If we assume that it was a particular conjuncture of political currents that defined the positions of different parliamentary groups with regards to the govern-

133 Martínez (1996:65) lists a number of these problems: a) the taxation system and its coordination; b) the transferring of federal funds, dedicated to poverty alleviation; c) the municipal government's capacity to go into debt; d) conflicts between the three levels of government; e) the "concurrent" exercise of power by federal, state and municipal governments; f) the decentralization of public services, and g) the effects of the international environment and the free market regime on municipalities, regions and states.

ment's remunicipalization strategy, we now believe it is time to reconsider the municipality itself, something that has been consistently ignored by Congress. The fact that the way in which the decree was carried out revealed a lack of true concern regarding the goals of development, governability and peace, is a good starting point for a political agenda that concentrates on the issue of the municipality and the challenges it faces. Here, we have attempted to signal the necessity of opening this debate. The responsibility to do so lies with academics, political actors and distinct sectors of society in Chiapas.

The study of the new municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero has revealed both internal and external logics that reveal the complexity of local power, something that is sometimes ignored. This case study reveals how the centralist and authoritarian nature of intergovernmental relations can reproduce itself and shows how it has an effect on local governability, administrative efficiency, legitimacy and consensus, all of which are key dimensions in the exercise of democratic local government. The character of this interaction, which is structural and is visible in both the old and the new municipalities, is what demands a national debate on the issue.

What the municipal government of Montecristo appears to lack is political and administrative professionalization. This is what is at the heart of most criticisms of the municipal council when pointing to the lack of transparency and the unequal distribution of funds. However, this is not the only problem that explains the precariousness of local government. There is also a clear lack of civic culture and a fragile local productive base, both of which inhibit possibilities for development, as well as serving to put Montecristo in a very dependent situation vis-à-vis state and federal governments. These three factors (a lack of civic culture, a weak productive base and economic dependence) block the development and consolidation of democratic government. The key actor in a democracy—the citizen—is missing from the equation.

In the case of Montecristo, the population's main concern has been to achieve a real distribution of public funds amongst the different locations in the municipality. One way of achieving this was the struggle for the reinstatement of the municipality itself. After more than five decades, this dream became a reality, but not necessarily because of the good will of the politicians. Once a municipality, the way the town councilors behaved followed a clientelistic pattern. In the regional context, it is not only that such funds have been unfairly distributed amongst the four municipalities that now constitute the Frailesca region, but also the fact that these funds are not adequate to their task. In order to win a disproportionate share of these resources, it is necessary to become clients of the relevant bureaucrats and politicians. This pattern of behavior was replicated in the relations between the local population and the municipal government.

In all of this, what of the citizen? Given all that has been said here, municipal government and local society are far from being a "school for democracy". But, according to central government, both remain vital to the country's democratization process. The focus on local spaces and events, as Braudel (1994) might suggest, is of the utmost urgency if we are going to avoid falling under the illusion that the will of the World Bank and experts in questions of governability will suffice to precipitate the perfect democratic equation. Citizen participation is subject to historical context, civic culture, political climate and institutional capacity for innovation, as well as legal and organizational norms. This demands careful reforms in the political system that strengthen the municipality as a local government institution and encourage a state of equilibrium between different government levels and powers.

It is undeniable that local society and authorities are undergoing changes, but it is very early to define the direction and depth of these, particularly in new municipalities where improvisation and a basic restructuring of social and political relations is almost inevitable. The seven new municipalities, including Montecristo, do represent something unprecedented. The changes wrought by recent elections at both national and state level and the remunicipalization initiative have, directly and indirectly, provoked a dynamic that suggests imminent changes in sphere of local politics. The most significant event, which brought the active presence of political parties besides the PRI, is that in a relatively short period there was a change of political party in the town hall. This is highly significant because, in contrast to other municipalities in the state, the competition between different political parties in Montecristo has become the legitimate way to access political power.

Returning to the query that motivated this research project—the viability (or not) of remunicipalization—the answer is more complicated than it appears. In the case of the municipality of Montecristo, there were historical reasons for justifying it, but under present conditions, the challenges are enormously complex and will be difficult to resolve in the short to medium term. The answer regarding municipal viability should really be preceded by another question: Why the deployment of a remunicipalization strategy in the first place?

