Silenced Voices of Mexican Culture.

Identity, Resistance and Creativity in the Interethnic Dialogue

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Abstract

Interethnic communication is the focus of this thesis, as the basis for understanding Mexican culture and identity as a dynamic and complex process, which acts, from the past and in the present, to create what Mexicans are and will be. By exploring different instances where interethnic communication occurs and produces various representations of culture this work shows the complexities of interethnic exchanges at different levels of Mexican society (in the community or in the nation) and at different moments of its history (from the conquest to the present).

This complex picture is constructed using an interdisciplinary framework that includes radical ethnography, social semiotics and new social history; all of them oriented to the understanding of culture as a meaningful way to analyse society in the context of its cultural, economic and political life. In this sense culture -- and the ideology implicated in it -- is conceived not as a homogeneous, monolithic entity but as full of diversity, ambiguities and contradictions. To relate different phenomena that work at different levels or times but interweave with each other as part of a unique process, I introduce some principles from Chaos theory and Complexity science. I use, specifically, the notion of fractals as a useful metaphor to understand the phenomena of culture in the rich dynamics of social and political structures.

The cultural representations produced in interethnic events in Mexico are seen as narratives that allow us to see the complexities of each culture and of the ideologies that give meaning to the different forms of interethnic exchange. As a narrative, each text is analysed to show the characteristics of Mexican culture and identity, not considered in themselves but as part of the historical and contemporary conditions of social interaction. In this way a set of examples from Cuetzalan, a Nahuat area of Puebla, and also at the national level the Zapatistas -- an Indian group that rebelled against the Mexican government -- allows us to find in the action of Indian groups the high creativity that has produced Mexican culture. As a counter to the persistent denial of the importance of the Indian presence in Mexican society, their active presence as an important part of Mexican culture is clearly shown. The culture of Indian groups in the present, in its relationship with the Mestizo society, becomes an example of how maintaining the continuity of a culture does not necessarily mean clinging to an idyllic past. On the contrary, it generates a rich range of options to work with the different alternatives facing contemporary Mexican society.

The whole range of cultural manifestations produced by Indians and Mestizos shows the richness of social actions in the cultural exchange between hegemonic and subaltern groups -- Mestizos and Indians -- making clear the reciprocal dialogue that emerges in an interaction which transforms the culture of both groups. Through
different interethnic activities (political meetings, cultural representations, religious practices, economic activities, institutional projects, social movements) this research explores what Indian creativity can offer to construct a society that is simultaneously ancient and new, united and diverse, Indian and Mexican, and, more than ever, just and inclusive of all sectors that form Mexican society.
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Introduction
Narrative of a search

I was walking in the Zócalo, the central plaza of Mexico City. It seemed close to sunset, not very light but not dark enough to have artificial lights. The place was very calm, without much noise and few people walking around. The flat place in the centre of the square was empty and there were many (nearly twenty) long wooden poles standing inclined against the walls of the old colonial buildings that are around the plaza. The poles had struts of wood to climb up like a ladder. Those poles were for the performance of the Voladores dance (the ‘fliers’, an ancient dance still performed by some Indian groups). There were some Indians walking around as if waiting to fix the poles somewhere in the flat square. They were dressed in the white camisa y calzón de manta (cotton shirt and trousers) used by Indian peasants and wearing guaraches* (Mexican sandals). Everybody looked happy but in silence. I could not hear a voice speaking in any language. I did not know what language they spoke, the only communication was through the meaning of the poles. Everybody knew what was going to happen. Everybody who was there was waiting to watch or play the dance of Indians in the centre of Mexico.

I had this dream at the beginning of my research, immersed in a process of discovery of my motives for researching the relationship between Indians and Mestizos, and especially the fact I was doing it outside my country, trying to understand my own Mexican identity. When I awoke the dream seemed to me a deep wish for reconciliation. I was sure it represented the symbolic recovery of the political and cultural centre, the ‘heart’ of the country, by the Indians who were dispossessed of their lands by the Spanish and excluded from being active members of the new society. The relationship between Indians and the rest of Mexican society has been a process of continuous interethnic conflict, sometimes open, sometimes hidden, from the moment of the conquest until today. The fact that I put the ‘solution’ to the interethnic conflict in terms of reconciliation was probably influenced by my Aboriginal friend, Pearl, who is living to find in Reconciliation the way to heal the wounds inflicted by the mistakes of colonialism in Australia, her country. I had always thought reconciliation should come from the others, not from the Aborigines, so probably in the case of Mexico I felt the need to offer the Indians this symbol as a possible way of healing the historical mistake of their exclusion from Mexican society. The solution of course is symbolic, and

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* The * indicates that the word is included in the glossary for a fuller explanation.
probably the need for reconciliation is my own need to integrate the parts that are so important in understanding my own identity.

The connection between my experience of being in Australia and my process of thinking about my thesis was very important and shaped it in many ways. I would never have done what I did without the experience of being outside Mexico, interacting with different people, different approaches and different positions. When I arrived I brought a defined project about interethnic communication in a specific Indian area, Cuetzalan. I brought also my fascination for the activities of a group of Indians from that place, working against the adverse conditions facing Indian people in Mexico, but in some ways I was watching them with the distance my status as researcher gave me, as different to them; a white, urban anthropologist. That is to say, from the dominant group, from a different class, from a different culture.

In Australia I began, with my supervisor’s guidance, a process of questioning my aims, my deepest thoughts and beliefs. I realised that what I was asking myself, about identities, construction of culture, processes of communication, dominance/domination, resistance, marginality, creativity, referred and connected to questions of my own as I tried to explain to Australians how it is to be Mexican, and specifically a Mexican who knows about Indian groups. I had been trying to understand my identity through researching the identities of others. When I realised this fact the whole process of research changed. I became the other, not Indian but closer to them. My personal experience, my culture, was the subject of my research, so that the other’s culture and experience then became familiar, different but not alien. When I returned to Mexico to do fieldwork I felt that the social interactions, interviews and events were not an object of research but another social experience, like many others I had lived in Mexico, immersed in a society full of diversity, contrasts and secrets. I was there to dialogue with these others to learn about the views of Indians, and as a result to understand and enrich my own culture.

In the context of my attempts to understand the dynamics of my culture, the dream became important data to analyse. Although it is a personal dream, generated by specific circumstances, I see it as an expression of the Mexican unconscious, since it was generated by the meanings of contemporary Mexican reality, where I had grown and lived my whole life. Personal interpretations, in my view, are important ways to understand society because they are never “constructions developed in a social vacuum by anomalous personalities ... all interpretations are important because they are all politically and socially possible” (Kellehear 1993:85). In this sense my dream came from a reality I received from my socialisation, through the national public educational system, the mass media and everyday interaction in a city, Mexico City, full of cultural expressions and representations of the country’s diversity. It was also influenced by my professional experience of conducting research on social problems of communication.
among indigenous groups in Mexico. My dream gave me many signs and clues to help me express some of my ideas about the dynamics between two complex cultures that have been fighting, in a metaphorical and literal sense, for more than 500 years to be what we Mexicans are in the present.

I decided to analyse this dream as a cultural text, considering it like any other material collected in the process of my research. A cultural text is a product of a sociocultural reality. It is not an object in itself, but a kind of narrative that carries a set of relationships inside the text, and links with other texts of similar or different kinds. In that sense, the text is a story that enacts a dialogue with other meanings and interlocutors in the past, in the present and the future. Thus, any cultural text (spoken, written, with images or a mixture of modes) is a “multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships ... [always more or less] dialogised” (Bakhtin 1996: 263). Cultural narratives in this sense are complex texts carrying a story, which crystallises a long cultural and social process. In this research the narratives I analysed related to the history of groups in interethic interaction. It is important to point out that by ‘interethnic’ I refer to a relationship between groups that are socially constructed as having different cultures. This departs from the common use of the term in Mexico, which is applied only to interaction between different Indian groups as ‘ethnic’ groups. I use the term to refer also to interaction between Indians and Mestizos, considering that both have a distinctive culture which characterises each as a different group. In this sense Mexican Mestizos are as ‘ethnic’ as Mexican Indians. Interethnic narrative texts are produced by a long history of ideologies externalised in actions and in representations of identities of different social and cultural groups. Such texts, including my dream, show how ideological meanings are expressed and deployed in cultural representations.

Considering each cultural text as a narrative constructed in a multiple dialogic way, I use a methodological principle I call socionarrative analysis. The term socionarrative refers to an approach that analyses social meanings (ideologies) carried by stories (representations of actions, feelings and worldviews) that are performed in different media (behavioural, visual and verbal) by different characters in settings related to specific social realities. The analysis of the interaction that produces these narratives should include the fact they are organised and governed by social and cultural patterns and involve negotiation between specific categories of interactants. In the interaction these social actors express themselves at different levels of consciousness, for specific social purposes on behalf of self and others. In this sense, each text, discourse, verbal exchange, performance, social space, object, image, etc. concentrates in it a ‘story’ that comes from the social processes of its production; a product that joins the voices of many people from many times. This notion of cultural text allows me to extend the important principles of Bakhtin from his study of language
and literary texts to any cultural manifestation. In them individuals or groups exchange meanings in the process of communicating and representing their cultural practices, a process which is inherently dialogic and heteroglossic.

Taking the dream as an example, the social meaning expressed in it relates to the kind of interethnic construction in Mexican society displayed by an ideology that excludes Indians as active agents in the development of the country as a whole. The ideologies are manifested in the behaviours in the dream and in my response to those ideologies. The story includes the interaction of specific social actors -- me, a few anonymous people and the male Indian dancers -- following or breaking some social patterns of interaction (the relationships between performers and audience in a particular meaningful space) through a specific manner of performance (waiting in silence) in the main public political space in Mexico, the Zócalo, which in itself carries the social meaning of the highly centralised nature of Mexican politics and public life. The media in this case includes a written description of behaviours and images, as the verbal externalisation of my thoughts. The level of consciousness moves from a manifestation of the social unconscious expressed in the act of dreaming to an attempt to make it conscious in a written reconstruction of the dream, which in itself includes conscious and unconscious meanings. Its social purpose is to understand the conditions of the ideology of Indianess in Mexican culture, and contrast with it my own emphasis on continuous interethnic dialogue as fundamental in the construction of Mexican culture and identity.

My own narrative, writing this piece of work, constructs a story as a way of interpreting this social reality. In some ways the act of writing was itself part of the process of interpretation. While writing I was in continual dialogue with my materials, a dialogue with different audiences, real or potential (Australian, Mexican, intellectuals, friends, relatives and of course Indians) and an internal dialogue with my phantoms, my internalised constructions of the academic other. In this process I had to take some decisions, knowing that they might provoke criticisms and objections. I decided to give priority to the positive and creative aspects of Indian cultural practices. By doing this I do not deny many counter-examples could be found, but my aim was to counterbalance the tendency to exclude or disvalue Indian views, by presenting an image that emphasises the high creativity of Indian peoples. I did this conscious that I risked producing discomfort because of the way we social scientists have been conditioned to associate hope and excitement in a researcher with being uncritical and unrealistic.

To understand the complexities of interethnic communication, and its relationship to the creation of culture and identities, I needed to explore different cultural expressions and show how they are linked by the dynamics of social actions through history. For this reason my interpretation includes the social, economic and political contexts where the interaction is performed, the characteristics of the interethnic history.
and some resources the social groups use today in specific interethnic events. For analysis of these cultural narratives and the context of production in their full complexity, socionarrative analysis needs to draw on a range of analytical practices to deconstruct the meanings expressed in each fact. The analytical practices I use have been informed by anthropology (Geertz 1993, Clifford & Marcus 1988), social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1995) and critical discourse analysis (Hodge and Kress 1993, Carbó 1984).

All the data was selected for its significance in understanding Mexican culture as an interethnic product, drawing on my knowledge of Mexican social life in Mexico City, and on field work in 1996 and 1997 in the town of Cuetzalan, which enticed me with its magic and beauty. This town is located in a Nahua Indian region, 5 hours driving to the north east of Mexico City in the state of Puebla. Although the materials were mainly collected in fieldwork in those years, I also draw on a wider knowledge of the area from an earlier research project (see Coronado 1999a). Also important in my theoretical and methodological decisions has been the knowledge of other Indian regions gained from my 25 years of professional experience in Mexico. Some materials were collected following a prior plan identifying specific areas of cultural and social significance for interethnic exchanges. Others, I cannot explain how, crossed my way, enriching the picture and producing great enjoyment in me. Obviously I could not include all relevant areas of intercultural exchange.

