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THE NEW YOUNG INDIGENOUS POLITICIANS OF THE HIGHLANDS REGION OF CHIAPAS: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN THE TRADITIONAL FORMS OF SELF- GOVERNMENT

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Abstract: After years of observing the process of co-optation of indigenous leaders by political parties in the highlands region of Chiapas, it allows me to see how the reconfiguration of the party system, and particularly what was called the New PRI in 2008, negatively impacted the balance of some Mayan-Tsotsil municipalities. Unleashing, among other things, a wave of intra-community violence. We conclude then that the “professionalization” of these young people has represented one of the most violent ruptures with the traditional systems of local government and the social fabric, in communities where political life is indivisible from community life.

Thematic: Party System - PRI - indigenous community - indigenous professionals - social fabric - social fabric

This paper describes some of the most recent transformations of the Mexican political system, which have given rise to the birth of a new political class, that of young indigenous professional politicians. I will refer particularly to the new politicians of indigenous origin in the Tzotzil region of the Chiapas Highlands, in the Mexican Southeast, in one of its most recent transformations. With a prolonged fieldwork initiated in the summer of 2008, interviews, observation and participant observation, the political career of the young municipal president of San Andres Larrainzar was followed and reconstructed. This case study will allow us to observe a new process of transformation and irruption of political parties in the Tzotzil indigenous communities and its negative impact on community life. It concludes that the professionalization of young indigenous politicians has generated a process of separation from the professionalized governments and their grassroots communities. The most evident result can be seen in the violent events that occurred in the municipalities of San Juan Chamula and San Pedro Che-

nalho during the summer of 2006 and from there, until its prolongation until the present year. An event in which more than 20 people lost their lives and which caused the displacement of 25 families inaugurated this new stage. An event that corroborated the first considerations in this regard was the imposition of young municipal presidents as candidates of the dominant political parties in the region. This situation imposed more social pressure, instability and violence, which has disrupted all the spaces of community life and structures on which the so-called traditional forms of government rested. In contrast to other societies in this context, the professionalization of young politicians does not necessarily contribute to the stability and development of the communities they intend to govern.

POLITICS IN THE MAYA WORLD:

“You will embrace, you will carry the burden, the contribution. He will take hold, he will hang on your humble matter, on your humble energy for a day, for a year...”

Fragment of *misha*, or ceremony of investiture of office of the Tsotsil Maya peoples of the highlands region of Chiapas.
Translation Professor Enrique Pérez López

With these words begins the ceremony of handing over the charge or baton of command from the outgoing mayordomos-cargueros to the incoming mayordomos-cargueros in some Maya-Tsotsil communities in the highlands of the state of Chiapas. Prayers or *mishas* like these show us with words the relationship of interdependence that is established between a mayordomo or carguero, that is to say, the person and the social-community structure. In the communities of the cultural area known as Mesoamerica, occupying a civic-religious position represents the beginning or culmination of a life journey, of the good walk of a man or woman. A path that begins in childhood when occupying the lowest

rungs of the religious hierarchy and which culminates when occupying the position of main steward of a large stewardship.

Once the individual has held various positions in these structures, he or she can move on to civilian or public positions indistinctly. By then, the individual is considered to have accumulated the necessary social strength and energy capable of mobilizing, sustaining and uniting the community. For he or she has demonstrated that he or she is supported by a wife or husband, by an extended family, by social networks, by his or her ancestors, in short, by the entire community. This accumulation of relationships has been built throughout a life considered upright or honorable, or at least it was considered so until before the penetration of political parties in the community. It should be noted that one thing is the presence of political parties and another is that they allowed indigenous people from the region to occupy important positions in their structures. Until the first decade of the present century, the so-called "big" positions were exclusive to the *coletos*. The *coletos* are people who conceive of themselves as direct descendants of the Spaniards who arrived in the region in the early 1500s and who managed not to mix consanguineously with members of the original peoples. A brief review of the official political history of the state will show that up to the time indicated here this has been the case. But the serious crises of the strongest parties at the national level forced their leaders to a profound transformation, seeking to root themselves in the communities in order to maintain their centrality in Mexico's political chessboard. The electoral triumph of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in 2018 showed that this was not achieved. Six years after the first triumph of the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional MORENA party, parties such as the Partido de la Revolución Democrática PRD lost its registration and the Partido de

la Revolución Institucional PRI is no longer important in the party system. With all these updates culminating with the arrival of the first woman president of Mexico Dr. Claudia Sheinbaum MORENA candidate in 2024. This paper will describe some of the strategies that preceded this total transformation of the Mexican political system. My systematic approach to this topic began in the summer of 2008. Interviews, observation and participant observation allowed me to reconstruct the political career of the young municipal president of San Andrés Larrainzar, whom I will call Santos on this occasion. Throughout the last 15 years, I have been able to corroborate empirically that Santos' trajectory has been replicated in a surprising way in other municipalities, in San Pedro Chenalho, San Juan Chamula, San Juan Cancuc, for example.