Table 7.1
Results of the Municipal Elections
Montecristo de Guerrero, Chiapas
October, 2001

Political Party	Total Votes
PAN[a]	732
PRI[b]	722
PRD[c]	50
PT[d]	15
PAC[e]	535
Spoilt Papers	63
Not Registered	0

Source: CEE-Chiapas (2001).

a *Partido Acción Nacional* – National Action Party.
b *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* – Institutional Revolutionary Party.
c *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* – Party of the Democratic Revolution.
d *Partido del Trabajo* – Labor Party.
e *Partido de Acción Cívica* – Civic Action Party.

Chapter 8

An Overview

Xochitl Leyva Solano and Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor

Remunicipalization, as shown throughout this book, cannot be reduced to a simple act of government. We conceive of it as a *process* characterized by actors, arenas and phases. These actors, both local and regional, had, as we hope to have demonstrated, different *interpretations, histories* and *interests* in play (and at stake).

Regarding the Interpretations

We can bring this book to a close by saying that during our field research we found that the interpretations of those involved in remunicipalization process went beyond the dichotomies with which we began our study. However, the most surprising discovery was that within this range of interpretations, at one extreme were those that thought that the formation of new municipalities was intricately linked with an "historic struggle", which did not begin with *Zapatismo* nor has anything to do with a policy of counter-insurgency. At the other end of the spectrum were those who could not imagine that there were elements other than counter-insurgency to explain the formation of new municipalities. From this position, it was impossible to imagine that the *Alborista* remunicipalization[134] gave voice to struggles borne in other historical periods. Perhaps a more complex perspective on the remunicipalization process should consider both dimensions: both the historic and the contextual. It is precisely from such complexity that, in this book, we have attempted to understand the (re)municipalization process. In Armando Bartra's words:

> It is not the same to frame different regional processes in generic concepts as it is to get inside their multicolored complexity. It is one thing to appeal

134 *Alborista* refers to Roberto Albores Guillén, who was interim governor of Chiapas from 1998 to 2000 and who implemented the state remunicipalization plan.

> to the "case studies" with no other intention than to confirm pre-existing hypotheses, but quite another to delve into specific realities with open questions and a willingness to confront surprises, the unexpected and the intellectually provocative (Bartra 2005:62).

This complexity brought us to the conclusion that the "municipal struggles" related in this book, could only have materialized within a governmental framework that took them up, gave them space, reshaped them and then placed them within a broader political-military logic, which consisted of the dismemberment of autonomous Zapatista municipalities. This was done in order to justify the entrance of the Army into the so-called "conflict zone" or else to seal off the area, thus preventing the Zapatista networks and the increasingly successful *de facto* municipalities from advancing further into Chiapas territory.

The logic of state power was to exploit these local histories and interests, in order to promote political-military strategies aimed at weakening and destroying the Zapatista enemy. Undeniable though this may be, it is worth remembering that people also have *agency* and they are not mere pawns on a chessboard, although the State may want to reduce them to that. This *agency* could be observed in those that actively lobbied for their own municipality in order to have their own governments, put their towns on the map, raise the status of their people, urbanize their municipal seats and avoid intermediaries in their relationship with the state and federal authorities.

The absence of state reform and the failed talks between the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista National Liberation Army – EZLN) and the government at the most decisive moment of the low intensity war (1998) meant that the *Alborista* offer came up against that of the Zapatista municipalities. This was not, however, merely a political struggle. It was a political and military struggle in which the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party – PRI), the ex-official state party, made use of, as we have seen, everything that they had at their disposal: increasing militarization, the backing of paramilitary groups,[135] the distribution of financial resources to anti-Zapatista groups and those in the "conflict zone".

In the case of Duraznal, the remunicipalization offer was theoretically destined for the Zapatistas of La Pimienta, members of the rebel municipality San

135 Regarding paramilitarization, the ex-secretary of the alliance government in Chiapas, Emilio Zebadúa, stated in 2003: "What this government does not deny, because many of those that now form part of the government denounced it and in some cases fell victim to it, is that there was a period before 2000 during which organized and armed groups were promoted, sponsored or tolerated so that they could carry out acts of violence with impunity … Those that participated in these groups for several years could be defined as paramilitaries because there existed patronage, sponsorship and impunity associated with them. …" (Zebadúa 2003:97).

Juan de la Libertad, who, as Sonia Toledo shows, did not join the remunicipalization program. It was by no means circumstantial that the seat of the new municipality was located in the *ejido* San Andrés Duraznal, a place with a history of allegiance to the PRI and where the Remunicipalization Commission made the first move, even when its communities had not made any formal requests regarding a new municipality.