I selected some interethnic sites where interaction takes place. In the case of Mexico City one important site was the central plaza of Mexico City, the Zócalo, where my dream was set. It is a relevant space for representing social meanings related to the construction of Mexican culture. Sometimes exchanges were not face-to-face interactions but exchanges of meanings from the cultures of the groups involved and their social actions. As we will see in chapters 1 and 2, the Zócalo contains multiple meanings in the social construction of the space (its colonial and prehispanic buildings) and in the use of symbols such as the flag. It includes social actors representing Indian meanings (Indians as sellers of handicrafts, and performing for tourists) and constructions of Indianess from the dominant ideology (for example the famous murals of Diego Rivera in the corridors of the National Palace). In this space an important event in terms of interethnic interaction was the meeting of the Zapatistas -- a group of rebel Indians from Chiapas in Southeast Mexico -- with people from Mexico City (chapter 2). This occasion and the whole process of this Indian movement became relevant to my investigation, giving a wider dimension to interethnic interaction at the national level. At the beginning of my research my aim was only a case study of one Indian region, Cuetzalan. But from that focus -- framed by the importance of national ideologies about Indianess -- the Zapatistas became more and more relevant, first as part of the ideological ambience that shapes the interethnic relationship in Cuetzalan,
then as another case study of interethnic exchange at a different level of Mexican structure. The other sites selected in the research came from Cuetzalan, Puebla, a municipality with a dense Indian population where face-to-face interethnic interactions are central in their everyday life and integral to the development of both groups, Indians and Mestizos. The sites of interethnic interaction inside this municipality (the church and its atrio*, the municipal palace, central plaza, etc.) are relevant for both groups as spaces where they deploy their resources to pursue their specific interests through successful interethnic interactions. Other sites, such as Protestant churches and schools in the communities, would have been worthy of inclusion. They are relevant spaces in the contemporary process of intercultural change. However due to the impossibility of covering the whole of interactions I decided to focus on those that evolve around the interethnic relationships in the municipal capital, all them interconnected in some ways.

The study of each interethnic site involved the analysis of the social interaction performed in that space. These interactions can be approached through an ethnographic description of the specific event. Although the dream is an imagined construction from my unconsciousness the narrative of the dream is a kind of ethnographic description, much like what I did with other actual interethnic interactions. I use ethnographic analysis in the sense of Geertz (1993:5-10), as a “thick” description of social and cultural practices, searching for meanings expressed by the interactants. This is an approach “to analysing and portraying a social system” (Kellehear 1993:21) mainly through direct observation and social interaction with the people involved, sometimes through casual encounters, at other times in structured interviews, but allowing interviewees full rein to express themselves in the form of stories. This kind of interview produced a great discursive richness in which the people interviewed expressed their conviction and excitement about the activities they were performing. Some of the interviewees were chosen because of their participation in the different projects I was analyzing. Others were selected by community authorities or institutions as the spokespersons, and others were the result of casual encounters. Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed literally. Through observations and interviews I was able to produce a description of actions that allowed me to construct a map, or better, a series of maps to link actors, actions, settings and intentions (explicit or not) in order to interpret the social meaning of each event, and its connection with other events produced by the groups interacting. So “doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of ‘construct a reading of’) a manuscript -- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, commentaries, but written ... in transient examples of shaped behaviour” (Geertz 1993:10). In that sense the writing of the dream, and probably all descriptions included in this research, and the verbal expression of social realities constructed during interviews or in written materials
produced by the social actors involved in the interethnic interaction, are all narratives which I have analysed to find coherences and contradictions.

With such narratives I used a social semiotic approach to analyse space settings and visual, verbal and behavioural texts "to reveal the operations of the dominant and powerful codes and practice of the day" (Kellehear 1993:44). This form of analysis considers not the text in itself but all elements that are producing it, "including context, purposes, agents and their activities as socially organised structures of meaning" (Hodge 1990:x). All texts are thus considered as semiotic structures expressing social meanings, so that we can understand the content of a text beyond its explicit meanings. The analysis of the structure of each text includes significant relationships between elements inside the text (syntagmatic plane) as well as in relation to other texts produced in that kind of interaction (paradigmatic plane) (ibid: 5). In this approach social complexity is expressed in the complexities of cultural forms, and "cultural meanings cannot be interpreted solely from the study of a text; what matters is how these meanings are integrated into a way of life of individuals and groups, as part of their social existence" (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987:94).

Within this framework I focus on the analysis of communicative acts as a complex process that includes social, cultural and linguistic behaviours. Such analysis continually looks for different meanings expressed by linguistic forms as well as contexts. The continuous connections between language use, the context of production, and broader social and political contexts of the communicative act are crucial to the different interpretation of meanings carried by different interactants, because "meaning is always actively negotiated and constructed in specific social contexts, by specific participants" (Hodge and Mishra 1990:xviii). The de-construction of the narrative in itself then has to use "procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices" (White 1993:34). The way to de-construct a narrative demands a conscious, detailed 'reading' of all the elements involved in the narrative: aims, social interactants, place, ethnic self-identification, body language, and verbal language (including propositional content as well as intonation), and also the relationships between those elements.

The understanding of the whole process, that is to say the specific meanings and their relationship with other social processes, requires us to include an historical analysis. In this case my main interest was to find, not the 'real facts' but representations of those facts by different social groups (in chapter 3). And this includes the public history (which represents hegemonic ideology), what has been named 'new social history', which includes "previously neglected sources [of historical record] as oral ones" (Goodall 1992:106) and written stories produced by the various groups representing their history. I consider all these as historical narratives. My main aim in this case was to get a dialogic version of relevant local histories in order to give a nuanced overview of interethnic interaction as central in "the way people(s) create, in
part their identities" and legitimate their practices through the ideological construct of their version of history (Jenkins 1991:19). In analysing hegemonic ideology it is possible to include also some cultural texts that construct other versions of history. Among these are uses of space (ie. the Zócalo of Mexico City and Cuetzalan) and national symbols (eg different national shields). In these 'historical texts' it is possible to find expressions of other ideological meanings, sometimes contradicting the official meanings.

In social semiotics, ideological analysis is more than a specific approach: it is the key to de-construct the different narratives that express the social meta-content from the point of view of different groups. The use of different kinds of texts produced by the actions of different actors in interethnic relationship allow me to analyse underlying meanings expressed by each text, as well as the explicit social meaning expressed through interaction. In this sense it is important to approach interethnic ideologies through its forms of expression because "through language [in a broad sense, written, speech, images, space] ideologies become observable" (Hodge, Kress & Jones 1979:81). Ideological analysis, as the approach to understanding the process of production of meanings and values produced by social experience (Voloshinov, quoted in Williams 1977:70), has the aim of depicting and de-constructing the 'Grand Narrative', (quoted from Foucault in Amstrong 1997), and the alternative narratives that are generated inside and outside this hegemonic narrative. All these together form the context of the interethnic process of the reproduction and transformation of culture.

I will now exemplify this methodology of socionarrative analysis within a social semiotic framework (see Coronado & Hodge 1999, Hodge & Kress 1995, Kellehear 1993) by using my dream as a cultural text. Given that texts are products of signification, the analysis aims to de-codify them to find behind the explicit meanings the hidden, repressed and distorted meanings arising from the fact that the text is the result of a phenomenon that is eminently social in its origin, functioning, context and effects. To take my own dream as part of my corpus posed some dilemmas. Would I be able to analyse 'objectively' a text that comes from my subjectivity? Is the method powerful enough to let me find my own contradictions and the signs of hegemonic ideology? With these questions in mind, and believing that no analysis is free from the subjectivity of the researcher, I began the exercise of analysis, trying to take distance from the text. Hence the author of this cultural text is named the dreamer and I, the researcher, am the one who is trying to decode it.

The text is a particular version of the broader reality and it relates the different social actors through the meanings expressed in the message. This message also carries ideological schemes, in its diachronic and synchronic dimension that manifests power and solidarity relationships, as direct conscious expressions or as internalisations of dominant discursive regimes (Foucault 1983). Thus the text is a complex representation
that includes contradictions, incoherencies and expressions of antagonism or cohesion between the different social categories. The text includes in itself a dialogue of multiple voices, present or imagined (see Bakhtin 1993).

The dream was represented as a written text so I could analyse and de-construct some aspects of the complex Mexican interethnic history and its ideological manifestations. The setting of the dream (the Zócalo) is relevant because of its historic significance as a public space at the national level where the Mexican State represents itself as the centre of power and symbol of unity of the country. So it is no accident that the dreamer expresses the symbolism of reconciliation there and not in any other place. The dream also shows the importance of different symbols in the unconscious of Mexicans, in that place and by association, considering the context of its production, in Indian areas (Zócalo, army, flag, church, administrative and political power, mass political expressions and hegemonic meanings). I consider this dream, then, as a narrative that displays part of the Mexican unconscious where the hegemonic ideology (see chapter 1) is transformed into a different personal position, a position that is personal but not unique, different in that it opposes the way the hegemonic ideology has constructed the interethnic exchange, but maybe not completely free from the hegemonic view.

Contrasting the specific elements in the dream with other moments in the same setting, it seems anomalous. The description includes things rarely found in ‘real’ events in that place (few people, no noise, no cars, no flag, no action, Voladores poles). The Zócalo as a public space is commonly used as a transit place for everyone, Mexicans or foreigners, and as a cultural display of colonial and prehispanic architecture, including some Indian dancers who consider themselves the heirs of the Aztec tradition -- concheros* -- and sellers of handicrafts. It is used politically as a space controlled by the government for public demonstrations of the unity of Mexicans (for example in celebrations of Independence or the Revolution) and the power of the centre (the National Palace and a huge flagpole with a Mexican flag that every day is raised and lowered by a group of soldiers who are under the orders of the president, who is also the head of the Mexican army). It is also used by Mexican people to protest against government policies and actions (in meetings, through people camping in the streets and demonstrations by political parties or civil organisations) ² (see chapter 1). By contrast, the absence of the common patterns of use of that space made visible the meaning expressed in the construction of this anomalous event. In this case the description of the event dreamt emphasised the absence of multitudes expressing conflict or acting as audiences of expressions of government power, in a public event

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² This effect is easy to see in the newspapers that usually report political events in that place taking for granted its important role in national political life.
where the Indians (who are mostly excluded from this space or fight to be there as social movements against the government) were there to perform an important cultural practice, an ancient dance. In the dream the government, the conflict, the hegemonic exercise were absent.

The absence of national symbols in the plaza, such as the flag in the centre of the square, gave symbolic meaning to the fact that instead of the flagpole, the central place was going to be occupied by poles for the performance of an Indian dance, which comes from prehispanic times and is still performed in some Indian regions, eg Cuetzalan. In this sense what is considered the symbol of national unity, the flag, (in fact an interethnic text constructed over centuries from the symbol of Mexico's power, appropriated and re-signified by the conquerors and their heirs, see chapter 1) is substituted in this event by a symbol of Indians, specifically from the area of the case study of the dreamer's research. This symbol itself has contradictory meanings. It can be associated with the common stereotype of Indianness as a construction for tourists (spectacular folkloric dance) or seen as a symbol which carries the deep meaning of an ancient culture, the *axis mundi* of the Indians (see chapter 6). In my view the second meaning makes better sense, considering that colourful clothes typical of this kind of dance were absent in the dream, which emphasised the deep meaning of the Indian culture rather than superficial displays of it so exploited as a tourist commodity (see chapter 4). In other ways the meaning of an Indian *axis mundi* is less clear, since the dream includes many poles leaning against colonial buildings. This image might show the problem of the fact of diversity inside what has been unified in the dominant ideology as a homogenous Indianness. In previous research done by the dreamer it is possible to find useful clues to interpret the meaning of so many poles. Diversity, in her view, is one of the central characteristics for understanding Indian culture (Coronado 1999a), which allows me to interpret the many *axes mundi* in the text as a symbol of unity in a diverse cultural reality, against the de facto political policy of one centre and one unified culture.

The setting of the dream, the central plaza surrounded by colonial buildings (where the poles are half standing, waiting to be put in place), refers to the interethnic process of the development of Indian culture in continuous interaction with western culture. From the image of the position of the poles I can interpret the possibility of a different kind of interethnic interaction, where Indian and Spanish meanings are no longer in the kind of relationship where the Indians are subordinated to Spanish power. In this case the relationship is inverted, not as in the past when Indian meanings were suppressed and buried underneath this very plaza, as the Spanish built the colonial city with the work of Indians on the ruins of the Indian palaces they destroyed. In the dream, instead of Indians carrying stones to build the churches and palace of the
conquerors, the colonial buildings carry the poles to serve the display of Indian culture. The signs of domination are transformed inverting the position of domination-subordination as Indian culture takes the central position in the nation.

The mention of silence, emphasised in the dream, might also express other meanings. One is the taken-for-granted dominant ideology, which denies Indians a voice, expressed through the fact that everybody was happy in silence. Another is the dilemma of a linguistic policy of multilingualism, which excludes the dominance of Spanish language (a theme in the same book written by the dreamer). In this case the dilemma is solved by the emphasis on symbolic meanings, “the meaning of the pole” as the way to communicate between groups that do not share the same language as a primary language, but share the same cultural system to decode the symbols. This is clear in the fact that “everybody knew what was going to happen”. This representation of everybody as sharing the same culture possibly comes from the dreamer’s wish, but as the dreamer is a Mexican it can also express her sense of proximity between her culture and Indian culture in terms of what she proposes as an explicit theoretical point of departure for the research as the context in which the dream appeared.