Although in 1998 Sonnleitner and Henriquez already argued that the communities and the so-called *usos y costumbres* systems were once again adapting to the transformations of the Mexican political system in the face of the reconfiguration of the party system, the communities are once again suffering the impact of this national project that has not incorporated them, destroying in its wake the social fabric that is indivisible from political life in the indigenous-farming communities.

SOME OF THE POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE STATE

On July 23, 2016, residents of some of the 130 communities that make up the municipality of the same name gathered in the central plaza of the municipality of San Juan Chamula. The meeting was under the pretext of demanding the distribution of funds and aid from the state government. In the middle of this meeting a group of demonstrators shot at the then municipal president and his team. This attack left 6 people dead, among them the municipal president, one of the trustees and

the president of the Conciliation and Peace Board. That same year, a group of inhabitants of the municipality of San Pedro Chenalhó were ambushed on their way back from a demonstration in which they demanded the resignation of the municipal president. As a result of this ambush, 5 people died and 120 more were displaced from their communities. In the summer of the following year, there were demonstrations and blockades on the highways connecting San Cristóbal de las Casas and the municipality of San Juan Cancuc, the demonstrators also demanded the resignation of the municipal president.

This wave of violence was the result of the PRI's internal renovation process, which in Chiapas began in 2018, for which they co-opted young indigenous people, until then natural leaders of their communities. Strategy that included the imposition of these in important positions of popular representation, resulting in more instability and violence. In other words, the institutionalization of political practices that until 15 years ago were based exclusively on "uses and customs" generated the rupture of authentically popular forms of representation. This does not mean that before they were not interconnected and even that the communities did not vote massively for the candidates of the state parties, but this attempt at modernization included very young men, even single men, or women in positions that were traditionally occupied by men. However, between state politics and community forms, objectives, goals and strategies for selecting candidates were negotiated. The arrival of more parties in the state since 1995 such as: PAN, PRI, PRD and Verde Ecologista also generated more division in the communities.

MEXICAN INSTITUTIONAL POLITICAL LIFE

According to Arreola (2014) and Muñoz Patraca (2011) "after the armed struggle and the approval of a new constitutional model in 1917, the post-revolutionary Mexican State tries intensively to rebuild a new institutionality". A very brief review of Mexican history, particularly in the post-revolutionary period, would allow us to corroborate how the construction of a party system was a necessary condition for the establishment of a single centralized government. However, the demand of the indigenous peoples of the country, led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) with the uprising of 1994, showed that in this process of creating a Mexican state, the political life of the original peoples was made invisible or omitted. In this process, two almost opposing fields were established, on the one hand, the political-social life of the communities and, on the other, the professionalizing institutions of national politics.

In the face of the artificial creation of these fields, political anthropology can respond with the analysis of the binding relationships between one field and another. This exercise would help us to understand the complexity of the social life of a deeply multi-cultural country such as Mexico. In this respect, we can recover the categories proposed by Abeles (2007), one of which is that of *the spaces of politics*, among which are political parties, governments, elections, etc. And the other, *the spaces of the political*, i.e. the community, the family, social life, social relations. These categories will help us to analyze the ethnographic information presented here and to understand why the professionalization of Mexican political life by definition is opposed to the political life of the communities, since in the latter, government and community are indivisible. The events that took place in the

municipal capital of San Juan Chamula, as well as the conflict that arose to demand the resignation of the municipal president of the municipality of Chenalho and Cancuc. And the more than five thousand displaced people from the municipalities of Chalchihuitan and Chenalho are, among other things, the result of these conflicts. Although the municipalities are distant from each other, they all have in common the renovation, arrival and attack of different political parties.

It is not the intention of this paper to ignore or deny that the national political system needed to be cleaned up, renewed, and that there was an urgent need for more and better participation of young candidates. But the case of Chiapas showed that once again the communities would pay the highest cost. However, we will see how the rupture between the systems of community representation, be it the system of cargos, mayordomía, etc., and the way of choosing representatives for political posts has generated conflicts and discontinuity between collective and individual interests. Since these local forms function as systems that are not only representative, but also integrative, they rest on and are nourished by community life.

