

**MAYA COMMUNITIES AND THE NATION STATE:
REFLECTIONS AFTER FIELDWORK IN THE
HIGHLANDS OF CHIAPAS, MEXICO**

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The Zapatist rebellion the first of January 1994 made the Mexican state of Chiapas and its Mayan part of the population world famous. Demanding social justice for the impoverished Mayas and political democracy for the whole Mexican nation, the Zapatists challenged the governing party PRI and the political establishment, and gained massive national and international support. The rebellion has obviously and rightly been seen as a political reaction by Maya Indians to the conditions in which they live. But it expresses also something else, as it forms part of a broader phenomenon among Mayas in Chiapas. The last few years the majority of Maya indians have entered one or other of various political and religious groupings, making distinct demands on government and authorities. The previously homogenous villages are divided up in sometimes bitter factions. There appears to be a radical restructuring going on of Mayan social communities and their relation to the broader, national society.

This article is an attempt to present some thoughts on this subject after having completed fourteen months of field work (1995-96) in one Mayan municipality in the highlands of Chiapas. The tone of this text is more conversational than academic and I do not present any coherent thesis. I also include very little ethnographic data. Rather, I wish to present the questions that are guiding my research and invite the reader to reflect with me upon some general issues - issues that seem relevant for understanding the current changes of Mayan lives.

Introduction: Project aim

The aim of my dissertation project, as formulated in 1993, is to investigate, by village based fieldwork, how the ethnic identity among Maya Indians is rearticulated and politicized when they join regional variants of the broader Indian movement. By such a case-study the project intends to investigate a global phenomenon wherein indigenous peoples come to reconstruct and politicize their ethnic identity in their struggle for survival and recognition. Central to these indigenous demands is to be acknowledged as participants - both as individuals and as an ethnic collective - within the specific nation-state. Thereby they form a criticism of the homogenizing and nationalistic aspirations common for nation-states.

With my study I intend to examine how the modernist and globalized form of identity created by the indigenous movement becomes meaningful and communicable in a local

setting. As many other peoples today, the Mayas experience the increasing intertwining of local and modernist life-worlds, and the rapidly emerging indigenous organizations - of which the Zapatista liberation army can be seen as an extreme example - use and are influenced by a global language for expressing political demands. Present in Chiapas are also a range of state authorities, parties, churches, NGOs, foreign visitors and tourists, who all in various ways interact with Mayas. Obviously, shared modes of communication are developed, and - as obviously - there are diverging interpretations of these discourses. Chiapas has become one of many meeting grounds for global and - several - local life worlds.

The changing relationship between the local and the modern is today a world-wide phenomenon sometimes referred to as "globalization" and recognized as such both by political actors and scholars (Marcus 1992, Kapferer 1992). However, these changes cannot be understood as a uni-directional trend of Western homogenization. Instead, it is essential to focus on how the global and the modern not only influence the local communities, but is also restructured and given new significations by these local contexts (eg Friedman 1992, Friedman & Lash 1992). These strategies of local persistence to global encompassment are also expressed in the articulation of ethnic differentiation which today shapes world-politics (Hettne 1990). The rapid increase since the 1970s of organized indigenous resistance - common to state nationalism and neoliberal economics - is one significant and accentuated example of these processes.

The highland Tzotziles

There are seven major Maya linguistic groups in the state of Chiapas in the south of Mexico. My study focuses on the Tzotzil-speaking Mayas, who together with the Tzeltales reside principally in the Chiapas highlands. The Tzotziles constitute a population of around 300 000 (INEGI 1992). The total Maya population in Chiapas is almost one million, or a third of the total population (ibid).

The majority of the Tzotziles live in self-governed municipalities who are named after their patron saint. Every municipality consists of many small hamlets scattered over the field-covered hills and valleys, where little forest is left. Every hamlet has a name and its members form a social unit, headed by a few authorities. Almost all Tzotziles are peasants, cultivating the typical *milpa* - the field with corn, beans and squash. Since the last century, however, many families have insufficient land for their support. Therefore, most men take seasonal work for additional income on coffee plantations or as unskilled labor in for example construction work (Wasserstrom 1978). Many women also produce handicraft for the growing tourist market (D. Rus 1988). The increasing shortage of land has forced many families away from their highland communities to the lowland regions of the state where they find land and form new communities. As the other Indians in Chiapas, the Tzotziles suffer from poverty with consequences such as malnutrition and high child mortality (Wasserstrom 1983).

The Catholic community

In my project description, I had stated I wanted to do my field work with a political organization as well as in a village where members from this organization lived. However, already before heading out for my field work in March 1995, I had decided to rather focus on a village group of "new Catholics", and when arriving to Chiapas it was such a group I set out to find. There were several reasons for this choice.