In interpreting the dream text I found other elements which I could not interpret with a double contradictory meaning, and so, against the will of the dreamer, I detect in them an unconscious expression of the internalized hegemonic ideology. One is the way Indianness is represented through their clothes. Even if, in this case, their Indianness was signified by peasant clothes (camisa y calzón de manta) instead of colourful folkloric and beautifully embroidered clothes, as in the common tourist stereotype (see chapter 4), the fact that the sign of Indianness was restricted to peasants denied the Indianness of many Mexicans who have transformed some of their practices and behaviours in the process of interethnic exchange (mostly in urban contexts but also in rural ones), without that change meaning a loss of Indian culture and identity. Another stereotype is the representation of Indians as passive, waiting in silence to act, instead of depicting them as active social agents. The dream, reinforced also by the description of the occasion as calm, depicts the Indians as needing to wait for others to let them act. The other common stereotype, not only applied to Indians, is the representation of these social actors as exclusively male. Even if it is the case that most Voladores dancers are men (with at least one exception I know, see chapter 6), this construction denies the possibility of women as an active force in transforming Mexican society. The examples in the case study in this research (see chapter 7 on Indian women in Cuetzalan) and the importance of Indian women in the Zapatista Indian rebellion in Chiapas (with its effects at the national level) show how false that assumption is. In this example, it is clear that even the more well meaning producers of cultural texts (such as the dreamer)
are liable to slide under the influence of the dominant ideology (see chapter 5 for other examples).

The researcher and dreamer become one again.

What is not included in the text but is very important to understand interethic ideology in the transformation of Mexican culture and identity is the fact that one aspect of what seemed anomalous in the dream, the Indians’ appropriation of the ‘heart of the country’, became a major sign of the change in Mexican political culture associated with the Indian movement that declared war against the Mexican government in January 1994. A few days after my dream, I read in the internet about an Indian Zapatista woman, Ramona, who as representative of the Zapatista Army, brought a multitude of different social groups together in the Zócalo to communicate publicly at the national level, from this central site, the Indian situation and their position on the government’s actions. She was invited to represent Indian women in the celebration of international women’s day (8th of March) in the context of social support for the Indian movement. Some months later, the 12th of September, the 1,111 representatives of 1,111 Zapatista Indian communities (*comunidades indias*) took over the Zócalo again, giving new meanings to its political culture, using new forms of political discourse and symbolic representations of social meanings (see chapter 2).

In this event, as in the dream, the interethic interaction linked different levels of society. In the first case, the Indian presence in the Zócalo brought to the centre of the country at the national level the meanings constructed in interethic interaction at the local level (in Chiapas). In the dream too, the meanings crossed between the local and national levels, in this case the symbols of the Indians of Cuetzalan appearing in the place, which represents the central power of the country.

From this perspective the understanding of interethic communication, as an important element in the dynamics of Mexican culture and identity, needs to include interethic exchanges as part of the dominant ideology at the national level, along with the reciprocal relationship of this ideology with social movements in specific regions. In this context I found I needed to include different levels and multiple processes as basic theoretical principles. One aspect of this process includes a broad framework for understanding interethic interaction as important in constructing Mexican culture and identity at the national level, which then permeates interethic exchanges of meanings in general and specific interethic dialogues.

In this thesis I developed a number of proposals to explain the general conditions which manifest themselves at the national level and that include the situation of different Indian groups. In this introduction and in chapters 1 and 2 I include different models to interpret the role of Indians and their culture in the history of Mexican culture and identity. Some of them come from hegemonic representations of Indianness and are clearly restricted ways of interpreting the relationship between
Indian peoples and the rest of Mexican society. Others come from Indian views, which construct a richer way of understanding the complexities of the process of interethnic exchanges, proposing different kinds of relationship between social groups. Within these two extreme points of view I construct a general view of the dynamics of the interaction between the two, which makes it possible to understand the complexities involved in the dynamics of culture and identity. Following this proposal I introduce in chapter 1 some examples that illustrate the different point of views and ideologies expressed in contemporary cultural life in Mexico City and in Indian regions throughout the country. In chapter 2 I include the case of the Zapatista Indian movement, which emerged from a specific Indian region but influenced the whole national political ambience. In addition to studying interethnic interaction in Mexican national life I also look at it in everyday life between Indians and Mestizos, in this case in the municipality of Cuetzalan. From chapters 3 to 8 I present different kinds of interethnic interactions that happened in this Nahua area in different kinds of interactions that include political, commercial, religious, cultural and economic events. The range of interactions and strategies developed by Indians and Mestizos -- in this case study and in other manifestations of interethnic relationship at the national level -- show the complexities of social relationships that deal with multiple resources from different cultures, histories, knowledges and goals in a complex process of cultural transformation which weaves together multiple voices.

Diversity of dialogues

The full situation of Indian groups in contemporary Mexico cannot be understood in itself. The only way to understand deeply the dynamics of culture in a multicultural country like Mexico is to see each interethnic exchange as a dialogue that acts continuously in both directions and at different levels.

Given the complexity of interethnic events within this framework of multiple levels and kinds of interlocutors, the concept of dialogue, in the sense proposed by Bakhtin (1993, 1996) as a dialectic, reciprocal exchange between actual and imaginary interlocutors and events, is a useful tool to relate different events at different levels, at different times. In this sense each interaction is a concrete relationship between the respective interlocutors, which also involves other dialogues. The concept of dialogue in this sense is useful to apply to the conditions of interethnic communication and their effects on different groups of a society, which probably did not experience the concrete interethnic encounter. Taking this point of view, the process of construction of Mexican culture and identity is the product of a dialogue with many voices, from inside and outside. The dialogue brings to the social exchange the experiences of all social groups.
who are interacting, including a variety of cultural resources drawn from different kinds of exchange between the Mesoamerican and Spanish civilisations (Rivero 1992, Bonfil 1987b, Coronado 1998).

The exchange has been different at different periods. Sometimes there has been an open imposition and struggle, at other times negotiation and appropriation. There has also been an innovative construction of new cultural products by both parties. Knowledge and experience from this history of interethnic relationship is at work in each particular interaction. The dialogue is performed then as face-to-face interaction and simultaneously as an imaginary dialogue that draws on past experiences and future expectations, both immersed in the ideological ambience that surrounds the interaction. Such dialogue relates different aspects of social life, connecting different levels of social organisation in a continuous movement from top to bottom, from the national level to communal and individual forms of interactions, and vice versa.

The importance of this dialogic displacement at different levels is that it allows us to understand some of the motives and expectations involved in the decisions and actions of a group in specific situations. Otherwise, taking interactive events in isolation, the deep reasons for social actions are never clear, and individual motives can be misinterpreted. For example, in the town of Cuetzalan I was present during the festivities watching the Indians from the communities collaborate to present a tourist event controlled by the Mestizos (see chapter 4). If I analysed that event in itself, unaware of the story of struggle in the history of that interaction and its connection across other levels of society, I might conclude the Indians are passive, allowing Mestizos to manipulate them to provide good profits from the tourists who come to see Indian dances and culture. But using a multiple dialogic framework I can see the Indians are acting in a broader context to fulfil their own cultural purpose (to dance for the saint, their Santo Patrón*), while also negotiating with political authorities in the municipality and the state. They behave as ‘good Indians’ to activate the conditions for reciprocal collaboration (which has not always been possible at other periods) so that they can demand Mestizo support on other occasions, for example municipal resources for services which benefit Indian communities. Taking the dialogic approach, instead of interpreting this Indian participation as a passive reaction to an imposition from above, we can see it as a strategy in interethnic interaction, where Indians take a wider set of relationships into account to connect different levels of society across different spaces and times, and mobilise forces from outside for their local advantage.

The relationship of different levels and the possibilities of reciprocal effects is especially strong in the case of Mexico because Mexican society is so highly centralised. Every town, city and social institution depends in some ways on the federal power, which rules and controls activities from the centre in Mexico City. In this framework the structure of social, political and economic life is built up through a
network that potentially connects all communities to the whole nation. To explain the interrelation between the different levels I found useful ideas from theories of Chaos and Complexity, which I encountered in a course given by my teacher and friend Dr Vladimir Dimitrov. In these terms I understand the political structure of Mexico as a network formed by different levels organised in a kind of fractal structure. According to Mandelbrot

fractals are geometrical shapes that ... are not regular at all. First they are irregular all over. Secondly they have the same degree of irregularity on all scales. A fractal object looks the same when examined from far away or nearby -- it is self-similar. As you approach it, however, you find that small pieces of the whole, which seemed from a distance to be formless blobs, become well defined objects whose shape is roughly that of the previously examined whole (1992:123-124).

From this perspective the political structure of Mexico, seen as a fractal object, is expressed in different levels, and each level repeats similar patterns of organisation, reproducing in each the inner structure of the whole system that contains the others (see Diagram 1). In this case all of them depend in different ways and to different extents on the higher levels, and all radiate from the centre of the whole as well as from the centre at each level. In this way in each community’s social life, economic activity and cultural practices are partly autonomous but depend on the political and economical structure of the whole nation, and even, it could be said, affected by the world system. This fractal structure is organised in all levels from the national authorities and institutions (represented at the top by the president and parliament) to the lower level, the communities.

The network links the community at the local level with the municipal level, and this with the district level, which is connected with the state level, and then with the federal level, Mexico City, which simultaneously is the centre of the highest level and represents the whole nation. In this way national policies and the hegemonic culture and ideology act everywhere, producing common features in groups that are isolated from each other. Each group is different, due to their specific responses in the present and the past, but are linked to other groups through the common ideology and culture reproduced from the centre over centuries. This central ideology, at the same time, is reciprocally constructed out of effects of specific practices of groups at all other levels of the structure. That is, the meanings that flow between different nodes pass through all levels in a continuous multiple dialogue.

The importance of links between levels for understanding interethnic communication and its influence in the culture and identity is enormous. Interaction between groups at the different levels has a major role in fulfilling the economic, social
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and cultural needs of people. Most government programs to assist Indians are federal programs. So the Indian population (individuals or groups) which wants to use these programs have to connect the rural community, where most Indians live, with the national level through all the potential paths. The different things they must do to get what they need depends on how strong they are to access the different levels. A strong group with good political links outside the local context can follow transvertical loops to reach higher levels (marked in the diagram as broken lines), not needing to interact with the immediately higher authority to fulfil their goals, because their potential interlocutors, the most powerful, are in the highest levels of the structure. By this action they are able to break momentarily the centralised control at the immediate higher level, but they are attracted by the centripetal force of the other higher levels. Weaker groups, eg. most small unions or community groups, need to go up step-by-step, climbing to reach the resources that usually come from the higher levels (this dynamic is marked by dot lines in the diagram). In many cases they never reach those levels, or they are completely dependent on the local governor's goodwill. The governor will try to keep control of the powers and resources of the centre at his (or her) own level.

The existence of this network, held together by centripetal forces (see Diagram 2), reproduced fractally in each level, and the way economic resources flow through it in the Mexican system, makes it necessary to take the whole structure into account to understand the complexity involved in interethnic communication at any one level. Interethnic exchanges are not only limited locally in concrete face-to-face interactions. The links between different levels of the network bring into the interethnic interaction the interethnic ideological ambience that surrounds all social practices. In that sense a small action at one level can transform the conditions for interaction at other levels, as it affects the way the whole is transformed and reproduced.

Each interethnic event in this context becomes a complex interaction where the whole structure of the nation -- with all its fractal levels, the ideological ambience and the specific interethnic experience -- is linked. In this sense the actions of social groups in different parts of the country are not performed inside a limited local context but bring into the exchange meanings from other levels of society. For example, in a political meeting in Cuetzalan the Mestizo municipal president described the Indians as "brothers", which sounded very strange in the context of the long interethnic conflict that has divided these two groups. How have they suddenly become brothers? The only way to understand that change of political rhetoric in Cuetzalan is to move outside the local level and see what is happening at the other levels, which has transformed the ideological ambience in which the local groups perform their interactions. The likely explanation for me is the existence of an Indian rebellion, by the Zapatistas, which affects not only their own region but the whole political situation of Mexico.
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The possibilities of transvertical movements across the fractal structure are not limited to one direction, nor only to a return movement. The dynamics of the dialogue are connecting through the vertical structure specific events that are not linked in a horizontal network. The multiplicity of possible movements within the fractal structure in the context of the centripetal forces makes each specific interethnic interaction complex. Both parties to the dialogue, Indians and Mestizos, were framed by the ideological ambiences produced by knowing the actions of other groups at the same or different levels. In this case the ideological ambiences produced by the Indian outbreak in 1994 strongly affected the national political conditions of interethnic relationships, so that the interlocutors in each later event had to change what had been the ‘typical’ behaviour in that kind of relationship. They acted differently than they would have done before the Zapatistas uprising. In this sense, the Zapatista movement in the state of Chiapas opened new conditions for negotiation in all Indian areas.

The Indian rebellion was very important in producing changes in the hegemonic ideology of Indianness (chapter 2). With the advent of the Zapatistas interethnic dialogue has become more clearly an important element of political and ideological life at the national level, and also frames other dialogues at other levels of the structure. This case is useful to show the concrete impact a local event can have in the national level, and also its repercussions on other levels of society that are not directly linked. The Indian movement has produced some important changes in the political life of Mexico. As an interethnic event it questioned the ideology about Indians and the Indianness of Mexican culture and identity, by demonstrating the active and creative presence of Indians in a dialogue with the whole society, including the president, parliament, state authorities, political parties and civil society, Indian or non-Indian (workers, peasants, students, homosexual groups, housewives, elders and children) (see Coronado in press).