STEWARDSHIPS

Since the publication of the document *The Municipios of the midwestern highlands of Guatemala* in 1937 by Sol Tax, a thematic field was inaugurated that deepened the study of the socio-political-cultural structures of the indigenous community. These were called cargo systems, mayordomías or cofradías. Subsequent works such as *La organización religioso-política en Mesoamérica* (1952) by Fernando Cámara Barbachano, *Las comunidades campesinas en Mesoamérica y Java Central* (1957) by Eric R. Wolf, *Political relations in Guatemala* (1958) by Manning Nash, *La organización religioso-política en*

Mesoamérica (1976) by Frank Cancian, among many others. All these works documented the origin, structures, social, political, economic and spiritual function of these forms of self-regulation of indigenous social life. In spite of the diverse perspectives in which this phenomenon has been studied and the diverse positions on the subject, this topic was central in the anthropological literature until the second half of the 1990s. And still, to a lesser extent, works were published on this subject until the second decade of this century. The constant in them is that the so-called cargo or mayordomías are recognized as the maximum authorities of the indigenous communities of the cultural area known as Mesoamerica. It is precisely in it where not only the authority of the people rests, but also the collective life and the spiritual balance of the community and the individual. Thus, we can affirm that in these communities, political life is detached or indivisible from the cultures.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Contrary to popular belief and from a distance, we can affirm that 1994, in the context of the Zapatista uprising, was not one of the most violent years in Mexico's contemporary history. Violence shot up to disproportionate levels with the arrival of the National Action Party in 2000 to the presidency and its eventual arrival to the indigenous-peasant communities in the south of the country. Zapatismo, on the other hand, as can only be evaluated from a distance, made it possible to think about the "possibility" of re-signifying political practices at the national and local levels. It is also important to point out that the political climate of the 1990s influenced the outcome of the 2000 federal elections at the national level, in the words of Collier (2004: 38) "The Zapatista rebellion deserves the reputation of the most powerful democratizing force in Me-

xico". For example, in the region in question, the former PRI member Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia headed the coalition "Alianza por Chiapas" (Alliance for Chiapas), which united 8 parties to form an opposition to the PRI (CIEPAC 2000).

As a result of this coalition, for the first time in Mexican history, the PRI lost the governorship of the State of Chiapas. In the same year and in the same political environment, the PAN won the presidential elections with candidate Vicente Fox Quesada after a PRI government of 71 years. Towards the end of the electoral process, the PAN presented itself as an option for a change of party in the government. On the other hand, the opposition, headed by candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, emphasized a change of government program, which could not be guaranteed with a simple change of party. In this context and for the first time, according to Garza, the then called State Party, the PRI, announced itself as a reformed party, which for the voters this time would serve the people (Garza: 2018). Once the elections were won, the new PAN-controlled government referred to itself as "a transition government". This transition implied a series of governance crises between the State and the institutions historically controlled by the PRI.

As a response of this party to the real possibility of losing the elections of that year, the need for a change that would contribute to recover the credibility of the voters and overcome "The crisis of the State party" (Montemayor 2000) began to be debated within the party. The general agreement was to establish a program that would help renew the party, even among the current known as the historical PRI "The time of glory has passed... the party militancy has been lost... The result is discouragement, disappointment and desertion. There is talk of renovation and it will have to be applied in the PRI"

(Tirado: 2000). As a result of this wave of renewal, in 2011 the current President Peña Nieto announced the "New PRI", the renewed face of the historical PRI. "What Peña sold in the 2012 campaign as the New PRI was a party of young people, which contrasted with the image of the dinosaurs who had lost the presidency twelve years earlier, but who had the political craft to ensure the efficiency of government" (Petersen 2017).

The PRI's renewal process, which in the first instance consisted of the presentation of cadres of young politicians, all presented as true promises or as Angel (2017) points out the "perfect" candidates. The new PRI members who debuted in 2011 managed to win 16 governorships out of a country with 31 States. The same ones that after 6 years, today are in jail, face judicial processes or are fugitives. Several unofficial and official, printed and electronic media have documented this extensively.

In other contexts, the renewal of the PRI was also present, as we will see, it imposed changes in community political life. Ten years of observing the Tsotsil communities of the Highlands region of Chiapas have allowed me to identify these processes, as well as their impact on other areas of the social life of the people. To illustrate these phenomena I will only delve into the case of the constitutional government of the municipality of San Andrés Larrainzar. The same municipality where there is also an autonomous government, that of the Zapatista Good Government Council, who call the municipality San Andrés Sakamchen of the poor. Both governments are headed by indigenous Tsotsil people from the communities that make up the "official" municipality. The Zapatista revolutionary autonomous government was established there after the formation of the Good Government Councils in 2006 as part of their de facto self-government project.