The new Catholics in Chiapas have converted as a response to the evangelization mission carried out by the Catholic church especially during the last decades. While Catholic symbols abound in the religious ceremonies in the Maya communities, few, also among Mayas themselves, call these practices Catholic. Being forced on (or "brought to") the Maya peoples in Chiapas during the first period of colonialism, the different groups have interpreted and elaborated the Christian symbols in ways that only bear some resemblances to Christian beliefs. This is the reason why both Catholic and Protestant churches have wanted to "further" the Christian evangelization in Maya communities. Since the 1970's there has been a strong upsurge of conversions among Mayas to the Catholic or the various Protestant churches that are present in the region.

In the highlands of Chiapas, where the diocese is headed by the politically radical and world famous bishop Samuel Ruíz, many of his clergy have since the 1960s initiated local church groups where the Bible is read with a liberation theological perspective. With its mission and its articulated stance in support of the "poor and oppressed", the diocese has won many converts in the poor Indian communities, and the bishop has there acquired somewhat of a prophetic role, by the Catholic Indians seen to head their struggle for better and more dignified living conditions. In contrast with the Catholic church, the Protestant churches in the region usually avoid political references to societal structures. Instead, they promise an improvement of the quality of life of their members if the individual behavior is changed radically (cf Stoll 1990). However, with their successful grassroot-focused work and democratic meeting forms they have influenced the methods of the Catholic evangelization and even fostered people for the political organizations (Collier 1995:55-56).

Many of the new Catholic Maya identify with the demands of the broad political Indian movement which today is quite strong in Chiapas, especially since the Zapatista uprising. Also, many of those who have entered the organizations or have become Zapatistas have first, as they say, "become conscious" in these church groups. (Bishop Ruiz has because of this been accused by the Mexican government of having initiated the Zapatista uprising, making Indians discontent and rebellious.) To a large extent, the Catholic groups share the political discourse of the Indian movement, including the emphasis on an identity as indigenous peoples and a wish to defend and recuperate the "traditional heritage" of their people.

To choose a Catholic group for my study would consequently - for my specific interests - to some extent be comparable with working with one of the Indian political organizations. There were also specific advantages with such a choice. While the political

Indian organizations in general hold meetings to address primarily practical matters, the Catholics reflect weekly in their prayer meetings upon their experiences in the Mexican society and compare with what the word of God has to say about this. Following a Catholic church group would thus enable me to listen to peoples thoughts and concerns and in a natural way talk with them about these things. Further, in contrast with the political organizations, who in general do not form any substantial groups in each village but gather members from several municipalities, the Catholics usually have their meetings on village-levels. Working with a Catholic group would therefore enable me to attend meetings at village level and to follow the group members in their daily life.

The Catholic village congregation which came to accept my presence is quite large, with about eighty adult members in a village of five hundred adults in the Tzotzil municipality Chenalhó. In the village there are also two small Pentecostal and Presbyterian congregations, some members of political organizations and co-operatives, adherents to an oppositional party, an unarmed base group of Zapatistas, and a small group of "priistas", supporters of the government party. There is also a group of traditionalists ("de costumbre"), who are practitioners of the so-called traditional religion. Most of the traditionalists are also supporters of the PRI-party. Some villagers are reluctant to choose faction but are still defined by other villagers as adherents to one of the groups. Villagers tend to socialize and even marry within their own group. There is much gossip about and antagonism to the other groups, and in the past there has been violent conflict. The factionalism of the village is highly representative of Maya life today in Chiapas.

Contemporary Maya factionalism

The Maya communities in highland Chiapas are sites of strong factionalism. (Factionalism is intense also in the newly populated lowland communities, but the history there is somewhat different, with for example strong competition for land. In the following, I am referring primarily to the highlands.) Almost all villagers have joined one of the several religious or political associations that today are present in most municipalities. Several associations established their presence in the 1960s and 1970s, and memberships increased gradually and came to escalate dramatically after the Zapatista uprising. Most villages are today highly divided, where everybody has to take side, either with PRI, the government party the last seventy years, "the opposition" to which most of the groupings above are counted, or align with some of the other groupings. In many villages conflicts between village factions have been severe and sometimes even violent with injured and dead and expulsion of families of the attacked faction.

Since my first stay in Chiapas in 1985-86, one burning question has been, and continues to be: what is actually going on with all these groups? Why are so many people converting to the Catholic or the Evangelical churches? Or joining political Indian organizations, the political parties, or, lately, become militants within the Zapatistas?