Through heteroglossic communication the Zapatistas reached all fractal levels of society, of course with different impacts but still producing a new ideological ambience for interethnic exchanges. The case of Cuetzalan, an Indian region far from Chiapas but affected by the national political crisis, shows how different levels of society can be articulated by an effect emerging from the dynamics of the fractal structure of the nation.

The national power responded to the Indian uprising with violence in Chiapas itself, and in other places where interethnic interactions were characterised by open conflict. But there were also other reactions, as in Cuetzalan, where local authorities acted more cautiously in their interaction with the Indians. This effect probably was intensified in this situation, given the existence of a strong Indian cooperative, which by transvertical movements had forged links with other Indian organisations and with government authorities at the federal level. The local political event in Cuetzalan
(expanded in chapter 4) was a particular interethnic event between Indians and the municipal authorities which implied, at the same time, a dialogue with the state level to reach the national level. It used the national conditions generated by another local event far from the area to win support from agents of the nation, state and municipality.

The fractal structure of Mexico and the centripetal force of its dynamics are not only an imposition flowing downwards in society. In its multidirectional movements it also allows a space for resistance and reciprocal transformation. In this case it allowed an imaginary dialogue which put together two Indian groups, one from Puebla and one from Chiapas, who have never been in contact but who became reciprocally dependent as an effect of the conditions of power and vulnerability of the dominant. The Zapatistas are a stronger national Indian movement because of the existence of other Indians (and non-Indians) politically active in other regions, and, at the same time, the other Indians can develop further as differentiated Indian groups because of the pressure the Zapatistas put on the national political power. For this reason, to understand the conditions of each interethnic event in Mexico, we need an approach that recognises the complexity of every social process, taking into account multiple factors from political, economic and ideological conditions at different levels of the structure of the nation.

While writing this piece of work, looking at these two diagrams I realised that superimposed they produce an image very close to the dance of the Voladores, in which the dancers fly down in circles around the pole that is the centre of the whole structure (Diagram 3). This image has accompanied me throughout the whole process of research as I have tried to understand the need for a continuous dialectic between the different levels, or as in Indian cosmovision, the different heavens. I do not know how much the image guided my theoretical and methodological decisions. It is clear, however, that just as the dancers repeat the same representation of the cosmos by performing the dance (from sunrise to sunset, over many days, throughout the fiestas*) I have spent three years connecting the different levels of Mexican society, going around each cultural text to make sense of a picture that lets me understand the meanings expressed by different Mexican voices; voices I have heard and dialogue with to display my own voice in the narrative of this search.
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Chapter 1

Mexican culture: multiple voices, multiple silences

The culture of contemporary Mexico, within which I grew up as a Mexican, has emerged over more than 500 years since the first confrontation of two different cultures, Indoamerican and Spanish. In spite of the conquest and colonisation the destruction of Indian civilisation by the Spanish did not mean the end of their culture but rather the beginning of a complex process of multiple cultural exchanges (in various times and layers) that has created Mexican culture as it is today. However, the presence and recognition of Indians and their culture in Mexican culture and identity is ambiguous, due to the historical attempts by different groups to impose Spanish culture and views as the legitimate culture of the country. At the same time, at different moments of Mexican history, in the process of constituting the nation, the ruling group tried to achieve a distinctive identity through the distinct culture created out of the continuing Indian culture as it interacted with Spanish culture. Sometimes Indians and their culture are “ours” and we are proud of them, sometimes we reject them and what they have become in interaction with other Mexicans.

In hegemonic representations of Mexican culture, the ambiguous and problematic presence of Indians is expressed at different moments and levels of social life, from the public arena to minor social actions. In everyday life it is possible to hear comments referring to Indians to insult others or express pride. The words ‘indio’ or ‘azteca’ are used equally to recall a high culture and civilisation or condemn the low culture, lack of intelligence and backwardness of an individual. One example is the name given to Mexico City as ‘la capital azteca’ (the Aztec capital), the same word as children use to insult each other as in the phrase “te pasaste de azteca” (you behave as bad as an Aztec).

This contradictory view of indianness was characterised by Carlos Montemayor as a schizophrenic division in Mexicans. “This schizophrenic division leads us to celebrate the indigenous cultures of the past, to recover them, to preserve them, to study them as they are or were, to feel them close, but no Mexican feels part of the contemporary Indian” (La Jornada. September 12, 1997:8). In this way Indians are sometimes important as one element that constructs Mexican identity as specific and different from the Spanish. Indianness is in this sense one important marker to define Mexican nationhood. At other times they are completely marginalised. Indians represent a problem to solve, a group who should be integrated into the ‘march of progress’, a burden hindering the modernisation of Mexican society. It is also now a group to fight or control because of its growing importance at the national level, as in the case of the Zapatistas, the Indian movement in Chiapas in Southeast Mexico.

In this chapter I will show different ways of representing Mexican identity and
culture as product of interethnic dialogues. The examples show how hegemonic cultural views are riven with deep contradictions by denying the contemporary Indian component of our culture. Contrasting with this view I propose a different approach which considers Mexican culture as a complex process of multiple interethnic dialogues. In the same vein the Indian perspective shows a much more dynamic understanding of the transformation of culture in interethnic exchanges.

**Indianness in Mexican identity**

No matter how much effort is exerted to deny the presence of contemporary Indians, indianness is also deeply present in the construction of Mexican identity represented in the category Mestizo. This word has had multiple meanings in different moments of the construction of the country as an ideological imaginary or as a socially grounded practice. The use of the word Mestizo first appeared during the colonial period to name the social group formed by the children of Spanish men and Indian women, but it was also used later to refer to the product of mixing over generations, as can be seen in the text books still used in schools:

*En México vive gente diversa. Alguna pertenece a los grupos indígenas y otra llegó de Europa, de África, de Asia. Pero la mayoría de los mexicanos somos mestizos, es decir somos hijos de gente de orígenes distintos (incluidas las mezclas entre las diferentes culturas indígenas).*

In Mexico diverse people live. Some belong to the indigenous groups and others arrived from Europe, Africa and Asia. But we, the majority of Mexicans are Mestizos, that is to say, children of people from different origins (which include the mix between different indigenous cultures) (SEP 1996:182).

The use of the word Mestizo gained new importance at the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was used to name the group who compose the majority of the Mexican population. The connotation of the word Mestizo as a racial mix was emphasised by José Vasconcelos, one of the most important ideologues of the ruling group in the twenties. He called Mestizos the fifth race of the world, a cosmic one “in which the other four will fuse, who in isolation have forged history” (Vasconcelos 1983:25). This fifth race was the result of the Indian being ‘civilised’ by European culture: “a religion such as Christianity made the American Indians progress in a few centuries from cannibalism to relative civilisation” (Vasconcelos 1983:10). Although this conception implies the superiority of the Spanish in the category of Mestizo, Vasconcelos constructed a positive view of the mix of race and culture produced by the history of centuries of colonisation and independence and the country’s constitution as a nation. Mestizo, in this sense,
represents the unity of the country and its common culture, whose main means of communication is Spanish, rendered distinctive by including some Indian vocabulary.

The importance of the unity of the country is still emphasised in the school system as a positive effect of the imposition of Spanish culture, which unified the diverse Mesoamerican groups as they never were before:

Los señores mesoamericanos no llegaron a formar nunca una unidad. El Virreinato les impuso un solo gobierno, una economía, una lengua, una religión

The Mesoamerican kingdoms never managed to form a unity. The Viceroy imposed one government, one economy, one language, one religion (SEP 1996:76).

This statement reinforces a dominant view, which rejects the value of diversity, which in other public spaces is recognised as important to characterise Mexico as a multicultural nation. By not recognising the high cost of that unification for Indian cultures, which were partly destroyed by the imposition of another language and culture and by devaluing their cultural richness, it is clear that diversity is conceived in Mexico as something which enriches a homogeneous culture based on Spanish language and civilisation.

In my view, the term Mestizo functions more to deny indianness than to be positive about Indian origins. The term Mestizo is more common in situations where social groups need to be contrasted because of the presence of Indians. This is the case in Indian regions like Cuetzalan where social divisions require a distinction from Indians. The Mestizos are the non-Indians, and it is the label commonly used by both groups, in an identity commonly defined by the Mestizos as being or not being ‘gente de razón’* (people who think). That is to say, Mestizos are people able to think, Indians are not.

In the national context, where the contrast with Indians is not so marked in everyday interaction, the use of the term is very rare, but it is used on some occasions. For example, a national basic level school textbook characterises the Mexican population:

se mezclaron tanto entre ellas mismas (tribus del norte) y con los españoles y los indígenas del centro que comenzaron a convertirse en ese pueblo mestizo que somos los mexicanos

they (northern tribes) mixed so much between them and with the Spanish and the indigenous peoples of the centre that they began to become the Mestizo people we Mexicans are (my emphasis, SEP 1996:72).

In this case Mestizo is used as a synonym of ‘mixed’ without indicating what kind of mix. In this way all Mexican can be Mestizo without needing to recognise their Indian origin.

In the context of this Mestizo culture and society the main way Indians have been
seen as part of Mexican culture is in terms of their ‘glorious past’. We Mexicans inherit
the same prehispanic culture as the Indians. However, Mexican Mestizos have inherited
“the architecture, the sculpture, the jewellery, the murals, the poetry of our indigenous
ancestors” (La arquitectura, la escultura, las joyas, los murales, la poesía de nuestros
antepasados indígenas) (my emphasis, SEP 1996:36-38), while Indians have only
inherited their native languages and their traditional customs:

Los grupos indígenas tienen costumbres y autoridades propias, tienen su forma de
vestir. Lo que más los distingue y da unidad es que hablen su lengua ... cada una
representa una cultura diferente y por lo tanto un legado cultural distinto.
The indigenous groups have their customs and their own authorities, they have their
way of dressing. What makes them more different and gives them unity is that they
speak their own language ... each one represents a different culture and thus a
different cultural legacy (SEP 1996:39).

Thus, our relationship with indianness is mostly projected back to prehispanic
times, to the culture destroyed by the conquest, or, more exactly, to the ideal
reconstruction made by the early Spanish and subsequent generations of Mexicans. That
glorious past is seen as a high civilisation, as in Maya astronomical and mathematical
knowledge and the mementos of a developed high culture, represented in stone sculptures
and the architecture of the great temples. Those are considered the elements to be proud
of, the culture to show off as the markers of our identity. In this sense we can say that the
Indian part of Mexican identity is in the museums and in ruins. We claim the knowledge
developed by those civilisations, while rejecting the contemporary descendants of those
groups. This way of interpreting the relationship of Mexican culture and society with
Indians strongly represents a dominant cultural view, where the Indians as subaltern
groups are only the passive recipients of hegemonic culture.

In this perspective interaction with contemporary Indians is mostly constructed in
a negative way, denying the possibility these groups could participate in society as
creative, independent and active groups. This same view was expressed about the Indians
from Chiapas who participated in the Zapatista outbreak. In this case the government
representatives denied the movement could have an Indian social base, claiming Indians
were unable to manage a coherent social and political confrontation by themselves. Since
the beginning of the war in 1994 the government has rejected the fact that the movement is
Indian, insisting that foreigners and non-Indians have manipulated Indians and their
motives for the war. Arturo Warman, as a representative official voice, used the dominant
stereotype, considering Indians unable to lead in their own struggle, and easily
manipulated by others:
se puede distinguir una dirigencia externa, y una leva espontánea de campesinos indígenas ... no es la voz de los indios, simplemente algunos de ellos están presentes como en todas las expresiones de la vida nacional.

external direction can be discerned, and a spontaneous drafting of Indian peasants ... it is not the voice of Indians, only some of them are present as they are on every occasion in national life (Warman in La Jornada January 16, 1994:15).

What is emphasised in this statement is not only the fact that they are not participating with their own voice in the guerrilla war but also that this is how Indians mostly participate in national life: without voice.

**Cultural transformation as co-evolution and interethnic dialogue.**

In contrast to this way of understanding Mexican culture I propose a different approach which recognises Indian cultural practices as a constant factor in the construction of Mexican culture and identity. I base this proposition on the fact that interethnic communication, as a complex exchange of meanings from different cultures, has been continuously present in Mexican society in different forms since the conquest. This interethnic exchange has simultaneously included different kinds of interaction between the different groups involved. Hence, it is not possible to understand the creation of Mexican culture as just the result of imposition, but as a dialogue between groups immersed in different kinds of exchanges, sometimes simultaneous, sometimes alternating.

The culture needs then to be seen as heteroglossic, in the sense proposed by Bakhtin who understands any cultural product as having “at any given moment of its historical existence... the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies ... that intersect each other in a variety of ways forming new [ones]” (1996:291) With this conception of culture the interaction between groups needs to be seen in dialogic terms as the result of creative responses of both groups acting throughout the history of Mexico. Instead of seeing culture as created by the action and imposition of dominant groups on the subaltern sectors of society, I propose that Indians, instead of being passive subaltern groups, recipients of dominant culture, have had a more active role in the construction of their own culture and an important influence on the culture of all Mexicans.