According to what I was told, both governments coexist to a great extent with the new young PRI and Green Ecologist governors elected in the last few years. So, seeking information about the functioning of the autonomous and municipal governments is that after 10 continuous months of requesting an interview with the “constitutional” municipal president of San Andres Larrainzar, he agreed to receive me. Santos, the young constitutional president of San Andres, is, above all, a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), as he emphasizes, allowed me to visit him a couple more times. The rest of the information presented here was gathered in various informal conversations with friends and neighbors who live in the municipality.

THE REINDIANIZATION OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

One street away from the central plaza is the building where the so-called constitutional municipal government resides. In front of the church, on the other side of the plaza is the old building that houses the representatives of the Zapatista Good Government Board, an autonomous municipality. According to Tilly and Kennedy (2006) this situation is repeated in localities where autonomous and municipal municipalities coexist. As far as indigenous politics are concerned, the presence of the new PRI in the southwest of the country intermingled in a very audacious way with local processes in the most diverse ways. In the case of the highlands region in Chiapas, this renewal was added to a process that has been called “Reindigenization” of municipal governments.

We know a lot about the young PRI politicians at the national level, because in recent years the media have put their private lives at the center of the news, seasoned with some of their professional careers. All of them occupying important political positions in the

three levels of government, at the federal, state and of course municipal levels. But in the case of the indigenous politicians we know little. In 2008 Santos was the young municipal president of San Andres Larrainzar, originally from Chaloxtoc, a small community of approximately 30 houses. In order to fulfill his position, during his administration he moved to the town. Being a town, primarily an indigenous Mayan Tsotsil people, his case was extraordinary. At first I was struck by the fact that, being 30 years old, he was still unmarried and had never held office in the community. And even with these characteristics he was elected municipal president. According to what he told me, he studied law in a private school in San Cristóbal de las Casas, the cultural capital of the State of Chiapas, where he lived for long periods of time. Once he received his law degree, he began a career in Business Administration, but interrupted his studies to dedicate himself to his political campaign. He says that for being young and single he was criticized, and that even ex-authorities and traditional authorities attacked him. “In our traditions, one of the key requirements to be president is to be married. At the beginning, of course they made fun of me and said so many things. But with the answer I am giving them, they respect me now” (Santos: 30 years old). When I asked him how he had achieved this, how he had earned the respect of the elders, he answered, “Well, I always go according to the law. The law is square and there is no one who can go above the law”.

For context, as I observed him over the span of a year, he has developed a modern and educated personality. In the following 10 years I have met several people like him, including young, educated, indigenous women who hold the position of municipal presidents and deputies in the local congress. These new generations ranging from 25 to 40 years old are part of what could be called the “elites of indigenous professionals” (Burguete: 2007).

They have quickly replaced the elders who, according to the traditions and local forms of self-government, should occupy these positions. Displacing also other central characters, who in past decades served as local authorities, I am referring to the rural-bilingual teachers. These characters were created by the post-revolutionary government in the context of the indigenist policies of the 1940's. Until then, rural teachers had fulfilled the task of intermediation between institutions and remote indigenous communities.

For Santos it was necessary to be trained, to study, to be able to contribute, in his own words, "to the development of his community". Once in the midst of his campaign and during his first term of office as municipal president, this professionalization made sense. He repeatedly commented that, being a law graduate, he knows the law and "that this has helped him to peacefully confront all his political adversaries". Those political adversaries he sometimes refers to are the same members of his party. After all, he was the winner in a race against 14 other pre-candidates for the presidency of the municipality of San Andres.

I tried to meet and interview him for 10 months between 2008 and 2009. Finally, when we were able to talk, I told him that I had a hard time finding him, to which he replied "I was in Washington, when he was already president-elect... I was selected as young president, at the national level". To which I asked him, "And what were you doing in the United States? I asked him "Mrs. Beatriz Paredes, president of my party, invited me". He told me very happily that he is the first young indigenous president to visit many places, since by the winter of 2009 he had already visited Washington, Spain, the United States, Costa Rica and other states in our country. At that time, 10 years ago, the implications or direction of initiatives such as these could not be measured. That is, to encourage young people to reach positions of popular representation at that level.