A common response among bystanders is that the Mayas have become conscientized about their oppression and therefore have formed groups with demands on social change. However, such an explanation is unsatisfactory. First, Indians in Chiapas have been grossly abused since colonialism began, but have not always contested with revolt. Obviously, they have dealt with experiences of exploitation in different ways throughout history, both in how they have conceptualized it and acted upon it. Why would so many organize politically today? Further, not all the groupings presently attracting Maya are politically oppositional to the government. Most of the Evangelical churches have a rather passive or neutral political line where criticism of the governmental authority is discouraged. Still, the many Protestant conversions seem to be part of the broader phenomenon of choosing new allegiances.

Today, many outsiders give attention to factionalism. Mestizo social workers and political advisors to the Indian organizations, as well as anthropologists working in the area are commenting on the factionalism which today is dividing villages, and on how "easily" people seem to convert to new religions, join parties and organizations, and often also shift from one affiliation to another. As some of these observers now suggest, it is reasonable to assume that the villagers are expressing something different with their political and religious affiliations than one as an outsider first might think, and that it might not have much to do with the official ideology of the specific grouping. Perhaps the churches, parties and organizations are "flags" used by villagers to signal locally relevant "similarities" and "differences" between people. But which, and why?

In order to understand how people in the villages interpret the political discourse on "indigenusness", the focus of my research, it seemed essential to pay attention to such local processes. Not only in order to understand what might be peoples' motivations in joining the Indian movement, but also to better listen to both the explicit and the, for me, hidden references people would make when they used the idiom of this movement. What are they saying about their lives and their society?

From the first few weeks of my field work I was struggling with several hints and impressions that seemed relevant to these kind of questions. Since 1985 I had become familiar with two seemingly opposed categories of Tzotzil Maya. One was composed of highly politicized villagers who took a stance against both the Mexican government and the local Indian *caciques* (men in formal or informal control of the political life in the Indian municipalities). The oppositionals, many of which became militants of Indian political organizations, spoke about defending Indian rights and traditions against colonial domination.

The other category consisted of politically non-interested Protestant Mayas, many of which were living in the outskirts of San Cristóbal, in neighborhoods formed around their specific congregation. They had been expelled from their native villages, accused of having deserted the traditions for their new religion. Others were allowed to keep living in their native communities, but made a clear stance against the beliefs and ceremonies held by their co-villagers. The Protestants declared they lived happier after they had

converted, with God and without the traditions and all the drinking that went along with it.

Although the political orientation of these two categories of people in general was quite different, they seemed to share certain important traits. Both groups were radically non-conformist, taking a reflective and critical stance to local norms and expectations, and they had chosen unconventional directions in their lives. This seemed to be new.

Was I exaggerating the degree of pressure on conformity that I believed had been common previously in the villages? People seemed however to increasingly choose roads that diverged from the behavior they would describe as traditional. Not only did villagers choose new group affiliations, all of whom had explicit, non-traditional agendas. The young, both girls and boys, had begun to make their own decisions on whom they would marry. Further, the status and power which formerly was the exclusive privilege of male elders was now challenged by young, bilingual men who had acquired leading positions within the new organizations and churches and thereby had special connections to the surrounding non-Indian society.

Thus, I did believe there was an important and quite broad and radical change going on in the Maya municipalities in the Highlands. And that it probably in part was related to the politics by the Mexican state during the last fifty years. Gradually, the government authorities had sought to increase its control of Maya leaders in the municipalities, while also increasing the material resources that were, or in practice, could be, accessible for the Maya communities. Local Maya leaders became again - as in several earlier historical periods - increasingly those who, in return for personal financial benefits, knew how to co-operate with state authorities and agencies, both in order to channel and structure local development projects and to assure the success of the government party, PRI, in local elections. Until recently PRI has been the only party in the Maya municipalities in the Highlands. Elections were often mere formalities where the municipal Maya authorities usually filled out the ballots personally for all the villagers. Since the 1970s, other parties have begun to appear in the villages, but without gaining many followers. The last few years something has happened, however, and in the municipal elections October 1995 PRI won in the Maya municipalities only because the majority of villagers (around 70%) boycotted the elections or annulled their votes. The local bosses - the so called *caciques* - and therefore PRI, have begun to loose their political control of the villages.

One common explanation given for the now wavering cacique control is that it is the result of the development projects carried out in the region, "modernization" gradually reaching out into the villages. With increased access to roads, and therefore to markets, and with more and more villagers with primary schooling, many can now find their own ways to income, agencies and state authorities, thus bypassing local bosses. Also, now being able to check on contracts and formal laws, many have begun to accuse their municipal authorities of lies and corruption, and of having abused the villagers' lack of knowledge, cheating them of money meant for communal projects. To many, these new

experiences have created a strong dissatisfaction with the supposedly traditional local leaders. Many argue that these leaders use the name of tradition to keep people conformative and passive. By identifying political opponents as trouble makers and accusing them of being against the traditions, the leaders seek to ostracize oppositionals and even expel them from the community.