Throughout the history of Mexico Indian groups have interacted, directly or indirectly, with the Spanish, Criollos (Spanish born in New Spain), Mestizos and Indians from different groups. In the communication both groups are influenced in their culture,
ideologies and social practices through the exchange of meanings. This interethnic relationship has included different kinds of processes, sometimes at critical moments, sometimes in stable interactions. Among the kinds of interethnic process I will emphasise imposition and rejection, struggle and negotiation, and appropriation and refunctionalisation. All these can be found in the history of all social groups in Mexico, and they can be present, simultaneously, in a single historical stage or even in the same cultural exchange. Cultural evolution and change work as a complex interaction at different levels, including both objective and subjective exchanges. During these processes the exchange of cultural elements, behaviours and meanings can be partial or total, and the transformation of culture includes not only the introduction of new elements or meanings but also the transformation of the whole culture in response to the new situation. The three pairs of interethnic processes are important ones in the construction of Mexican culture. They are opposite in different ways: sometimes they are alternative behaviours, sometimes complementary.

The first group of interethnic processes, which I define as polarity behaviour, is the first step in interethnic interactions, where the groups involved try to promote their own culture as the only legitimate one. In this case, depending on the strength of each group, the response could be the acceptance or not of the other culture. This kind of position in the interaction is not only temporary, or the end of the relationship. It may occur with every new interaction, as a sign of the position and status of each group. This kind of behaviour, in asymmetric relationships, is frequently more uni-directional, since dominant groups control the interaction and more actively impose their culture. The possibility of rejecting that imposition is limited for subordinates but still exists, and when this happens it can be interpreted as resistance that aims to keep control over their own culture. However, a group can be so strongly subjugated that acceptance of the dominant culture cannot be interpreted simply as passivity, but as recognition that rejection is impossible. Even so, an imposed cultural practice once accepted becomes part of the culture, exposed to inner controls that may transform it or not.

Imposition, as one of the terms of this polarity, refers to the introduction of new social and cultural practices without allowing the recipient group any control. Sometimes this is the first stage in a later process of appropriation but not always. In contemporary Indian life it is common to find some changes externally imposed, mainly arising from the economic needs of poor groups. For example, changes in agricultural practices are imposed as conditions for loans, transforming traditional self-sustaining agriculture into more commercial practices. It is also possible to have imposition and other kinds of interethnic exchange within the same cultural practice, given that every cultural manifestation is a complex one, allowing the interethnic process to affect some aspects but at the same time keeping control over other elements. One example has been the introduction of the national school system into Indian communities. This is usually seen
as a complete imposition, with the Indian community unable to control any of the cultural practice, since content, material and teachers are under the control of the education system. However, inside the activity the community can take control of some aspects, giving new meanings to the external culture, imposing some behaviours on the teachers, and even rejecting some practices as being against their values and expectations.

This means that in every attempt to impose the dominant culture there is a space for their rejection. Rejection as an interethnic process is the explicit position of one group opposing the imposition of some cultural practices or external controls over them on the grounds they are against their cultural values and expectations. Rejection is shown most overtly when external groups or cultural products are expelled. Teachers are frequently expelled if they do not work as the community expects; for example, if they use the native language instead of teaching Spanish as a second language, or the contrary, using Spanish as the only legitimate form of communication, rejecting the use of the mother tongue.

The second pair of behaviours, struggle/negotiation, involves a more interactive process. They arise out of continuous interaction between groups that have to forge a relationship with other social groups who need to reach some agreements. The difference between the two processes in this category is their way of resolving difference. The use of one or the other depends on the different power of each group and the relevance of their aims. Previous experiences of interaction provide important knowledge to define the limits of possible actions and outcomes.

The process of negotiation implies that the groups involved have some strength to impose their positions, but at the same time they have some reasons, aims or interests to avoid confrontation. In this case the political context at national and international level acts as a pressure to avoid confrontations, so Indian groups try to access the public arena to make their position and demands visible at higher levels. The need for negotiations between Indians and the ruling groups has centred especially on land rights, demands for services and political self-determination. Indian organisations at a regional and national level have been able to move into the national arena to lead the interethnic exchanges, which have produced changes in the law. One example is the negotiation with the government over changes of articles 4 & 27 of the Mexican Constitution relating to territory, land tenure and collective legal organisations. The fact of negotiation at the national level creates conditions that play a role in the local interethnic interaction, defining for each group the space where they are able to move.

Competing with negotiation there is always the option of struggle as an interethnic process. Open confrontation between groups appears when possibilities of negotiation are closed by the imposition of one group over the others, using political or military force. The Indian invasion of land that was 'stolen' by Mestizos or the burning of Indian towns by powerful landowners have been common in interethnic confrontations in rural areas.
throughout Mexican history. Struggle in interethnic exchange is always present in the collective memory as a common option, and it is an important element in the construction of contemporary Indian identity (see chapter 3).

There are other kinds of interethnic exchanges that can be seen as more cooperative processes in the actual interaction or arising from it. Appropriation and refunctionalisation are different ways of transforming a culture by using elements from a different culture. Each group seeks to control the process of cultural change for their own interest, and both are influenced by the other's culture. The difference between these processes is where the cultural feature comes from, their own culture or the other’s.

Appropriation is a process where a group -- Indian or Mestizo -- introduces cultural meanings or material culture taken from the other, transforming their meanings under their own control. In this process the new cultural forms no longer controlled by the other group become part of the group’s own culture (see Bonfil 1987a:34). The process of appropriation can be total or partial. Sometimes it requires acceptance by the other group in a continuous interaction. Indian religiosity is clearly the result of historical processes of appropriation of Catholic Saints as Santos Patrones immersed in Indian beliefs. But the presence of the priest is important for the reproduction of this religiosity in a continuous interethnic exchange, which can be directed in the same or in different directions. Another common appropriation is the use of images of indianness by Mestizos as a tourist commodity, in multiethnic regions, or even at a national level (see chapters 4 & 5).

The process of refunctionalisation is the result of interethnic interaction that changes an original or appropriated culture. The refunctionalisation process transforms former practices by introducing new meanings or changing the meaning of alien elements in the context of a group’s own cultural meaning. This transformation is due to a change of conditions the group needs to manage, where cultural practices introduce new elements or use them differently to signify new meanings to help the group adapt to changing situations. These changes can arise from pressures from outside or from inside. One very common example of refunctionalisation, produced by short-term migrations, is the transformation of the traditional communal duty of the work done as a faena*, (community service) by allowing absent people to continue their communal involvement by payment of a day’s work instead of doing it themselves.

These interethnic processes are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes they are sequential or complementary. They can also work outside the direct interethnic interaction as a symbolic exchange of cultural elements, meanings or ideological views from different groups. The interethnic exchange is then a relationship over a long historical process, where interethnic knowledge (which includes the experience of a history of contacts and conflicts) consciously and unconsciously defines the possibilities and limits of the interaction. In this way the interethnic interaction also includes an imaginary dialogue (see
Bakhtin 1993) constructed outside the actual relationship, drawing on both individual experience and collective interethnic knowledge. The choice of one or another kind of interaction is related to the knowledge each group has of the strength of the others, what are their aims, and what experience of success or failure in interethnic relations they have had in the past. For example, it is not always convenient or possible to reject cultural impositions. Depending on specific conditions, sometimes it is determined by the political situation at other levels of society, and the decision then is based on interethnic experience in the past and the understanding of the local and broader contexts in the present.

The ideological ambience, constructed by the continuous exchange between the hegemonic culture and sub-cultures in a society, became the frame for every cultural exchange. In the historical construction of indianness hegemonic culture permeates the different levels at society in diachronic and synchronic connections between fractal levels (see Introduction). In this construction of a fractal society the actions of every group are influenced by, and influence, other levels in the society, from macro to micro social actions and vice versa. This allows actions of groups in the lower levels to produce changes and redefinitions in the policies of the groups at other levels, creating a wider interethnic exchange than the one performed in the face-to-face interaction.

In each interethnic exchange people involved construct their decisions, actions, discourses and narratives in a dialogue which uses knowledge of past interethnic processes, specific knowledge of the present context (local, regional, national and international) and expectations of that exchange for the future. Groups are linked by the over-arching structure of the nation -- as part of it -- in a way that ensures the presence of local meanings in the construction of meanings at other levels. In this way the fact that the lower levels of society have an Indian culture and identity creates the conditions for a permanent dialogue between different cultures and meanings, more or less Indian.

Cultural exchange from different matrices

In the context of interethnic relationships, as is the case in post-colonial societies, culture is manifested in cultural products, which are complex sets of elements from different times and cultural sources in permanent transformation. In this sense each cultural manifestation, like any complex cultural product, is a new interpretation of the former manifestation that was itself an interpretation of earlier ones (see Hannerz 1992). In the case of Mexico the culture is the product of the confrontation between different civilisations in the remote past, creating a permanent dilemma for groups between cultures from different civilisatory processes. Consequently, the construction of contemporary

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1 Civilisatory process is a term proposed by the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Riveiro (1976) to explain the different tendencies of development in cultures. In his interpretation of Latin American
culture includes elements which define each group as more Indian or more European, but in every case the resulting product includes elements from both sides, sometimes shared, sometimes different, sometimes hidden, sometimes recognised.

Looking for a richer understanding of the cultural diversity that has characterised Mexican culture I propose a model of cultural transformation based on the existence of a permanent dialogue between cultures as a continuous reciprocal exchange of meanings (Bakhtin 1996). The realisation of each cultural or linguistic act always includes the actual situation as well as the potential exchange with the other interlocutor. Both cultures, interlocutors and meanings are equally involved in the process of transforming themselves and at the same time being transformed by the other’s response.

Dialogue as a creative process of cultural transformation constantly goes backwards and forwards in time, space and events. In Diagram 4 I illustrate in a schematic way a dialogic interpretation of Mexican culture. In it the cultural complexes can be seen as a continuing process of transformation of meaning through the interaction of sub-cultures. The dialogue creates new cultural representations and meanings from old elements, in new contexts of social interaction. The continuity of each sub-culture is based on the action of the cultural matrix, which is a set of articulated cultural actions and elements that form a basic core system. The cultural matrix has a generative power to give continuity and to transform the culture of a group in their specific social practices (Bonfil 1987a).²

In contemporary Mexican culture there are at least two related sub-cultural matrices, one oriented to the Indian worldview, the other to the western worldview. Both share some meanings but are differentiated by the tendencies to accept and reproduce one or other civilisatory process. In my view the different groups of Mexican society are more or less oriented to one or other direction, independently of whether they are considered Indian or not. The weight of negative hegemonic views about contemporary Indians reinforces the denial of Indian ways even in cases where it is clear the culture expressed in a social practice is similar. This is so of popular culture in peasant groups or in urban settings where cultural practices such as fiestas*, religious rituals, beliefs, medicine treatments and cuisine, are very close to those of traditional Indians.

The diagram shows the complexities of the interactions and exchanges that produce continuous transformations in each group interacting in the broader context in the

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² In the literature of Anthropology there are different words that refer to concepts similar to matrix, such as model (Quinn & Holland 1987), pattern, sieve, map (Geertz 1973:4-5). All of them refer in some sense to "systems of significant symbols" (ibid: 46) that characterise and define the collective cultural behaviour. The problem with them is that they evoke a fixed structure, as is clearly expressed in the next quotation: "cultural patterns ... are the end product of behavioural evolution" (my emphasis, Fox 1973:36). In my view the concept of matrix, specially emphasising its generative power, expresses a more dynamic system that changes itself as well as the behaviour that it is modeling.
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same society. This broader context, shared by different groups, is represented as the cultural matrix, a primary set of meanings that underlie the ‘deep culture’ of each group and constitute the basic bond between the different groups in a society. The ‘deep’ meanings from different civilisations inside the cultural matrix act on the specific cultural practices of each group independently of how much they are recognised as coming from one or the other civilisation. The cultural matrix is the framework that links the cultures in transformation, and through those changes it is changing as well (Bonfil 1987b).

Mexican culture then began with the creation of a common cultural matrix. This was the result of historical exchanges between groups that had differences produced by their civilisatory processes, one from Mesoamerican civilisation and the other from Spanish, Western civilisation. The different cultural matrices were oriented in different directions, but as they developed in continuous cultural exchange, by means of the various interethic processes, they produced a new cultural matrix that included both civilisatory directions, sometimes compatible, sometimes oppositional. This continuous exchange, in the framework of the wider bi-civilisatory matrix, defines some differences between them while sharing others. The cultural framework for the interethic interactions might be seen as multicultural in itself, not only due to the presence of two civilisatory processes in the moment of foundation but because of the continuous creation of cultural meanings from the creativity of differentiated groups.

Starting from its cultural matrix each group in a society develops its own deep culture with its ideological representations and social practices. But since they are all part of a broader society they interact and communicate using different meanings provided by their own culture and drawing on their knowledge of the meanings of other groups. This continuous interaction between groups transforms the culture of each into a new phase, where they exist as Indian or Mestizo sub-cultures, different from their previous forms but still closely linked. The continuous changes in both groups through the exchange of meanings in the communication process produces a transformation of the cultural matrix itself. The deep culture of each group is transformed, remaining different but sharing some elements taken from the interaction, elements that are transformed by the effect of the generative power of their own cultural matrix.