Today, more than a decade later, we can say that, at that time, a process of professionalization of the indigenous government was underway. That air of professionalism and cosmopolitanism with which his government was dressed was strengthened by a group of 16 assistants that surrounded Santos. At the end of the same month we interviewed him, he was going to receive the national award for sustainable development in the north of the Mexican Republic, he told me "they give us a recognition, a document, they don't give us money, but it is a paper that has national recognition, imagine what it means for our municipality... that everyone knows about Larrainzar". He also said that he was passionate about managing support for the people in the communities that need it the most.

The term of office that Santos held, that is to say that of constitutional municipal president, is for a period of 3 years, when we met he had already been in office for 1 year and 10 months and in his own words he had already fulfilled quite a few campaign promises. I asked him how he was elected and he replied that it was through a plebiscite. In Larrainzar the public vote is called a plebiscite, in other towns it is simply called a show of hands. Although it is called by different names, the procedure is similar in several peasant-indigenous towns in central Mexico.

In Larrainzar, these plebiscites are basically public votes by a show of hands with all the married men of the communities that comprise the municipality, in an assembly in the central plaza of the municipal seat. The winning candidate is then included, presented and registered with the political party that controls the region, in this case the PRI. This is how adult men who had begun their service to the community by holding religious offices begin to occupy positions in the civil representation systems, and eventually in government institutions. This practice is similar to what Recondo (1997) records in the state

of Oaxaca, Mexico. In this case, the recognition of the *usos y costumbres* only helped the permanence and strengthening of the political parties in the indigenous communities. At this point we will not delve into the case of Oaxaca, but it is quite illustrative of how the party system is incorporated into community life, without making substantial changes in the political life of the country.

Although Burguete pointed out in 2007 that the re-indianization of governments was a palpable process tending to be described as a positive event, the case of Santos provides more specific information on the creation of these new social actors which were formed under the protection of official institutions. The Santos case provides more specific information on the creation of these new social actors which were formed under the protection of official institutions. Of course, ten or eleven years later, it is possible to evaluate the impact of this process on community life, at least in this aspect, which is the one emphasized in this work. This process has gradually or violently disassociated political representatives from the grassroots or communities they represent.

Thus, while traditionally or commonly, the men of an indigenous peasant community, from a very young age, even as children, began to participate in community participation in positions of the religious system. For example, in the Nahuatl indigenous-peasant communities of Central Mexico, at the age of seven years old, they served as *topile de bandera*, the most elementary position of the Catholic *mayordomías*. As the years went by, and when they were around 50 years old, they held civil positions, which almost automatically joined the political-civil life of the community. However, in Chiapas, for the last decade, these young indigenous people have started to hold civil positions very early, at the beginning of their young lives. It is important to add that this change is not exclusive to communities affiliated to any political party.

On the contrary, it was also observed that this practice, that of encouraging youth to participate in community affairs, was carried out in autonomous territories of the diverse range of more or less autonomous projects that exist in Chiapas. However, there are variations in the impact of this on community life. Although this is not the subject of this work and much more evidence would have to be shown, a more positive impact on youth participation in politics can be seen in communities that have a wider margin of independence with reference to political parties.

In the case of Santos, for example, despite saying that he is not really interested in politics, since 1999 he has served in different positions in the municipal government. First, as secretary of productive projects. In the following period he became director of productive projects. In the third period he was advisor of sustainable rural development and advisor to the municipal president. From 2005 to 2007 he was leader of the *Confederación Nacional Campesina CNC*. He repeatedly says that he had no political aspirations, but only had the desire to serve his people, but his arguments always reflect the absolute recognition he has for the state institutions and his closeness to them.

HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AS A YOUNG PRESIDENT

When asked, “What are the responsibilities of your constitutional government? He tells me that the obligations of his government are basically to attend to the needs of the people with the resources they give him. Also among his functions he comments that he has to manage extraordinary resources before other people and before other dependencies. By them he refers to deputies, senators who give him a moment to talk to them, even some organizations or agencies that donated resources to him were the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, CEPIS and SEDESOL.

At that time Santos told me that the important thing was to “give” things to the people. He calls this action *resource management*. There are several possible interpretations of this. The positive side would be that obtaining resources, lowering resources as they call it in his political jargon, or obtaining some programs, would have a positive effect if and only if. In reality, these programs would meet the real needs of the communities, but this is not the case. These programs are designed elsewhere, in other instances far from the communities, as we will see later on. And, on the other hand, the most negative effect observed in the region is that in the communities where resources have been allocated to cover collective needs, collective work has been left aside, as before and now, the *mano vuelta*, the *faena* or the *tequio*, as it is called in other towns. That is to say, the construction of relationships within the community has been left aside, weakening the social fabric. That is to say, this new type of government no longer relied on the strength of the community, but depended more and more on resources obtained from outside.