If this might be part of the background to the present factionalism in the villages, I felt however it was far from sufficient as an explanation. Apart from being still quite superficial, it was too colored of the (Enlightenment) notion that people had gone from "lack of knowledge" to "knowledge" and as a result had become less suppressed. Also, it did not really explain why people would convert to new religions.

Being Maya in a national society

Of course, there are many attempts by anthropologists working in Chiapas to further the analysis of the present social and political processes in the Maya population, and I have listened with eager ears to new and initiated ideas. Also, I listened to my own impressions and "hints". These were some of my most important concerns after the first few weeks of fieldwork:

- There seemed to be a great difference between those Mayas who moved around much in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the central highland town, for example as active in the political organizations or the churches, and those who were not, but who came into town just for some errands or for an occasional political demonstration and then returned to their village. They seemed like different kinds of persons altogether. I sometimes tried to understand what I went by when I classified people into one category or the other, and I realized I did it very rapidly and largely by the eyes: people of the "first category" would meet my eyes. There was some kind of acknowledgment of a mutual existence; we shared the etiquette of town life by which we were anonymous but courteous subjects to each other. By conforming to this etiquette we also implicitly communicated our mutual competence of dealing with town infrastructure, its stores, banks and offices.

People of the other category, the "peasants", would always avoid my glance. While people of the first category would, through their whole appearance, seem focused and "directed", the others seemed evasive and "soft". The differences were always apparent when I, as a paraplegic using wheel chair, would try to get help with my wheelchair up some curb. The accustomed town dwellers would always feel obliged to help me, and if they did not know how, it was easy to show them. The whole thing became a polite affair in which we both had our given roles in. The "peasants", on the other hand, would not at all understand that I was directing myself to them, and, when I insisted, they smiled embarrassed and showed they had no clue of what I wanted or how to comply (even if they understood Spanish) and signaling they really could not help me. By then, usually,

someone else would come and help me, leaving the others to feel rather disturbed and surprised by the whole affair.

In short, I had the sensation that the "peasants" and I, along with the other town people, moved in different "rooms", parallel but separate. As if we really had nothing to do with each other. They were just temporarily visiting the town, and would soon go back to "their own" social spaces. The question this raised was burning hot: if I was right and they actually themselves felt they were only temporary visitors, or even "outsiders", when they were in town, how did they regard these and other social spaces outside their villages? And how did they perceive their place and role in them?

- I was struck by that those who had the most experience of working in the political Indian organizations also were those who dressed the most like Mestizos, who would use watches, folders with papers and move around with apparent ease in town and its different offices. Especially the young (ex-)peasant guys who would hang out at the office of the specific organization would proudly and eagerly try to imitate this style. To these youngsters, these "markers" - of "modernism", Mestizeness, town life? - seemed almost to be as attractive and important as the political work itself. At least at first glance, this seemed to contrast with the political programs of these organizations, where an important objective is the defense of what is described as indigenous traditions and life forms.

It was also striking that I, during these first weeks, felt these people to be much more "like me", a Westerner and town person, than the typical village type of people. This refers back to the point above. Were there differences in the ways one related to people in the various social spaces? Did the town, or city, imply a special form of social interaction which the sporadically visiting villagers did not enter into? Was I even facing two distinct cultural ways of being persons (subjects)? Apparently, these differences in interaction or personhood caused, or motivated, the Maya village people entering the political world of meetings and town life to gradually reconstitute themselves. The change was evident both to people like myself and the young guys in the offices. We also knew the reason for change: while "Indian" or "village" way of being is marginalized and stigmatized in the town, the "other" way ("Mestizo"/"Western"/"towny") is esteemed and gives potential access to status, influence and resources.

Certainly these different ways of interacting is highly related to ethnicity. Mayas have until a few decades ago not been allowed to use the sidewalks in San Cristóbal and still know they should keep a low profile in interaction with Mestizos in order to avoid any extra retaliation and humiliation. What has this implied for how one constituted oneself as a person - at least when being "an Indian dealing with a Mestizo"? This connects with the next observation.

- At one of the several workshops I attended, Tzeltal women, were informed about and discussed article 4 in the Mexican constitution, which speaks of the rights of the indigenous people in the country. Judging both the hesitation and interest of the

participant women, the work shop was a meeting ground for rather different pictures of what is Society. What would these be? Allowing myself some initial speculations, it would seem like Maya peasants in the Chiapas highlands until recently have had "the village", "the municipality" and "the town" as the entities which constituted society and by which they would organize the people they interacted with, both Mestizos and Indians. Certainly this society also included an idea of "the capital", Mexico City, where the "ultimate government (Mestizo) authorities" were located. And also "plantations" (*fincas*) where many men would go for seasonal work. This society, then, would primarily be regional (geographically) and draw heavily on the intragroup sharing of personal experiences of the various sites.