As for the communities of Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas, studied by Neil Harvey, two new municipal seats were established in order to act as a counterweight to the autonomous municipality José María Morelos y Pavón, whereas the municipal seat of Maravilla Tenejapa remained in the *ejido* of the same name, in an effort to displace Amparo Aguatinta, the seat of the autonomous region Tierra y Libertad. As Xochitl Leyva and Luis Rodríguez show, this situation was not incidental, but a deliberate step decided on by the government and carried out by numerous actors who guided decisions with explicit geopolitical intentions. In the municipalities of Aldama and Santiago El Pinar, Araceli Burguete and Jaime Torres show us how the power struggle did not focus on disputing the location of the municipal seat but rather on the character and design of the municipal institution.

From chapter 1 through to chapter 7, it has been shown that the governments of Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León and Roberto Albores Guillén were not really offering the remunicipalization program as a negotiation strategy for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Indeed, this offer was not directed at them. The manner in which the proposal was presented to the rebels broke with the rules of protocol of dialogue, it ignored the *Comisión Nacional de Intermediación* (National Mediation Commission – CONAI) and the *Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* (Commission for Concord and Pacification – COCOPA) in their role as negotiators and proved to be openly provocative. Let us not forget that the invitation directed at the rebels was delivered via the media. They were given a week to present themselves at the offices of the Remunicipalization Commission with their applications for new municipalities.[136]

On the one hand, we can conclude this section by saying that the *Alborista* remunicipalization policy had important counter-insurgent effects on the autonomous municipalities of Magdalena de la Paz, San Andrés Sacamch'en de los Pobres and Tierra y Libertad. Much of this, however, was due to the government's counter-insurgent activities occurring at the same time and not to remunicipalization alone. Regrettably, these actions have not been addressed in detail in this book. On the other hand, it can also be confirmed that the outcome of this remu-

136 "Albores 'invites' the EZLN to participate in the remunicipalization process and gives them a week to respond" ("*'Invita' Albores al EZLN a unirse antes de 8 días a su plan remunicipalizador*") in *La Jornada*, May 29, 1998.

nicipalization process did not prove to be very successful if we take into account the fact that of the 33 municipalities proposed by Roberto Albores Guillén, only seven (around a fifth) became a reality. Of these seven, only three (a tenth of the number originally proposed), are located in the so-called "conflict zone". But within this area, of the twelve municipalities proposed by Albores in Las Cañadas (the Zapatista stronghold), not one of them was successful.

Regarding the Histories

Taking the voices of the promoters and the agents of the *Alborista* remunicipalization policy as a point of departure, we realized that in the case of Aldama and Santiago El Pinar, both located in the Highlands, their demands dated back to 1921, year in which they were stripped of their municipal status. Moreover, the identities of these new municipalities were created, in 1999, by reactivating customary practices. The same happened with the inhabitants of San Andrés Duraznal, despite the fact that they did not explicitly demand the return of their municipal status, being people that had arrived from the Northern region of the state at the end of the nineteenth century. As for those who lobbied for the municipality of Montecristo de Guerrero, they saw the remunicipalization offer as an opportunity to have their municipal status reinstated, something they had lost in 1933 and had fought for ever since (65 years) until regaining it.

Last of all are the tropical municipalities of Maravilla Tenejapa, Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas. Only the first one, Maravilla Tenejapa, had made a request in 1984 for the creation of a local government unit, although the other two municipalities had always informally expressed their frustrations at belonging to the enormous municipality of Ocosingo. The 350 kilometers that separated them from the municipal seat meant they received little attention and support. Nonetheless, in reality Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas had been considered as sub-regions of the Lacandon Forest since the mid-eighties (Leyva and Ascencio 1996), because they largely ran their own affairs, conserving considerable *de facto* autonomy with regards to power groups in the town and municipal seat of Ocosingo, an autonomy rooted in a particular history of colonization (González Ponciano 1995; Harvey 1998a). As always, the local history of the new municipalities studied in this book can only be understood if they are interwoven with regional, national and global histories.[137]

137 Unfortunately, we have not addressed in this book the local-global relationships, choosing instead to focus on those between the local, regional and national spheres.