In this regard, Armando Bartra commented in 2007 what an inhabitant of the municipality of Ocosingo told him about the social programs that were applied on the eve, during and after the Zapatista uprising of 1994, in the words of this person “The plan was to teach us to ask” (2007: 332). This is an open and clear reference to the large investments in infrastructure, such as highways, roads and some social programs carried out by the federal and state governments in the first years after 1994, with the intention of getting some dissident communities to leave the Zapatista movement and some other more independent peasant organizations. For example, today if you travel by road in the municipalities where there are autonomous communities or Zapatista *caracoles*, it is very easy to distinguish the

communities in *resistance* and those that are affiliated with a political party with strong influence in the area, such as: PRI, PRD or Verde Ecologista. The affiliated communities, if they are very close to the autonomous communities, receive all the programs in vogue, a firm roof, a firm floor, a decent kitchen, they receive food, their schools are in good condition. On the contrary, the Zapatista communities lack many basic services, but the facilities and services they enjoy have been developed by themselves, since a fundamental part of being in resistance is not receiving any government program.

At some point I asked Santos, “Who and how are the needs of the people defined? He replied, “The community itself does it, the assembly, they themselves bring the proposals, we hold an assembly and that is where the works are prioritized. They have to ask what is the highest priority for them. They decide, and we just receive the proposals”. He tells me that, for example, this year what they have asked for the most is housing. He says that the intention is “for the people to have a more dignified house, because the people are really suffering, since the communities are in really bad conditions”. Certainly during 2008 and 2009, in the region, significant amounts of sheet metal were distributed to roof houses. However, the federal government’s *Progres*a program had been specifically providing this material for construction in Chiapas in recent years. At least this could be verified in the highlands and the jungle-border region.

So I asked him, “I beg your pardon, but isn’t the *progres*a program already providing houses? Then he answered me that “Yes, as you have already seen that we are just giving houses, well -the communities- are requesting houses...”. The same thing happened with other examples, regarding this issue. It would seem that he himself had not realized this, because he told me, at the end of each topic

we developed, “Yes, right?” We came to the joint conclusion that the communities did not really determine their needs and that what was distributed to them was because it had already been determined in other political spheres. I told him about what I had seen about this PROGRESA program in other regions of Chiapas, such as in Comitán and Las Margaritas, and even in the State of Oaxaca and Tlaxcala where I had also done field work. He was surprised to learn that it was not even in a Chiapas state governmental office that was deciding these issues. Our conversations also allowed us to explore some other aspects of her work, and I decided to focus the conversation on learning more about the things she does have influence on.

SOME OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S INNOVATIONS

At some point in the conversation I commented that in my opinion it is one thing to give things to the people, as the parties do in the indigenous communities, and quite another thing to govern. In a second meeting we had, which took place in the house he rents a few blocks from the municipal palace. According to him, he only occupies that house while he is serving his term. Late in the afternoon and after drinking a soft drink, I ask him to what extent, in his opinion, he is truly free to govern. He remains silent for a moment and answers me “I have also generated some laws, that the municipality of Larrainzar had one of the highest rates of alcohol consumption. And therefore of intra-family violence, fights in the streets and injured people because of that”. Faced with this problem, in 2009, as a response he issued the first regulation on the sale of alcoholic beverages. And at the same time, in September of the year mentioned above, he was preparing a regulation on religious freedom. A situation that in his words was going to be more complicated and

important, since the confrontations between the faithful of the Catholic, Muslim and various Christian denominations that are growing at an impressive speed in the region are a daily issue. These conflicts have even led to the displacement and expulsion of some inhabitants from their communities.

Or even in the founding of new *rancherías* and colonies, such as the Hormiga colony, founded on the outskirts of San Cristóbal de las Casas, or the Ojo de Agua area, now mostly Muslim. In the summer of 2016 I was able to observe with respect to the first regulation and its impact, that for the time being the sale of alcohol had been prohibited in the center of the municipal capital of Larrainzar and its surroundings. However, on the borders between San Andrés and the neighboring municipality of San Juan Chamula, alcohol outlets and improvised cantinas, or stores that freely sell alcohol, had increased. In the vicinity of these establishments, one can observe men of various ages chatting, most of them evidently drunk or others lying on the ground, walking along the roadsides stumbling or even lying in the streams along the highways. Many of these consumers are from San Andrés, as they look for ways to satisfy their needs.