Today, however, it seems like more and more Maya place themselves in a social map which uses quite different entities, and which they often learn about through people outside their own group, like the Mestizo women leading this workshop. Here, the fundamental societal unit is "the country", Mexico, or "the nation" (-state). The authority for the country is "the government", but there is also "a constitution", a text accessible to the public, which gives the rules which the government should follow. In this frame of mind, Chiapas is a "state" among many in the country, and in several of these states there are other "indigenous peoples" like the Tzeltales or Tzotziles. There are, in this world-view, also other countries, with *their* governments and *their* indigenous peoples, and, for the politically oppositional Maya, there is since the Zapatista uprising the notion of a "public opinion" in these other countries which supports the Chiapas Indians in their struggle for justice.

Not surprisingly, the society that many Maya in Chiapas today imagine is quite similar my own notions and those nation-states described by Benedict Anderson (1983). These concepts are part of a modernistic and increasingly globalized discourse by which social realities are formed. However, although the various local uses are mutually recognizable and communicable, they also speak of specific life worlds. Therefore, it is crucial to ask, in the case of Maya in Chiapas: how does that society look like which the more "village-oriented" Maya imagine (and which I made a first guess about above)? And coming with these conceptualizations, how do they interpret and apply the "modernist" notion of society and how do they regard their place and role in such a society?

- On the Mayan Chiapas arena, I found that this "new" notion of society often goes together with equally new notions of "rights", "laws", and "justice". Whether new Catholics, Protestants or politically organized people, the notion of some form of "external" or absolute rights and justice seems to be a novel and awesome element in their conviction. The Catholics I work among, for example, refer to "the word of God" to manifest the wrongfulness and injustice of their living conditions and of how they are treated. In the UN declarations on Human Rights and the Mexican constitution and laws they find wordly manifestations of a similar moral, and they refer to them when criticizing the behavior of authorities and others.

What is felt as empowering, I believe, is the notion of an indisputable, absolute and universal moral law against which local circumstances can be measured and judged. If there are Human Rights, then abuse of people signifies that these rights are "violated", which accordingly is, in absolute terms, "wrong" and "unjust". (Not to underestimate, the significance of such "weapons of the weak".) One reason the Zapatistas have gained such a widespread support among the Mayas is probably because they reached far into the villages with their strong and untimid proclamations: that the exploitation and humiliation of Indians is in absolute terms wrong and *unjust*, and that the international community agrees.

In sum, my preliminary hypothesis was, and continues to be, that the many new groupings among the Maya - the Catholic and Protestant congregations, the political parties and the organizations - offer people, among other things, forms to participate in the doings of a broader society, the Mexican nation-state. Heretofore, Mayas have been ascribed passive and submissive roles, both socially, economically and politically, in their interaction with members of the broader society. The roles have to a large extent been determined by the dominant Mestizo population and most Mayas had few possibilities to influence the terms.

In the new associations, I suggest, Mayas find means to conceptualize and relate to the national society; they are presented with a mode, or an idiom, to understand and analyze as well as making demands on it. Thereby, they attain (a promise of) a way to become citizens in the nation-state, subject to lawful treatment and with voice and rights.

Further, through the infrastructure of each association and their advisory and expert personnel (like lawyers, nurses, or sociologists), the Maya members acquire tools to handle authorities and agencies of the national society. Increasingly, they can present claims, demands for resources, and appeals against legal cases.

Another important aspect of the associations, I believe, is that they offer a form of citizenship which is not primary individual but collective. Certainly, the citizenship claimed by these Maya makes each individual subject to rights and obligations. However, the form of participation and identification practiced is collective. It is as Catholic, Cardenist or Pentecostal Maya that the villagers today make their entrance on the arena of the national society and join other Catholics, Cardenists or Pentecostals, both Maya and Mestizo. Within the new collective they are promised equal respect and treatment with the non-Indian members; the political or religious denomination is the unifying identifier. It is also as members of this collective they present their claims on the national society. The political entrance on the national arena is often publicly displayed and enacted in collective rituals. In Zapatist demonstrations or religious processions, in regional or national meetings among Presbyterian indigenous pastors or activists of the Indian movement, villagers come to the towns to publicly express their acquired citizenship and their participation in and demands on society and government. To some extent, the members of the associations seem to have created a new way of being Indian.

Changing Maya communities

The changes that seem to be taking place go further, of course, and have more causes, than the shared arena of the national society. The widespread factionalization into various associations evidently influences relations between Mayas themselves and affects Maya societal models. There are also internal local processes in the Maya communities who motivate people to become members in these groups in the first place, besides the motivations suggested above.