This process of dialogic co-evolution works towards a long-term cultural transformation, producing different matrices for Mexican culture overall as well as different developments for the subcultures (Indian and Mestizo) that are part of that matrix. In this sense Mexican culture as a whole includes meanings from different cultural matrices as well as new meanings from the interaction of sub-culture groups.
Unilateral view in hegemonic conceptions of Mexican culture.

Contrasting with this dialogic approach, the dominant ideology offers a reductive view of Mexican culture, denying the importance of the Indian peoples (*los Pueblos Indios*), and their culture as an active part in it. This denial produces what Guillermo Bonfil has described as *México Imaginario* (imaginary Mexico). The imaginary Mexico is the result of a dominant project of a minority group, which has been imposed on the whole society. It is organised according to “norms, expectancies and aims of the western society that are not shared [or are from a different perspective] by the rest of the national society” (Bonfil 1987b: 10).

The other side of this dominant project is the way Indians are seen. Indian culture is continuously reduced to the prehispanic civilisation, and this high culture, which allows Mexicans to be proud of being Mexican, is seen as alien to contemporary Indian groups who are part of Mexican society. As a result of the same effect contemporary Indian culture is not considered a shared culture. These Indians are recognised as the heirs of the Mesoamericans, but they are not like them any more. From the point of view of the dominant culture they are degenerate versions of their ancestors, not good enough to be like other citizens. Mexicans appropriate their knowledge and symbols as a common inheritance, independently of how much these Indian origins are recognised or accepted.

The Indians, usually defined as those who speak an Indian language, are stereotyped in a negative dismissive way considering them -- sometimes in a subtle way sometimes directly -- as not knowing what they want, not able to decide by themselves, not thoughtful (*gente de razón*), but ignorant, drunks, lazy people, etc. At the same time they are positively valued when they keep some cultural practices that can be converted into tourist commodities or national symbols, when they resemble the idealised prehispanic image of Indians in their artistic skills expressed in handicrafts, clothes, or folkloric practices such as the dances. In this sense interethnic exchange is present but only in restricted terms, using the Indian culture as their own, but treating the Indian groups as if they were separate, not interacting with the society in a dialogic exchange. The cultural exchange is accepted as much as is convenient for hegemonic interests, but the idea of the social exchange as a reciprocal dialogue is rejected. This construction of Mexicanness is uni-directional and denies the relationship with Indians as Indians, or emphasises their role in culture only in prehispanic forms.

The interethnic relationship has taken different forms in the various stages of Mexican history. However, it is mainly constructed as a non-reciprocal exchange where the ruling groups use or reject the Indians depending on the needs and specific aims of the dominant groups. In this way Mexico is seen as multicultural because there are still separate Indian groups but not because Mexican culture was the product of different
cultural processes.

**Representing hegemonic views**

This simplistic construction of Mexicanness can be exemplified in one important artistic representation of history displayed in the National Palace, in the central plaza of Mexico City (the Zócalo). The mural "The History of Mexico" painted by Diego Rivera between 1929 and 1935 shows the nationalist ideology of the time, in an important definition of Mexican nationhood: "Nowhere was the dual process of cultural institutionalisation and emergent national identity more keenly articulated than in Rivera's mural **The History of Mexico**" (Rochfort 1993:84).

The mural, which is still displayed and open to the public, includes two lateral walls opposite each other, with the image of prehispanic life (right) facing modern Mexico (left). The past (Illustration 1) is a typical idealisation of Indians as a harmonious high civilisation. Even the depiction of a fight, well known as characteristic of the time, in this mural is represented as non-violent. It looks more like a ritual combat, a 'flowered war' as the Aztecs called it. The remaining images depict a peaceful every day life, through images of music, dance, handicraft, agriculture, writing, cooking, and magnificent pyramids, on whose top the Aztec God³ **Quetzalcoatl** is represented as an honoured ruler happily attended to and served by other Indians.

The depiction of the present and an idealised future, in the "Class struggle" (Illustration 2) draws on Rivera's ideas as a well known communist and critic of the church⁴. In this mural representing the idealised future and present Indians are not marked as such. Contemporary Mexicans are depicted as Mestizos, a homogeneous mix of Indian and Spanish race, differentiated, mainly through clothes, as rural or urban. However, there are a few images of Indians low down in the mural. One man is kneeling with crossed arms gazing at the Virgin of Guadalupe, a woman carrying a big burden is giving alms to the Virgin and a couple of peasants, dressed in a very poor Indian style are bent down, working the land, looking to the floor with their faces hidden by hats. At a higher level ascending on a step there is also a man without visible face, carrying bricks, maybe as a sign of the construction of Mexico on the shoulders of faceless Indians. The position of these figures at the bottom, with no interaction with the rest of the picture nor with the spectator, emphasises the separation of Indians from the rest of society at the time it was painted, as now. They are depicted as passive workers, not included as social fighters,

³ At risk of committing orthographic mistakes I will use a capital letter for Mesoamerican Gods and Goddesses, considering that the rule in English, as well as in Spanish, implies ideological meanings that subtly gives a higher value to monotheist religions in general, and Christianity in particular.
⁴ Marx is painted talking with some workers pointing in the direction of an image of the country as technologically modern. This contrasts with the image at the right side, which represents a vision of war. The ruling class is depicted as confined in some kind of boxes, leaving bigger open spaces to represent social movements led by the proletariat fighting against ideological forces represented by the swastika and
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ideologically alienated and controlled by religion.

The main wall represents the rest of history in two axes that cross in the centre, where a version of the national shield is painted using an iconography which emphasises the prehispanic meanings even more than in the contemporary shield (in Mexican flag) (see below). This symbolises, in my view, the connection between the ancient past and the present, linking the central power in prehispanic times (the Aztec Empire) with the central power in Mexican society (Illustration 3). At the bottom of this wall the picture represents the defeat of Indian warriors as the foundation of Mexican history. Higher up, the image of evangelisation alongside the eagle shows the betrayal of Indian beliefs (Illustration 3b). In this part the interethnic relationship is represented as a conflict between Indians and Spanish (with Indian allies) and the imposition of religion on passive Indians. Indians are present but reduced by the might of the Spanish army and culture, becoming subjugated and enslaved, and also Christian.

In the upper part of the mural (Illustration 3, 3a & 3b) Indians are part of a mass of people seen only from the back. These are very poor people, most of them men, wearing palm hats or dressed in typical Indian clothes. indianness is represented by white cotton trousers and shirts, and in the few images of women by long skirts with woven belts and their traditional trenzas (headdresses). Some carry rifles and cartridge belts or heavy loads, and they look to the heroes of the country: Spanish, Criollos, Mestizos, racially indigenised Mestizos and less brown Indians. Most heroes are dressed in tailored suits, sometimes holding documents relating to their role in history, written in Spanish, the dominant language. Some historic characters were known as Indians, the most important being Benito Juárez, the only Indian president. He rejected his language and culture to learn Spanish and western culture so he could succeed in Mexican society. The central wall also depicts two wars against foreign interventions, one against the United States, the other against the French. In both, Indians are included as soldiers (Illustration 4), as has always been the case in all wars. Indians were soldiers during the war of independence (1810), they fought in the army against the French in the battle of Fifth of May (1862), and they were soldiers during the revolution (1910).

This version of Mexican history is not very different to the official one in the present, which still represents Indians as separate groups. Their connection with the past is their only way to interact with their indianness, but there is no permanent and creative dialogue between the two cultures. No dialogue with viewers is possible with most Indians represented in the mural. The only Indian faces that look out and engage with us as spectators are prehispanic Indians from the remote past (Illustration 1).

This mural clearly constructs indianness as a unilateral exchange in the interethnic interaction, where the Indians gave the heritage of their past, they gave their work and the cross.
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their lives to defend the country, but there is no reciprocity. This non-dialogic representation constructs a version of interethnic exchange that denies the active role of Indians as creative groups in Mexican society. Instead, they are conceived as passive recipients of the hegemonic culture.

The next diagram (Diagram 5) schematises this dominant view of Mexican history. It encodes a Mexican identity created by a progressive denial of Indians as integral to our culture, with the foundation moment of the Conquest as the main reference to them. In this scheme Indians are our ancestors, but the importance of Spanish culture is emphasised in our identity, so the Indian part that has been continuously interacting in the whole society is denied. The exchange in this case is only Indians being influenced by the culture of Mestizos, but not the contrary. Their presence is acknowledged, they are Mexican citizens hence they are fighters for the welfare of the country, but they have been separated and only valued through their association with prehispanic origins. In this sense the Mestizos, the heirs of Spanish people and prehispanic culture, are the Mexicans, but Indians, the heirs of the prehispanic Indians transformed by the Spanish culture, are only second class Mexicans, marginalised Indians.

Multiple meanings in interethnic narratives

In the context of the hegemonic view of indianness it is not strange that the Mexican flag includes a representation of the mythical story of the foundation of the Aztecs’ great city Tenochtitlan, depicting an island in the middle of a lake with an eagle standing on a nopal devouring a snake. The iconography of this symbol in the Mexican flag (Illustration 5) comes from a Mesoamerican codex. Stylistically the lake and the island are similar to the Mendocine Codex (Illustration 6), where the picture of the eagle is the toponymic symbol of the place where Tenochtitlan was founded. The national shield also includes branches of laurel and olive, symbols of victory since the Greeks, tied by a ribbon with the colours of the flag (green, white and red), which are the same as in the nopal flowers in the Mesoamerican icon, which represent hearts (Florescano 1998). The meaning of the colours now has been re-interpreted giving meanings related to the construction of Mexico as a nation. According to didactic material for children, the meanings of colours are: green for liberty and the sovereignty of the nation, white for peace, and red for blood, uniting all Mexicans (Historia de las Banderas Mexicanas. History of Mexican flags. Didactic monograph). In my childhood the interpretation of the red referred to the blood our heroes had shed for the country.*

Different versions of this symbol have been used in different periods, sometimes with the eagle crowned or looking to the front in a more European style, and the lake and the island represented more as a landscape. The contemporary one includes more clearly
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the iconographic style of ancient writings. The last version of this icon, very close to the
older one, is now in the centre of the flag, as the symbol of the country (patria). Among
other places it is now flown in the centre of Mexico City (Illustration 7), in the same place
where the Templo Mayor once stood, the Temple of the Aztecs -- the centre of their
empire.

The inclusion of Mesoamerican and European symbols in the national icon could
be interpreted as a recognition of both cultures in the creation of Mexican culture. In some
ways this is the case, but the meaning of the presence of each in cultural spaces in
contemporary Mexico is not so transparent, and much more ambiguous. Indian people do
not have the central place in the nation that Mesoamerican symbols have in the flag. This
is clear if we think about the functional meaning of the flag in the centre of Mexico City,
where the whole space can be considered as an interethnic narrative. In it the Indian past
is shown by the prehispanic ruins that are now displaced from the central square, replaced
by the colonial construction of the Cathedral, the National Palace and other colonial
buildings built on top of the ruins of the Aztec square.

In this very important space for public demonstrations of national significance, the
centre of Mexican political life, contemporary Indians have been trying to restore the
Indian meaning of the place by their presence, which is sometimes permitted, sometimes
forbidden. Every day one or two group of dancers claiming to be the heirs of Aztecs, the
Concheros, offer ritual dances, dressed in Aztec style and using copal* (a resin used as
incense), as a spectacle to the people who cross the square on their way to the subway or
for tourists, showing at the same time one of the tendencies of the dominant ideology
which reduces indianness to an allusion to the Aztecs. Other Indians from different areas
go there to sell their handicrafts, or make demands and protest against the government.
Another Indian meaning was the clandestine appearance of offerings (flowers and lighted
candles), during night, on the ruins, which were uncovered because of the construction of
the subway 4. Also important is the presence of the Indians as Zapatistas, who marched
from Chiapas in the South to the centre of Mexico, carrying the Mexican flag alongside
the flag of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Illustration 8) (also in La
Jornada September 12, 13, 14, 1997). On that occasion, and all the time the Zapatistas
fought and negotiated with the government, the meaning of the flag was used by this
Indian army to symbolise that they are Mexicans, that they respect the country, and that
they have appropriated the flag to restore its true meanings which the government has
corrupted:

El Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General del EZLN
les entrega [a la sociedad civil] ahora la bandera nacional para recordarles lo que

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ella significa: Patria, Historia, Nación y comprometerlos en lo que debe significar: democracia, libertad y justicia.

The Indian Revolutionary Clandestine Committee-General Command of the EZLN gives you [the civil society] now the national flag to remind you of its meaning: Country, History, Nation and to demand your commitment to what it should mean: democracy, liberty and justice (in EZLN 1994:312).

The presence of Indians in the Zócalo is restricted when the government uses this public space. In those cases the government controls images of Indians. Indians are not marked as Indians when they march as part of the army during the Independence day parade, although they are represented in the same occasion as Zacapoaxtla (a heroic group of Indians from Cuetzalan), in the historic battle against the French (Illustration 9). And of course Indian meanings appear in all official events in the symbol of their ancestors’ land in the National Shield. But this symbol represents not the inclusion of contemporary Indians, only the appropriation of Indian territory.