During the talks we had, the ideas of progress and development, which, in his words, his government promoted, were often mixed with the ideas of tradition and the need to preserve what he calls, custom. For example, in the second half of 2009 outside his house was one of the first police patrols to enter Larrainzar. The first thing that came to my mind was the image of the traditional police who always take a seat outside the church and with their batons and traditional clothes from there watch that no one disturbs the order of the community. Or that everything goes according to what is normal for Larrainzar. Then I asked him which municipality that patrol belonged to, he told me that considering the

insecurity in the country he decided to implement that program. He says that the state government provided him with a couple of patrol cars and police uniforms. I also asked him if the traditional guards no longer existed. To which he replied, "Yes, there are, I am not against the culture either. Right now there are only 12, but by next year we will have 20 policemen. This caught my attention in particular because only ten years ago in that municipality, as in all those in the region, all matters were decided in an assembly.

For example, from the election of the representatives of the civil and religious offices and even to take a photograph in the public square, permission had to be requested from the traditional authorities, which of course included the traditional guard. At that time the impact of this event could not be measured, perhaps for some it could simply be interpreted as part of the process of "modernization" of the community. However, in recent years, from 2016 to 2018, we have seen more clearly the intervention of professional police groups and/or state police forces in community conflicts, which historically had been resolved without the intervention of these groups. This has been evidenced in the "solution" given to the conflicts that recently arose due to the request for the dismissal of the municipal presidents of San Pedro Chenalhó and San Juan Cancú, interventions that have had unfortunate results, such as the loss of lives and injuries.

Faced with these symptoms of modernization, I ask Santos if he does not fear that this will strongly change the relations in the community, and he answers "I am not above the law, I always go according to it. For example, in some cases, if there is a crime, there are economic sanctions and physical punishments if they do not comply". With this example, he explains that even though there are now police, traditional laws are still

applied. He comments that among the physical punishments they apply are, for example: deprivation of liberty "we lock them up for 36 hours, at the most, and if they don't comply, we submit the punishment to the people's determination". This means that the people, in assembly, determine what type of physical punishment will be applied.

THE RENEWAL OF THE STATE PARTY

The process of shaping the Mexican party system, of which Muñoz Patraca (2006) gives an extensive account, is directly linked to the emergence and strengthening of the PRI in 1929. Parallel to the institutionalization of the country's political life, a new national political class emerged. This class, which in past centuries held some position of local, regional or state authority as owners or former owners of haciendas, businesses, caciques and/or former military generals, found in the post-revolutionary period the opportunity to participate in the process of institutionalization of the country's politics. It is in this way and due to the characteristics of its members that this party managed to place itself in the center of the country's official and unofficial politics. Under this new form of government, the old elites managed to maintain centrality and control of the country for almost another 5 decades, now in an institutionalized manner.

However, according to Tirado (2000), it was in the 80's when the need to modernize the party was registered for the first time, signifying a first wake-up call before a crisis in later decades that would lead it to lose its centrality and dominance. In the 1990s, when the group known as the "technocrats" took control of the party, its second transformation process began. Those first politicians who studied abroad and planned the transition from the welfare state to a model of privatization

of national companies, Telmex, Mexican telegraphs, national railroads, etc. This neo-privatization wave is what intensified social discontent during the 90's and led to the party's crisis in the year 2000, which led it to lose the presidential elections. Faced with this event, the party surprisingly reorganized and announced its third and biggest change. Thus, in 2012, the current President of the Republic, Enrique Peña Peña, announced the birth of the "New PRI".

During this announcement, a slate of relatively young politicians was announced, who wished to represent the new values that in their slogan sustained "a PRI closer to the people". All of them, at that time, presented themselves as candidates for governors of more than 20 states in the country, where elections for governors would be held. With this image renewal, the PRI once again positioned itself on the electoral and political map of the country. However, before the end of their terms of office, many of them were involved in problems of misappropriation of resources and other serious crimes, conflicts that have not yet been clarified and others are still pending. The state and federal governments showed, as illustrated by a significant number of publications of various kinds, that the so-called new PRI, through its candidates, were no longer loyal to their voters, nor to the institutions.

It was quickly shown that this announced change was not enough to transform the party nor to improve its administrative and government practices. It is not surprising that even with the previous crises faced by the PRI, at this moment it is at its worst. Given the current crisis of governability that the PRI reform and readjustments of the party system have brought to the country, it is safe to assume that the old currents of the party of the institutionalized revolution established the rhythm and nature of the relations that the various government institutions would maintain with the

local factional powers, organized crime networks, as well as with the peasant and workers unions. And of course, they created their mechanisms to maintain a relatively constant relationship with the indigenous municipalities, in which the necessary "balances" were maintained for the coexistence of the various political powers in this country.