Concerning the Interests

There were many interests at play in the remunicipalization process. Apart from the state's interest in counter-insurgency, which could be called "remunicipalization from above", there was also "remunicipalization from below", which was *Zapatista*. Regarding the former, *Alborista* variety, the principal actors were groups, factions and cliques rather than individuals. But there is no question that in both cases, the power groups in constant change and conflict made us move from *the political* towards *politics*, and travel through that wide and overlapping field in which both exist (Slater 1998).

Throughout these case studies, we came to realize that the local power groups (*Zapatistas* included), all shared the same clear objective: to *become* government, to take control of the municipal institutions and to validate their political project, whether their project were municipal, developmentalist, modernizing, autonomist, anti-*Zapatista*, pro-government, rebel or alternative. For the central administration, the concern was more about introducing reforms to contain and incorporate local and regional resistance or to contain and pacify *the political* within its already established borders. This is nothing new in this, on the contrary, it has been widely documented in other countries in Latin America (cf. Slater 1998).

In Chiapas, the groups, factions or leaders who responded to the *Alborista* call were from PRI stock; a fact that does not, of course, add anything to what was already known previous to this publication. But perhaps what this book has done is to bring out the *ethnographic detail* of the precise ways in which the different supporters of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) became involved in remunicipalization, from members of civic committees and "universal Catholic" groups to those leaders or members of peasant, *ejido* and teachers' organizations. They all took advantage of personal relationships to put forward their demands. The bonds between *compadres*, friends and all the other private loyalties in play were fundamental for achieving the support of those located at different levels, whether they were politicians, presidents of local political party committees, state ministers, commissioners, or leaders of Social Solidarity Societies or from the *ejido* unions.

Without the political use of these types of relationships, none of the seven municipalities would have been created nor would they have been able to comply with the formalities of the procedure, although aspects of this were often ignored or modified, depending on the political needs of those lobbying for the new municipality and on the PRI authorities in charge of the process. Perhaps the most documented example and conspicuous feature throughout these chapters is the vertical and authoritarian way in which the municipal presidents, affected by

the decree of the new municipality, literally received "the order from above" to accept the secession of a part of their territory. Reflecting on this, Sonia Toledo states that, despite the remunicipalization program being vertical in character, when it was actually carried out, many different political forces intervened, regional and local, entering the fray with unequal resources (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1995).

As seen throughout this book, the PRI government, promoter of remunicipalization, resorted to practices typical of the Mexican political system: authoritarianism, illegality and corporatism. Concerning the last of these, Neil Harvey and Leyva and Rodríguez state that the corporate character of the remunicipalization process that took place in Benemérito de las Américas, Marqués de Comillas and Maravilla Tenejapa, was no novelty in the region and nor were the organizations involved in the process new actors, although, paradoxically, they contributed to the weakening of state corporatism as well as to its reproduction. Sonia Toledo, following Krotz (1996) and Tejera (1996), has shown that the *state culture*, which facilitated remunicipalization in San Andrés Duraznal, responded to a logic created long beforehand.

After reading the seven case studies that make up the best part of this publication, we can also affirm that remunicipalization did not contribute to a lessening of tensions in Chiapas. On the contrary, with the government actions of 1998-1999, it heightened the confrontations between pro- and anti-Zapatista groups, as well as between different factions within the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In other words, it can be said that with the remunicipalization process, *politics* failed regarding "the institutionalization of an order which was designed to overcome, or to at least confine, the threatening conflicts of the political" (Slater 1998:389).

Considering peace as a process of political negotiation between sides (Bernal 2000), which requires a lessening of tensions to move toward social reconciliation (Torres-Rivas 2000), what this book suggests with regards to a political and negotiated solution to the conflict (Camacho Solís 2000), is that there occurred a crisis of trust in which not only the Zapatistas and their supporters questioned remunicipalization, but so did the new municipal council members who had not received the promised budgets, and the local populace who seriously questioned the governing methods of their new authorities. In other words, reconciliation between Zapatistas and non-Zapatistas was a long way off, but further still was the reconciliation between Zapatistas and governmental institutions. The government's counter-insurgent logic revived hate and violence, causing greater levels of social disruption.

If we accept that the peace negotiations in Latin America "are intimately bound up with the transition to democracy" (Arnson, Benítez and Selee 2003:19),

and if we take the case of Chiapas and the *Alborista* remunicipalization policy, we can imagine the negative effects that these governmental actions precipitated at other levels, given that this policy did not herald the creation of institutional relationships that genuinely addressed the causes of the armed conflict. Nor did it help to advance aspirations of a more inclusive citizenship, an issue that the "conflict in Chiapas" makes us see as "a broader problem, related to Mexican democracy" (Arnson, Benítez and Selee 2003:37).