The altering forms of interaction as well as the changing significations of that which is perceived as the "community" respectively the broader, Mestizo dominated society seem to express a process of reconstruction of collective identity in the highland Maya municipalities. The attraction of the organizations and congregations appears to express (among other things, of course) a restructuring of the local community, in some sense altering the importance of the geographic village as locus of identity and social cohesion and as central in defining and legitimizing power and authority. I believe there are new forms developing for how the individual positions herself in relation to the various social spheres - one's own community and municipality vs. the "broader" society - and its other actors (co-villagers, municipal authorities, Indians from other municipalities, Mestizos, "licenciados", the government etc). This would imply a transformation of how people, both as individual and collective subjects, constitute themselves and define their intentions and motivations. Hence, it affects how people act and respond to the actions of others. Ultimately, this process relates to the initial focus of my research; how highland Maya today are beginning to interpret and use the present politicized notion of being "indigenous peoples".

The changes I have suggested would have taken place at least since the 1970s and have accelerated intensely since the Zapatista uprising 1994. In my work I hope to compare the presently developing forms of collective identity with those which were dominating from the 1930s-40s and until at least the 1970s. During this period the integration of PRI-controlled power and resources in the Maya municipalities gained its force, while most villagers still did not have personal interaction with the broader society. Here follows some initial speculations on the theme.

At this stage of my work, and drawing on my field work and some ethnographic texts on the region, I propose the previously customary Maya relation to power and authority, divine or human, be characterized as a "petitioning" relation. Richard Wilson's description of the Q'eqchi's in Guatemala seems relevant also for Chiapas Maya:

In general, offerings are made to define a deferential relationship with authority. They are the basis of a traditional, subsistence-based 'moral economy'. Q'eqchi's give food and presents to priests, landowners, government officials, and others who stand in a superior position over them. The giver is in the subordinate role but hopes to negotiate the receiver into an obligation to wield his or her power in a beneficial manner. In eating the offering of food, the consumer swallows the

responsibility. The offering, then, placates the tzuultaq'as [mountain deities] but also contains elements of manipulation and egalitarianism" (Wilson, 1995:75).

Wilson also finds strong similarities with Taussig's description of the Bolivian mountain spirits: "By feeding the mountain spirit, peasant producers ensure that the mountain spirits will feed them... The ambivalence of the spirit is always present... But ritual gift exchange can channel this ambivalence into a favorable outcome" (Taussig 1980 in Wilson 1995).

Let me briefly and superficially suggest how this type of "petitionable power" might look in the secular version. "Power", ie the decision and the capacity to comply with the petitioner, is something which resides "inside" the (heart of) the mighty person. A good petitioning, which is humble but elaborate, strives to elicit the benevolence of the mightful, so that he will want to comply. The power of deciding is all in the hands (the heart) of the mighty; the petitioner can only petition (to this heart) and hope.

When addressing Mestizo authorities the situation appears to be extra delicate and insecure. Indians in Chiapas commonly seem to regard Mestizo bosses as arbitrary in their decisions and execution of power. There are few mutually recognized norms to guide the decisions, and the boss is also free to shift eventual norms at will. This experience of arbitrariness, I suggest, enforces the notion that the power of bosses resides within the person itself, for himself to control and execute.

For my continued research, it would be valuable to investigate eventual general and continuous mode among the highland Mayas (in both Chiapas and Guatemala) in the conception and treatment of authorities, both during pre-Colonial and Colonial times. The change of social structures and living conditions, and the models set by colonial, later national Mexican (and Guatemalan) power structures all have influenced the relation between Mayas and authorities, be they Indian or Mestizo.

In the highland of Chiapas the form of leadership within the Maya communities appears to have changed considerably during the last fifty years with the development of the caciquismo described above. Maya authorities became, as in several previous periods in history, co-opted by the national government and functioned to some extent as its intermediaries (Rus 1994). George Collier (1995) describes this change of local leadership in the highlands as a shift from rank based to class based leadership. Some decades ago, Indian municipal leaders were dependent on their followers which motivated them to nurture that relation. Although there was an asymmetrical relation between political leaders and villagers it was possibly considered legitimate, I suggest, as it may have been based on a recognition of an "affiliation" between the two parties which created mutual obligations based on their respective position in the power hierarchy. The two parties "concerned" each other and hence had to act with a determined responsibility. Addressing the authorities with deferential "petitioning" was purposeful and ensured a morally acceptable response.

Today, local leaders achieve both their positions and resources from higher levels in the national hierarchy; the state government and agencies, by presenting firm loyalty to PRI, the governing party (Collier 1995). Thus, they do not need to foster the loyalty of the villagers, which opens possibilities for neglect and even overt abuse. Collier argues that municipal leaders in this vein have come to exclude a large number of villagers from their "social sphere" of concerns and obligations - villagers who belong to a different party, or other political or religious affiliation than those of the municipal authorities. (My own fieldwork strongly affirms this argument.)