Although it is not the purpose of this article to explore the forms of political domination that the Mexican party system developed in post-revolutionary Mexico, suffice it to see the relationship that was established in the case of Oaxaca and its opposite, the State of Guerrero. The old politicians, as in the case of Chiapas, thinking of the municipality of Comitán and Las Margaritas, also belonged to the landowning families of the region. And in one way or another they knew how to reconcile between the spaces of politics and the spaces of the political. In the case of Chiapas, it is also important to take into account the historical developments of each region, for example, in the case of Comitán and Las Margaritas, the local political groups coming from the regional hacienda families contained the political spaces linked -evidently- to what was left of the indigenous communities outside the haciendas, mainly the Tojolabal population.

We have then that the PRI's modernization strategies, which implied the creation of youthful, political-professional cadres, could mean a reconfiguration or "indirect reinstatement" of the local mestizo classes in government posts. An indicator of this may be that precisely these unpopular candidates among the inhabitants of the municipalities they "govern" rely on "non-indigenous" groups to maintain themselves in these positions: For example, the governor of Chiapas, the state attorney general, as well as police and paramilitary groups.

And at the community level, this has meant a break with local-indigenous structures and forms of government. The strategies to involve these young politicians are quite attractive. In 2009, in an interview with Santos, he told me that the person who encouraged and invited him to participate in “politics”, that is, in official politics, was the then president of his party, Beatriz Paredes, who always organized meetings, courses, international tours, so that, in her words, according to Santos, his candidates could get their training.

TENSIONS BETWEEN MODELS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

The abundant literature on cargo systems and other systems of community social representation shows how the so-called “cargo” systems are structures that not only fulfilled or fulfill the function of celebrating local religious rites or religious ceremonies of Catholic influence. They are fundamentally articulating systems of the spiritual, social, political and economic life of the communities. They are systems that in detail and if observed carefully show the weight, the responsibility that falls on the men and women in charge.

In light of the events of the last decade in the municipalities that make up the region of Los Altos, we have been able to observe how the arrival of new generations of young indigenous political professionals, nor the renewal of political parties has necessarily meant a better functioning of social life at the community level. Much less the strengthening of indigenous political life. Contrasting the political processes at the national level with the conflicts at the municipal level, we are able to appreciate the tensions and interrelationships that maintain a Mexican political system that still struggles to make itself present in indigenous communities. In other words, these serious tensions and conflicts bring to

light the weakness of the Mexican political system and the lack of inclusion of all the country’s inhabitants.

Now, in view of the above, how can we anthropologically reread these conflicts? Why does the restructuring of a party have such serious repercussions for indigenous-peasant communities? Is it possible to understand the local cargo systems or forms of self-government as part of the so-called Mexican State? Why is the political life of the country so fragile? Are the process and forms of government part of the cultural heritage of a people?

Long observations made in field work, particularly in the region of Los Altos, have allowed me to confirm how the forms of government of the communities of native peoples, among other things, serve as integrating structures. That is to say, for the fulfillment of at least the lowest position in the civic-religious hierarchy, the family must be included, which is the one who supports the man or woman in the fulfillment of that position. This is more evident in the case of receiving or fulfilling the highest position of the *mayordomías*, since it is in this position that the heaviest expenses and the “most direct service to the inhabitants of the town” fall. But considering that we are referring to communities with a small number of inhabitants, between the fulfillment of one or the other position/charge of the *mayordomías*, the whole community is involved in one way or another. For its optimal functioning, a stewardship creates networks of support and mutual help.

Being integrative, they also fulfill the function of granting, to the individual who fulfills an office, a kind of membership to the community. By this I mean that the office will be granted only to those who are active members of the community and to be a member it is necessary to participate in the fulfillment of civic and religious duties. That is to say, the individual rests on the collective and vice ver-

sa, it is as well as in my opinion that, in the communities and native peoples, the political life is indivisible from the social. This case allows me to think that the active and vibrant life of the native peoples allows to reconcile what Auge called the spaces of the political and the spaces of politics.

These arguments leave open a number of emerging issues and conflicts, as well as pending tasks that now involve new emerging political actors and the reconfiguration of the contemporary political class. As well as the new role assigned to the original peoples in this new challenge with the arrival of a new central political party.

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