While Arnson (1999) and other academics have confirmed through studies carried out in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Colombia, that peace processes can create new, more democratic and participative forms of government in post-war frameworks, in the case of Chiapas-Mexico, we have seen that remunicipalization, as part of a supposed peace package, has contributed to what Bizberg (2003:226) calls "the transition pact". In other words, that which occurs only at an electoral level and does not actually transcend society as a whole or renew institutions or cultures, and the *Alborista* remunicipalization certainly contributed to advancing multi-party membership in Chiapas and Mexico (Alonso 2007).

Taking into account the processes of decomposition and reconstruction that occurred in the new municipalities between 1999 and 2001, our argument coincides with that of Bizberg (2003:188, 229) when he states that the alternation of power that exists in Mexico "fomented a more open discussion of the conflicts, which, although on one hand, undoubtedly undermined the legitimacy of traditional leaderships, on the other, it also opened the gates for new movements to invent other political methods for resolving conflicts of identity, interests and projects". It is the same Bizberg, however, who considers the term *transition* too limited when trying to tackle the questions that arise in a society's democratization process. He prefers to use instead "a much more open concept, such as *societal reconstruction*, in so far as having the capacity to work on their conflicts and their differences, and continuously inventing new forms for resolving conflicts in the future" (Bizberg 2003:189, emphasis added).[138]

138 With regards to *societal reconstruction*, we can say that whilst finishing the concluding parts of this book in its original Spanish version, a book was published entitled *La Desmodernidad Mexicana*, which deals with the need to rebuild the social, the collective, the local and the regional to be able to confront and remedy situations arising from the inequality and *anomie* produced by the neo-liberal system (Zermeño 2005). Sergio Zermeño's book puts forward a methodology that would lead us to (re)consider the *Alborista* and *Zapatista* municipalization from the point of view of economic sociology, where the main ethical point of reference concerns the "thickening" of society, in clear opposition to the liberal governing principle, the competition between open economies. *Thickening* is understood here as the empowerment of citizens, leading to a more just and fair society. Although here we give it only a passing mention, this book will undoubtedly give way to new texts, debates and actions.

Looking to the Future

Since 2000, these seven new municipalities have faced many challenges. Not one of them was really in conditions to become an autonomous entity and the budgets they received were basically channeled into efforts at tackling historical underdevelopment, as well as being limited and pre-allocated, and dependent on political operators with partisan interests or linked to authoritarian governmental decisions. As for the new municipal councils, they were fragile entities formed by inexperienced individuals. In the majority of the new municipalities, there was frustration amongst the population because in spite of the creation of the municipality, their problems were still not being resolved. With the government discourse on remunicipalization, over-optimistic expectations were generated regarding the real possibilities and scope for change. Most municipalities soon revealed a degree of political disenchantment at the ballot boxes (Alonso 2007).

For these reasons, María del Carmen García and Jesús Solís, in their evaluation of the remunicipalization process in Montecristo de Guerrero, call into question the relevance of remunicipalization policies, imagining a future scenario of ever increasing fragmentation, with poor, small municipalities of small landholders, unable to sustain themselves. García and Solís affirm that the new municipalities do not guarantee the equal distribution of land and resources; quite the opposite in fact. They each bring a danger of political fragmentation. For García and Solís, more than the formation of new municipalities, what is needed is a state reform that includes the internal structure of local governments and a rethinking of the relationship between the three levels of government (federal, state and municipal). Burguete and Torres coincide with García and Solís in the need for such a reform, yet they add to this by specifying that it must include, in the framework of indigenous autonomy, discussions related to the design of government institutions themselves, an argument which is developed in greater depth by Tonatiuh Guillén (2007).