A telling example, offered by Collier, is from the Tzotzil municipality of Zinacantán (1995:138). A woman who seeks divorce is doubtful whether she can settle this with the municipal authorities, as she belongs to a different political party than they do. Her brother, from whom she seeks advice, tells her: "Well, I don't want to go either [...] for I know that the authorities will ask me if you are from the PRI, and I will have to tell them you and your husband are Cardenistas. Then they're likely to say 'Who knows what municipio the Cardenistas belong to?' And that won't do". Collier explains that this is an insinuation to the Cardenistas that they deserve exile. I suggest it also is an expression by the municipal authorities that the Cardenistas in a sense already belong to a different community, in spite of the fact that they reside in the same municipality. The PRI-authorities do not accept the petitionings of the Cardenistas because the differing party allegiances express a fundamental rupture of communality. Since they no longer share affiliations they have no mutual obligations. The PRI-authorities are for the pri-ista villagers. In the same vein, villagers of other than PRI-loyalties might feel no moral or legal reason to follow judgments of PRI-leaders (Diane Rus, personal communication 1996).

In many municipalities, the authorities often choose to expel those villagers who chose new, non-PRI affiliations, especially if these are Protestant congregations, but in some cases also Catholic, Zapatist or other. Also in municipalities where authorities do not choose expulsion, villagers of diverging political or religious affiliations experience a "symbolic" expulsion. The consequences are far reaching. It may not only imply refusal by authorities to settle personal disputes, as in the case given by Collier above, but implies often also a denied access to services and infrastructure, as water, electricity, roads etc. In the case entire villages are regarded non-PRI they must, in order to get such services, bypass the municipality and go directly to state authorities and agencies. A couple of decades ago few villagers had such means.

Municipalities where other parties than PRI hold authority show similar exclusion of non-allies. As most Maya municipalities are PRI controlled, however, we find today a widespread exclusion of non-PRI villagers from the social sphere to which the municipal authorities recognize responsibility. Coupled with the general disinterest which Collier describes authorities to have today for villagers, also those of PRI-affiliation, municipal leadership seems to have become a political vacuum.

In my field work, I met many villagers expressing a feeling of being subjugated to arbitrary and abusive behavior by municipal authorities. The legitimacy of the leaders and the

municipal form of power they represent has become seriously undermined. While many have felt powerless and have avoided behavior which might be interpreted as oppositional, others have sought for other affiliations that would make influence and resources accessible to them. Ironically, this in turn further excludes them from the communal sphere recognized by the municipal authorities.

In sum, allegiance to a party, organization or religious congregation evidently expresses deep-going bonds of communality and identity in the Maya communities. Put in a different way, possibly these associations are used to express alliances - and divisions - that might have preceded the entrance of party- and organizational labels. In order to understand the factionalizing processes I need to find the principles for community which villagers apply. Are there other relevant (Maya) societal units besides the village and the municipality that might explain the seemingly rapid emergence of factions?

There are also nostalgic memories among villagers of past village life as being united and homogenous. What are the ideals for the Good Village? Has the village been constituted in contrast with villagers' experiences of the Mestizo Town, thereby emphasizing the role of locality, social cohesion, continuity with the past, and conformity to the authority of tradition, for communal, indigenous life? If these have been the ideals of the community, they are apparently changing today. In what direction?

The new moral communities

Maya villagers today seem to look for new "communities", new places where to belong. I suggest, tentatively, that the allegiances to new associations can be seen as a construction of new "moral communities"; smaller social spaces within the municipality where communality and shared identity and norms are re-established. These moral communities offer sometimes, in the case of a numerous local presence as for example is the case with many religious congregations and the Zapatistas, actual communal spaces within the village where members meet. They become, to some extent, like new villages within the village. However, they also transcend the geographically defined villages. The new moral communities are "multilocal" or "translocal" as they draw people from various villages within the municipality, and from various municipalities. Thereby, they seem to create a strong sense of being related to a large community of people that are significantly "similar".

Further, they connect in important ways to the idea (and the doings) of a broader society, a nation-state, as they offer a way to interpret and participate in the national society, as suggested earlier. Through membership in these moral communities one acquire a way of being "citizen", something which the village-type of community can not offer, or "intends" to do.