In this context the meaning of the shield can be interpreted in different ways depending on the group using it. It can be seen as an appropriation of the Indian past by the hegemonic culture in a non-dialogic exchange with contemporary Indians, or it can be seen as the manifestation of a multiple dialogue with past and present; the flag being part of everyday life in this and other important spaces that are interethnic in themselves. Finally it can be read as the symbolic recovery of the space by Indians, the true owners, who have refunctionalised the national symbol, restoring not the prehispanic meaning of indianness, but a contemporary meaning where Indians are fighting to be an important part of an inclusive Mexico. This was clearly expressed by Marcos (Mestizo Zapatista leader) in a speech to the Democratic Convention in August 28 when the EZLN gave the national flag to the civil society:

Esperamos ... encontrar a quien entregarle esta bandera, la bandera que encontramos sola y olvidada en los palacios del poder, la bandera que arrancamos con nuestra sangre de la apenada prisión de los museos, la bandera que cuidamos día y noche, que nos acompañó en la guerra y que queremos que nos acompañe en la paz, la bandera que hoy entregamos ... no para que la retenga y escatime al resto de la nación ... no para abrogarse representatividad y mesianismos. Sí para luchar porque todos los mexicanos la vuelvan a hacer suya, para que vuelva a ser la bandera nacional, su bandera, compañeros.

We wait ... to find someone to give this flag to, the flag we found alone and forgotten in the palace of power, the flag we tore down with our blood at the shameful jail of the museums, the flag we care for day and night, which was with us

\(^5\) Personal communication of Eduardo Matos. 1984
in the war and which we want to be with us in the peace ... not to keep and diminish the rest of the nation ... not to claim to be representative and messianic. It is to fight for all Mexicans to make it yours, to make it the national flag, your flag, companions (in EZLN 1994: 310).

By refunctionalising the symbol the Indians are not trying to stay fixed in the past as separated groups. What they are proposing is a true interethnic symbol. In this and other examples it is clear the representations of culture in social life include the interaction of Indian and Mestizo elements. Both groups are trying to achieve public recognition of their culture as their own, under their control, not as a uni-directional exchange but a dialogue, inherently reciprocal, which influences the various cultural forms, all of them partly Indian, partly Spanish, partly new. What the Zapatistas offered was a new meaning for the shield, one that made sense for the unity of Mexico:

La bandera del águila devorando una serpiente ... la bandera que en su centro declara sin rubor nuestras raíces indígenas, la bandera que debe ser continuamente rescatada del secuestro al que la someten los criminales que habitan el Palacio Nacional, la bandera que nos hace hermanos, la bandera mexicana.

The flag of the eagle devouring a serpent ... the flag whose centre declares without shame our indigenous roots, the flag which should be continuously rescued from being kidnapped by the group of criminals who inhabit the National Palace, the flag that makes us brothers, the Mexican flag (in EZLN 1995:461).

In this interpretation of the national flag, what had been seen only as a toponymic is transformed into a new meaning to identify the groups, Indian or Mestizo, who are against domination. For them there should be only one flag, where the eagle is the symbol of the people and the serpent is “the serpent of power” (la serpiente del poder) (in EZLN 1995:462). So the flag brings together the people who will defeat that power.

Interethnic communication and the construction of Indian identities

In the same way that the construction of Mexican culture and identity is the result of the interaction between two civilisations, Indian culture and identity have been constructed in the continuous exchange between Spanish and Mesoamerican culture. The difference in my view is the tendencies that result from the kind of interaction between social groups that has defined the interethnic exchange as a relationship of domination-subordination. The ideological complex, with its “functionally related set of contradictory versions of the world, coercively imposed by one social group on another on behalf of its
own distinctive interests or subversively offered by another social group in attempts at resistance in its own interests” (Hodge & Kress 1995:3) produces an ideological ambience which surrounds the different individual and collective interactions. This ambience permeates the interethnic process, in a way that defines the kind of response that transforms their culture and constructs their identities.

Exposed to the continuous interaction with different groups of Mexican society, and fully immersed in a range of interethnic exchanges, the Indian population has transformed their culture and identities. The transformation of Indian culture, like any other culture, is a complex process that responds to pressures from inside the group as well as from outside. An inner change of culture is not independent of external influences and in many ways it is the intention to adapt to external conditions that leads to reproduction of the culture as distinctive yet not excluding other cultures. In this respect Indians have undergone a long process of adaptation to be able to participate in Mexican society. This does not mean a direct rejection of their own culture or a passive acceptance of an imposed culture, but a transformation of it, including new knowledge useful for their development of relationships with other groups as well as knowledge of the new conditions they have to confront.

The culture of the hegemonic group is part of the Indian world in various ways. It includes the ideology transmitted by the mass media, the content of educational programs and also the social practices and ideologies of the concrete groups that interact with Indians through religious and economic activities, technological innovations, etc. But the presence of hegemonic culture does not mean that Indians just react passively to incorporate the meaning and cultural practices that are imposed. The process is more complex and dialectic, not unidirectional. Their reaction to hegemonic culture is as strong as is the reaction of hegemonic culture to Indian influences.

As a result of the interethnic interaction, both cultures are transformed by the exchange of meanings, knowledge and behaviours, creating two cultures that are different from and, at the same time, both continuous with the former cultures. There may be some shared practices or beliefs between the social groups but they acquire different meanings depending on how they are transformed to become part of the distinctive subculture. Parallel to the cultural transformation interethnic interaction also needs a construction of identities, which both groups use to interact with the other.

*Creating indianness: Between community and nation through interethnic interaction.*

When we refer to an identity we are actually talking of a plurality of forms of behaviour and identifications that are continuously changing to adapt to new and different social situations. In this sense we cannot talk of one Indian identity but of many identities that are constructed in order to respond to diverse social, economic and political needs. As
a result of the kind of relationship between Indians and other Mexican groups, Indian identity includes features from different cultural sources, some of them Indian and others Spanish. For this reason the construction of the image of indianness includes influences from different groups that have been interacting at different stages of their history, producing a rich and flexible range of behaviours.

Indian identity is developed in everyday interaction in Indian communities as a complex process, where the individual becomes part of the social collectivity through learned patterns of cultural and social behaviour and values. But at the same time, Indians need to incorporate a knowledge of the other, the Mestizo. The most frequent interaction between Indian and Mestizo is at the local level, in face-to-face interaction, mainly in the regional or municipal centres, where commercial and administrative offices are located. But the interethnic relationship also includes institutional interaction between Indians as a group and representatives of the dominant society. In this way Indians are frequently involved in specific acts of communication where interlocutors are marked by their position as part of either an Indian or a Mestizo group. Interethnic communication then is a complex space for ideological exchange, where different groups use their knowledge of values and behaviours of themselves and others to produce successful communication outcomes, successful in the sense that they will fulfil their needs and objectives.

The specific characteristics of interethnic communication in Mexico come from a long history of contact and conflict between groups pursuing their own interests. During this time Indians have developed strategies that deploy different images of their indianness for interacting with Mestizo groups. These different representations of being Indian emerged partly from their own characteristic patterns of life, and partly as a response to the construction of indianness by others. Arising from this, indigenous policies at the national level and their application at the regional and communal levels have opened up spaces for interactions of this kind, in the on-going processes of political and economic negotiation. In this sense indianness, as the dominant ideology constructs it, has been reinforced as an important means to move in the political and economic space which links an Indian community with the national society.

Although my main interest is interethnic communication between Indians and Mestizos, it is important to include different aspects of Indian culture that are important resources for interethnic communication, no matter if they are created in the complex space of communication inside the group. However the fact that a community may be mainly Indian does not mean it is completely mono-ethnic. It will also contain meanings produced by external interethnic exchanges. It is in the inner community, through the mechanism of socialisation and communal social life that the individual receives the knowledge, values and behaviours needed inside and outside the group. For this reason it is important to consider the influence of the inner community as well as the outside world. Both processes interact to develop the contemporary culture and make it available for use
on behalf of Indian groups. Pressures from the outside world and the inner community are present at every moment in the creation and reproduction of cultural meanings and identities. These different meanings are expressed in various forms that include specific knowledge, behaviours and representations, displayed in a variety of semiotic forms that transmit meanings through behavioural signs and visual and verbal semiotic representations (see Hodge & Kress 1995).

The multiplicity of cultural expressions learned and created as part of the culture of any social group (in this case Indian) is an important set of resources that are used in creative and functional ways. I am emphasising three different and important functions carried by identity representations that I see as relevant for interethnic relationships. These functions work to reinforce cohesion among them, develop forms of resistance against external forces or build up spaces for negotiation with the other group. In all these functional uses of cultural resources it is important to keep in mind the contexts created by interactions between communities and the regional and national society, because these are always present as a pressure on the specific behaviour. The knowledge of this context generates an imagined expectation that has an effect on the construction of cultural forms in the community, in view of potential interethnic interactions outside it.

Specific social interactions in interethnic situations require many cultural resources to be able to manage different communicative needs successfully. So each group involved in the interaction takes advantage of previous experiences, not only at the individual level but, more importantly, as a group. These experiences allow people to “play” with different images -- differential identities (Foaert 1987) -- that are part of their broader social identity, which define the group as specific and different to other groups. Differential identities are specific forms of identification within the group or in relation to other groups. Each individual could be a member of various groups formed by diverse links and interests in social organisation: family, neighbourhood, or group, religious, political, ethnic and/or national. In this sense each Indian has a relationship to other Indians and Mestizos by virtue of sharing or not some features or having some interests in common (economic, political or cultural).

The access to different representations of identity allows Indian people to display, consciously or unconsciously, different images of being Indian. These are performed in each communicative event in the interaction with others, with all participants trying to display a specific ideological position appropriate to the context and the desired effect. So each act of representation takes into account what kind of interlocutor is involved in the communication, where it takes place, what aims are being pursued by each side and what political forces are acting in the context of the event. Under this set of conditions Indians display different representations of their identity. Some replicate the typical stereotype of the dominant view of indianness in Mexican society, but others show different ways of being Indian to contest the stereotypes.
The use of stereotypes is typically a way to invoke the dominant ideological position along with its devaluation of indianness. This position is sometimes internalised, but more often is rejected by Indians who create different positive images of being Indian. It is common to find examples of Indians taking for granted the legitimacy of the western view and accepting the devaluation of their culture. Contrasting with this position, other Indians reject those values and reaffirm the legitimacy of their culture in the present. One example comes from the introduction to one book of oral traditions from San Miguel Tzinacapan, Cuetzalan:

*En los relatos vemos como están vivas nuestras costumbres y al retomar las enseñanzas de los ancianos, es como si abonáramos la planta para que siga produciendo.*

In the stories we see how our customs are alive and when we reacquire the learning of the elders, it is as if we manure the plant so it continues to produce (Taller 1994:29).

The alternative identities are complex in themselves and are displayed through different forms of behaviour, knowledge and representation. The use of one or other alternative identity is the result of a selection from a set of possibilities, depending on specific interaction situations and interethnic knowledge. The fact that they are individual decisions does not exclude the importance of the influence of both communal and hegemonic policies in the choice of different alternative identities. I will mention only three types of identity, which I consider the most relevant to interethnic relationships. The types of identity according to function are: cohesive identities, resistant identities, and negotiative identities. Within each type are very many features used to create particular images, mobilising different behaviours, using different knowledges and displaying alternative representations. The possible uses of each of these features and the ways they can be combined are theoretically infinite, and any or all of these might be used by Indians to relate to Mestizos in different sites.

Indians deploy a fuller range of functional identities externalised in the different images, due to the fact they have a continual imperative to succeed in a society of Mestizos, interacting with them in different kinds of interethnic processes. In the interaction Indians are normally subordinated, and they can decide to accept or reject this, depending on their relative strength in each situation. Mestizos, the dominant participants, mostly express positive images of indianness when negotiating in specific situations over Indian resources (material or cultural). On rare occasions, when outsiders are involved in

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6 I am referring here to the image of indianness constructed by both groups, Mestizos and Indians, and not to the constructions by Mestizos of their own identity. I am considering only the references that Mestizos make to images of the Indian, showing their acceptance or rejection of Indians in this ideological terrain.
the interaction, they can show a positive image of indianness, expressing cohesion and solidarity with Indians. Such images are not always self-consistent, but contain a mixture of positive and negative features. For example, a positive verbal image of indianness can be contradicted by covert behaviours, and even within the words themselves there are ambiguities and contradictions (examples of manipulative uses of indianness are included in chapters 4 and 5 in contexts of political and commercial interethnic negotiation.)

The interaction between different ethnic groups generates an identity that is strongly tied to the construction of the other. Thus Mestizos construct their own identity by contrast with Indians, especially in high-density Indian populations. Paradoxically despite the fact that Mestizos are partly Indian, to be Mestizo is also a way of not being Indian, by denying the similarities of culture and behaviour between Indians and themselves. Against this construction of identity as a negation of Indianness they develop a more flexible view of themselves, generating a representation of indianness which incorporates their history, full of cultural exchanges from Mesoamerican and Spanish civilisation, as well as contemporary cultural expressions. They are Indians but contemporary.