Araceli Burguete and Jaime Torres believe that the State's policy of territorial reorganization leaves unaddressed many issues that have repeatedly been avoided by legislative and executive powers or cloaked in administrative mechanisms that on occasion have ended up in pure simulation. Both authors maintain that throughout the twentieth century, pending issues, such as the restitution of municipal powers, have erupted cyclically and, sometimes, violently onto the scene. Armando Bartra (2005) calls this the story of our ancestral and ontological vocation for democratic self-government but immediately clarifies that this should be read "in a context of confrontation of paradigms, not totally superficial, but more circumstantial than the *pueblos*' ancient will to self-govern: insurgent municipali-

ties or constitutional municipalities, rebel resistance, in danger of marginalizing themselves politically; or participating autonomously, taking on the risk of co-option" (Bartra 2005:64)

Sonia Toledo similarly questions the remunicipalization program, even though she points out that in spite of everything, it also benefited the local population of San Andrés Duraznal; whilst the budgets assigned to the new municipalities were insufficient, without the remunicipalization project, San Andrés Duraznal and its inhabitants might not have received the little support that they did and would not have drawn the attention of academics like herself. Harvey also admits that the new municipalities were not minor achievements in terms of everyday life in Marqués de Comillas and Benemérito de las Américas. Along with Leyva and Rodríguez, Harvey demonstrates the "double-edged sword" character of social organizations—co-opted or independent—in local and regional political life; as agents of change but at the same time obstacles to the democratization of local politics.

Finally, it can be said that the new municipalities in Chiapas arrived in the twenty-first century with a considerable democratic deficit: a shortage which, as the title of María del Carmen García and Jesús Solís' chapter suggests, constitutes part of the "unsettled business" of remunicipalization. We would add that this deficit is characteristic of each and every municipality in the state and in the country as a whole and would appear to be one of the most important deficits of the Mexican political system, unresolved even by the alternation of political parties in government. On a national level, it is difficult to imagine that the inhabitants of new municipalities could ever go beyond what has been achieved by the Mexican population as a whole, above all if we consider that they are marked and limited by a situation of suspended dialogue (EZLN - Government), owing to the non-compliance with the San Andrés Accords and by the still unresolved political and military conflict.…

Chiapas, Mexico, 2007

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

A.C.	*Asociación Civil* Civil Association (non-profit)
AEDPCh	*Asamblea Estatal Democrática del Pueblo Chiapaneco* Democratic State Assembly of the People of Chiapas
ARIC-UU	*Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo-Unión de Uniones* Rural Association of Collective Interest-Union of Unions
CAM	*Congreso Agrario Mexicano* Mexican Agrarian Congress
CAS	*Centro de Atención Social* Social Attention Center
CCI	*Centro Coordinador Indigenista* Indigenist Coordination Center
CCRI-CG	*Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena – Comandancia General* Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee – General Command
CD	*Convergencia por la Democracia* Convergence for Democracy
CDHFBC	*Centro de Derechos Humanos "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas"* Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas"
CEE	*Consejo Estatal Electoral* State Electoral Council
CEFIDIC	*Consejo Estatal de Fomento para la Investigación y Difusión de la Cultura* State Council for the Development of Cultural Research and Dissemination
CENCOS	*Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social A.C.* National Center for Social Communication
CEOIC	*Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinas* State Council of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations
CER	*Comisión Estatal de Remunicipalización* State Commission on Remunicipalization
CIEPAC	*Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria A. C.* Center for Economic and Policy Research Community
CIESAS	*Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology

CIOAC	*Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos* Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants
CNC	*Confederación Nacional Campesina* National Peasant Confederation
CNPA	*Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala* National "Plan de Ayala" Coordinating Committee
COCOPA	*Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación* Commission for Concord and Pacification
CODESSMAC	*Consejo para el Desarrollo Sustentable de la Selva de Marqués de Comillas* Council for the Sustainable Development of the Forest of Marqués de Comillas
COESCAFÉ	*Comisión Estatal del Café* State Coffee Commission
CONACyT	*Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología* Nacional Council for Science and Technology
CONAI	*Comisión Nacional de Intermediación* National Mediation Commission
CONASUPO	*Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares* State Company for Popular Subsistence
CONECULTA	*Consejo Estatal para las Culturas y las Artes de Chiapas* State Council for Cultures and Arts in Chiapas
CONSUR-G	*Consejo Regional del Sur de Montecristo de Guerrero* Regional Council for the South of Montecristo de Guerrero
COPICAS	*Consejo Productivo Indígena Campesino de la Selva* Indigenous Peasant Productive Council- Selva
COPLADE	*Comité de Planeación para el Desarrollo del estado* Planning and Development Committee
COPLAMAR	*Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas Deprimidas y Grupos Marginados* General Coordinating Committee for the National Plan for Destitute Areas and Marginalized Groups
COSPECH	*Coordinadora de Organizaciones Sociales y Productivas del Estado de Chiapas* Coordinating Committee of Social and Productive Organizations of the State of Chiapas
CTM	*Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos* Confederation of Mexican Workers
DICONSA	*Distribuidora Conasupo* Conasupo Distributor