The "new" communities also offer new authorities to whom there is a strong sense of mutual affiliation and obligation. It seems that in the new religious congregations and political organizations, leadership recreates an ideal of leaders as having good intentions,

seeing to the well-being of the members, and the idea of the norms guiding their power as something shared and rational. However, I am not sure to what extent these leadership forms recreate the former asymmetrical patron-client type of relation between leader and villager. Presidents of political Indian organizations, receiving members in their offices sitting behind their desks surely reproduce the typical model of municipal or state authority or Mestizo boss. In this sense, the members still (have to) use a "petitioning" mode of addressing the leaders.

However, these new "communities" also seem to foster the idea that authorities are not supposed to execute arbitrary power according to their own will. Instead the execution of power should be structured by rules, defining also the rights of the petitioner.

Instead of the "petitioning" relation to power and authority we have, I suggest, the "contractual". The rules are outside the boss, written down in texts to which also normal people have access (for example the Bible, national laws, the constitution, the UN Declaration of Human Rights). Thereby, it is emphasized, people can both learn about these rules and demand that they be implemented, through licenciados and lawyers, in San Cristóbal and Tuxtla, the state capital, or all the way to Mexico City.

The moral communities offer ways to participate in the doings of the broader society, the nation-state, which ought to be attractive to those villagers already interacting with this broader society but who feel powerless in it. But what about the "true locals", for example the women who rarely leave the village and less the municipality? Perhaps the importance of the moral community is that it extends not only the social and physical space, but also the moral and conceptual. In the new associations new thoughts and new truths are offered and discussed. The members acquire new experiences and begin reflect upon things that could be different.

Gender are one of such issues, reflected upon primarily by women. Through the associations women have access to, and interest in, arenas who by merely getting outside the home and field implies changes of the space where a highland woman "should be". Further, women begin to participate in collective ("new communal") gatherings, being able to listen to the arguments of men, and sometimes even speak themselves, not to mention participate in demonstrations, where their public appearance at the same time is an intentional political manifestation. This, hence, implies that women gain increased access to the public, collective arenas where power is at stake, whether within their own local group or in regional gatherings. They have a chance to follow discussions and to form opinions. Although highland indigenous women still rarely speak up in large gatherings where men dominate (which usually is the case) they are now able to agree or disagree. They are also able to see other ways of being woman than those they themselves know and follow. For a woman role which has been highly rigidly defined, allowing few elaborations, and whose first command has been to obey her father and husband, these changes of course are provocative, especially for men, who feel they lose control over women's behavior. The degree to which many men try to stop women from

participating in these new arenas can hence be seen as a marker of the degree of the female gender change which is at stake.

Certainly also the male gender is under change in the associations, although not as a dramatic one, I believe. In much it relates to what I described above, as acquiring "Mestizo"/"towny" male ways of being. This "townification" seems to be a wider phenomenon among village men than only concerning those engaged in the congregations or political organizations. However, these groups definitely seem to be able to offer village men a "privileged access" to these "towny ways" of being and knowing, which I don't think should be underestimated as a reason why these groups are attractive to men. Further, the "townification" of indigenous village men seems to create a different kind of change in gender relation to what I outlined above. Especially when visiting the town, gender differences within many younger couples are enforced by ethnic and even class differences.

Many of these Mayan men resemble today rather well-dressed, town-confident Mestizos, literate and bilingual, while their wives, walking behind their husband with fast steps, carrying child and extra burden on their thump line, rather resembles poor indigenous servants, without language and knowledge to handle city life. Also this change of gender relation has its impact on family life in the villages.

Ultimately, then, the new moral communities can be seen to provide new versions of reality for their members. The new idioms these groups use for talking about reality and their own experiences - the Catholic liberation theological, the Zapatist, the Presbyterian - become means for reinterpreting and constructing partly new truths and moralities. These new idioms, then, can be invested with strong, personal experience and motivation and made to speak of things that the common idiom cannot. More, they can be, and are, used to address and challenge old truths and norms.

Evidently, the factionalism in the Maya communities make, potentially, deep rifts between people who used to hold the idea of communality high. The many groupings, ideologies and religions in the communities is constantly defined as a problem by villagers, also by those who belong to one of the new associations. Among many, or perhaps most, there is a sadness and regret over the divided villages and, often, families. Therefore, there are also some attempts to stop the trend. One example is a community in one of the Tzotzil municipalities where the villagers decided to choose their "agente municipal" themselves in the 1995 election, and not have him selected by the municipal authorities (who belong to the PRI). They also decided that whoever would win of the three candidates, who were PRI, Zapatista and "Sociedad Civil" respectively, the candidate would not obey his specific political municipal or regional authorities, but only respond to the villagers. Thus, the villagers attempted to avoid the factionalization of their community and "reconstruct" village cohesion. So far, however, such attempts of reconciliation are few and form no evidence to counter the factionalizing trend. The future character of Maya communities is hence uncertain, while the active Maya presence in the national society is likely to continue.

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