DIF	*Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* Integral Development of the Family
EZLN	*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FAFOMUN	*Fondo de Aportaciones Federales para el Fortalecimiento Municipal* Fund for Federal Contributions for Municipal Strengthening
FAISM	*Fondo de Aportaciones para la Infraestructura Social Municipal* Fund for Contributions to Municipal Social Infrastructure
FIPI	*Frente Independiente de Pueblos Indígenas* Indigenous Peoples' Independent Front
FONAES	*Fondo Nacional de Empresas en Solidaridad* National Fund for Companies in Solidarity
IFE	*Instituto Federal Electoral* Federal Electoral Institute
IMSS	*Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social* Mexican Institute of Social Security
INEGI	*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, Geografía e Informática* National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Computing
INI	*Instituto Nacional Indigenista* National Indigenist Institute
INM	*Instituto Nacional de Migración* National Migration Institute
MIRA	*Movimiento Indígena Revolucionario Anti-zapatista* Anti-Zapatista Revolutionary Indigenous Movement
MOCRI	*Movimiento Campesino Regional Independiente* Independent Regional Peasant Movement
MSF	*Médicos sin Fronteras* Doctors without Borders
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCEZ	*Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata* Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization
OCOPECH	*Organización Campesina Obrero Popular del Estado del Chiapas* Popular Peasant and Workers' Organization of the State of Chiapas
PAC	*Partido de Acción Civica* Civic Action Party
PAN	*Partido Acción Nacional* National Action Party
PARM	*Partido Auténtico de Revolución Mexicana* Authentic Mexican Revolution Party

PAS	*Partido de Alianza Social* Social Alliance Party
PCD	*Partido de Centro Democrático* Party of the Democratic Center
PDS	*Partido Democracia Social* Social Democracy Party
PEMEX	*Petróleos Mexicanos* Mexican Oil Company
PFCRN	*Partido del Frente Cardenista de Reconstrucción Nacional* Party of the Cardenist Front of National Reconstruction
PNR	*Partido Nacional Revolucionario* National Revolutionary Party
PRD	*Partido de la Revolución Democrática* Party of the Democratic Revolution
PRI	*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* Institutional Revolutionary Party
PROCAMPO	*Programa de Capitalización al Campo* Government Program to Capitalize Rural Areas
PRODESCH	*Programa de Desarrollo de Los Altos de Chiapas* Development Program for Chiapas Highlands
PRONASOL	*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* National Solidarity Program
PSD	*Partido Social Demócrata* Social Democratic Party
PSN	*Partido de la Sociedad Nacionalista* Party of the Nationalist Society
PT	*Partido del Trabajo* Labor Party
PVEM	*Partido Verde Ecologista de México* Ecological Green Party of Mexico
RAN	*Registro Agrario Nacional* National Agrarian Registry
RAP	*Región Autónoma Pluriétnica* Pluriethnic Autonomous Region
SEAPI	*Secretaría para la Atención a los Pueblos Indios* Secretariat for the Attention to Indigenous Peoples
SEDESOL	*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* Secretariat of Social Development
SEMARNAP	*Secretaría de Medio Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca* Secretariat of the Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries

SEP	*Secretaría de Educación Pública* Secretariat of Public Education
SEPI	*Secretaría de Pueblos Indios* Secretariat of Indigenous Peoples
SIPAZ	*Servicios Internacionales para la Paz A. C.* International Services for Peace
SNTE	*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* National Union of Education Workers
SOCAMA	*Solidaridad Campesino Magisterial* Peasant Teachers' Solidarity Organization
SRA	*Secretaría de Reforma Agraria* Secretariat of Agrarian Reform
SSS	*Sociedades de Solidaridad Social* Social Solidarity Societies
SUTECH	*Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Especializados en el Estado de Chiapas* Labor Union of Specialized Workers in the State of Chiapas
UNAM	*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* National Autonomous University of Mexico
UNHCR	*Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados* United Nations High Commission for Refugees
ZORUMA	*Programa de Desarrollo Sostenible en Zonas Rurales Marginadas* Sustainable Development Program for Marginalized Rural Areas