The Indian view of interethnic history

Contrasting with the reductive hegemonic view of Mestizos at the national and local level I will develop a more dynamic and creative interpretation of the effect of the relationship between Indians and Mestizos, a specific view of history, expressed in Indian oral traditions. In a Nahua oral tradition (Taller 1994) the Indians are active agents in the local history, which is constructed as a specific interpretation of their role in regional and national history. In their view:

Al revivir nuestra historia se nos abren nuevos horizontes ya que podemos contribuir con nuestra historia local a la creación de la historia nacional. Porque al darle la oportunidad a nuestros abuelos de decir su palabra la historia oculta, la historia silenciada brota como manantial que da vida.

As we revive our history new horizons open to us because we are able to contribute with our local history to create the national history. Because as we give our elders the opportunity to say their word the hidden history, the silenced history bursts forth like a well-spring of life (Taller 1994:30).

It is clear in this statement that, for them, the national history lacks the voice of Indians, who have been denied, hidden, silenced, so they propose to introduce it and open new possibilities of creativity. So this book, (Tejuan tikintenkakiliyaj in toueyitatajuan.

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7 It has been extensively shown by analysts of ideology in discourse (Hodge & Kress 1993, Carbó 1995).
Les oíamos contar a nuestros abuelos. Stories we heard from our grandparents) (Taller 1994), represents history from the Indian point of view, in the framework of an interethnic history, that is, Mexican history.

The history is represented as a sequence where important events cluster around the topic of struggle between different social groups. Even in references to the remote past, in the myth of origin of humankind, the Indian hero, Sentiorpl, the son of corn, had to fight first against the tsitsinimej (supernatural beings) and later with the Mestizo inhabitants of the city. It is important to point out here that even in the myth, the history is told not only as a Mesoamerican history. It includes later versions of events that transform the myth into a story, mixing Mesoamerican symbols such as the tsitsinimej with elements from interethnic knowledge. There are post-conquest references to evangelisation — the First Man in the myth is Christian -- and to later periods, including the contemporary relationship with Mestizos:

Lo que les cuento es que ese hombre vino del chupamirto. De ahí vino la mata de ese cristiano. Así nació Sentiorpl. Lo habían tirado al agua y de ahí tomó la forma de cristiano. Y mató a los tsitsinimej.

What I tell you is that that man came from the hummingbird. From it the plant of that Christian came. Sentiorpl was born that way. They threw it into the water and there it took the form of a Christian. And he killed the supernatural beings (ibid: 50).

The myth does not simply repeat the old history but brings it into the present, and symbolically re-positions Indians as important in the national history. That is clear in the same myth where the Indian Hero produces floods in Mexico City to punish its citizens:

Los habitantes de la ciudad se sentían grandes, se creían mucho. La gente estaba ocupando las casas pero no sabía quien había construido la ciudad [Sentiorpl les dijo] Ustedes ven a alguien como si no valiera nada. Pero todos velemos ... entonces hizo pensar a los coyome.

The people from the city felt themselves great, they were arrogant. The people occupied the houses but did not know who had built the city. [Sentiorpl said to them]. You look at people as if they had no value. But we all have value ... then he made the Mestizos think. (ibid: 49).

In this case the interethnic knowledge of work done by Indians in the past to solve problems of flooding in Mexico City in the XVII century (see García Martínez 1987:257) is inverted so that Indians are in control instead of being a work force under Spanish control. It is important to emphasise that symbolic interethnic exchanges can be very
different from the actual relationship between Indians and Mestizos, where in this case the Indians worked for the benefit of the Spanish.

Confrontations between different social groups and cultures are represented in all other events in this Oral History book. In the war against the French of 1862 Indians from this region feature in the national history as fighting for the nation's sovereignty, but they themselves saw it as a fight against enemies of Indians, sometimes the local Mestizos, at other times the Analtekos, French. The official history says: "The Zacapoaxtla Indian battalions played a key role in the struggle" (Los batallones de Indios Zacapoaxtlas fueron una pieza clave en el combate) (SEP 1996:127), serving the nation against a threat to its sovereignty. The Indian version emphasises not service to the nation, but Indian strategies in the local context, defending their land and avoiding heavy taxes, using the political opportunity of the fight between liberals and conservatives (Thompson 1995, Mallon 1995, Valderrama & Ramírez 1994). The Indian story of the event stresses how well the Nahua people fought, their courage, their organisation, the participation of women, their knowledge of the territory and their skill and ingenuity in tricking the armed soldiers.

In the same way, the Mexican Revolution is depicted not as an ideological struggle between revolutionaries and conservatives, but a conflict between rich Mestizo factions in which Indians allied with external groups against local Mestizos who used armed force, assisted by the revolutionary forces, to oppress them more than ever. This construction of Indian identity in these events, in my view, gives a specifically Indian view of interethnic history, which makes the past live for present and future interethnic encounters. It is an identity that reminds contemporary Mestizos that these Indians are not passive and subordinate as in the stereotype. They are Indians who have fought throughout history to defend their rights, no matter how weak they seemed to be.

Another important part of this view of history, which contrasts with the hegemonic view is the inclusion of a long chapter about everyday life, presenting it as a continuum that allows them to be contemporary and still Indian. The book emphasises the fact that in spite of changes and the new elements they have adopted there is a continuity in what is named la costumbre*, (the custom) in Indian towns, as the essential part that is reproduced as the basis for innovation. "La o el costumbre" can be interpreted as the cultural matrix of Indian culture in the sense that Bonfil (1987a & b) defined the concept. As matrix la costumbre is the set of articulated elements forming a basic core system, which has a generative power to give continuity and at the same time to transform the culture of a group as manifested in their specific social practices.

This version of history, as an important part of cultural knowledge inherent in Indian identity in the region where this group lives, constructs each event as an interethnic dialogue. In it each representation includes the experience of conflict which has permeated
Indian life in the Mexican context as the knowledge needed to reproduce their culture in the future. They do not retreat to the remote past, nor are they a separate group from Mexican society (as in the mainstream view). Instead they appeal to the close experience and knowledge which synthesise in each event different beliefs, experiences, and knowledge from two cultures, now interrelated, looking towards a possible different future.

This Indian view is depicted in the next diagram (6) which shows a richer, more dynamic interpretation of history than is found in the hegemonic view (see Diagram 5). In it the continuous reciprocal exchange between groups transforms the culture of both. The recognition that they are heirs of the Mesoamerican culture is not a nostalgic memory, but transforms and reproduces *la costumbre* by refunctulisation, appropriation and innovation in their cultural practices in the context of the national culture and interethnic exchanges. This cultural matrix allows the continuity of some cultural meanings that have been rejected or concealed in other groups who followed a different civilizational tendency, towards Western culture, in spite of the fact they also share the Indian culture.

From these cultural manifestations, from the national and local levels, in dominant or subaltern groups, we can see the wide range of contradictory ideological constructions of Mexican culture and identity. What it is clear is that the hegemonic view has tried for centuries to maintain power by negating an important group in Mexican society, the Indians. This can be seen as an obvious practice of power in the context of a post-colonial society. But what it is not so obvious is the fact that while doing this the dominant groups deny to the whole society, including themselves, the recognition of a deep self that is strongly Indian. In my view the only way to develop Mexican society in a positive and creative way is by decolonising our colonised minds, through recognising the value of contemporary Mexican Indians and accepting our Indian self, which is there anyway but has no space to act creatively.
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Chapter 2
Contemporary interethnic dialogue: breaking stereotypes

The presence of Indians in contemporary Mexico has changed in the last decades as new Indian organisations have emerged in the local and national arenas. The growth of Indian movements has occurred in an international context where minority groups in different countries have made public their demands for cultural and political rights through international organisations around the world. Bodies such as UNESCO and in Latin América the Instituto Interamericano Indígenista (UNESCO 1982, III 1982, 1990) have pressed states to respect the demands and rights of their minority ethnic groups. In this international framework representatives of Indian groups from Mexico and other countries of Latin America expressed demands and claimed rights as citizens. International pressure and Indians’ specific political demands have produced major changes in national Indigenous policies, at least in the official discourse. These policies publicly recognise the minority groups’ language and cultural rights based on documents produced by Indian international organisations since the 1970s, such as the ones presented in the Consejo Mundial de Pueblos Indios (see Bonfil 1981, Rodríguez & Varese 1981a, 1981b). Also important in this respect were the “Declaración de la ciudad de México sobre las políticas culturales” (UNESCO 1982) about the language and cultural rights of minority groups in multiethnic societies, and the Convenio 169 of the OIT (Organización Internacional del Trabajo) signed by many countries and ratified by Mexico in 1991 (see Díaz Polanco 1995).

In this context there have been local attempts to create political spaces for Indian organisations at the national level. In Mexico, different organisations were created and some Congresses were held (such as the Congresos Nacionales Indígenas, among them the Congreso Nacional Indígena at Chiapas in 1974). Their goals were to discuss the views of Indian groups, articulate proposals and agree on some actions. In the legal arena there have been some changes in the laws, such as the change in the 4th article in the Mexican Constitution, which opened a space to recognize specific cultural practices in the customary law (Nahmad 1997). Although these changes have not had a very big impact, especially on political and economic rights, they have opened some space for Indian peoples to demand some specific legal rights as culturally differentiated groups. Some examples are the introduction of Indian languages in court, so that all Indian speakers have the right to be tried with the support of an interpreter in their own language, and the right for the characteristics of the customary law exercised in local communities to be taken into account. The emphasis on recognition of cultural, and sometimes linguistic plurality is at the same time the way the government avoids accepting other Indian rights -
- such as land possession or political self-determination -- without seeming antidemocratic or opposed to the acknowledgment of Indians as an important part of society.

The growing importance of Indians, however, did not impact on the whole society but was restricted to some political and academic spaces, those more involved with actions and policies related to Indian populations. It was not until January 1, 1994 that the Indian uprising in Chiapas, in the Southeast of Mexico, made it impossible to ignore the presence of Indians as an important part of contemporary Mexican political culture and social life. The declaration of war by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) against the "Supremo Gobierno" (the name they gave the government as an allusion to the Porfirián dictatorship at the beginning of the century), introduced into the everyday life of Mexican society the Indian 'face' of 'underground Mexico' (el México del sótano) as they named themselves (EZLN 1995:56). Paradoxically, the Indian face had to be covered by a pasamontañas (a wool helmet which covers the whole face, with only the eyes uncovered, Illustration 10) to make Mexican society notice them, in a different way to the hegemonic ideology. As the Zapatistas said: "para que nos vieran nos tapamos el rostro" (to be seen we covered our face) (Marcos in EZLN 1995: 285).

In this chapter I will discuss the Zapatista Indian movement to show some characteristics of the process of transformation of the dominant ideology about Indianness#. As an interethnic event it includes different behaviours and representations from various groups which depict the event as a complex dialogue enacting contradictory meanings from the process of transformation of the ideological ambience. Those meanings express social actions of resistance and transformation as well as attempts to reproduce the legitimised values of hegemonically powerful sectors.

From interethnic war to dialogue

The importance of the uprising in one of the regions where Indians are in the majority was the fact that the movement was not presented as another local Indian revolt, of which there have been many in the history of Mexico (in Chiapas and other states of the country), normally controlled by powerful local groups. Although this was an Indian movement emerging from a specific region, they invoked a situation comprehensible at the national level in which Indians (but also other sectors) suffer the worst social, economic and political conditions. In this way these Indians broke the power of force of the centre acting on the local level, going to the top level of the fractal structure of the nation and declaring war on the federal government and the national army, the Mexican army. The Zapatista public position -- Indians fighting for liberty, democracy and justice for the nation -- created a bridge between Indians and other sectors of society. All of them shared the fact of being Mexicans who are poor, exploited and excluded from the benefits.
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of economic globalisation, although not from its negative effects. In different ways they all “suffer intolerance, persecution, abuse and contempt” (sufren la intolerancia, la persecución, el maltrato y el desprecio) (CCRI/Marcos in EZLN 1995: 450).

The declaration of war against the government had as its main reason the unacceptable socioeconomic and political conditions of the Indian population in Chiapas. These conditions were not new or exclusive to that region. What motivated the outbreak at that moment was the expected effects of neo-liberal economic policy, with the signing of NAFTA (Tratado de Libre Comercio TLC) between Mexico, United States and Canada. This policy pushed the situation for this population beyond their limit, despite having endured for more than 500 hundred years unbearable levels of exploitation, marginality, poverty and discrimination from Mexican society. In the declaration of war the cause of the insurrection was clear:

HOY DECIMOS ¡BASTA!, somos los herederos de los verdaderos forjadores de nuestra nacionalidad, los desposeídos somos millones y llamamos a todos nuestros hermanos a que se sumen a este llamado como el único camino para no morir de hambre ante la ambición insaciable de una dictadura de más de 70 años encabezada por una camarilla de traidores que representan a los grupos más conservadores y vendepatrias. Son los mismos que se apusieron a Hidalgo y a Morelos, los que traicionaron a Vicente Guerrero, son los mismos que vendieron más de la mitad de nuestro suelo al extranjero invasor, son los mismos que trajeron un príncipe europeo a gobernarnos, son los mismos que formaron la dictadura de los científicos ... son los mismos que hoy nos quitan todo, absolutamente todo.

TODAY WE SAY STOP! We are the heirs of the true builders of our nation, there are millions of us dispossessed and we appeal to all our brothers to join in this appeal as the only way to avoid starvation due to the insatiable ambition of a dictatorship of more than 70 years, headed by a gang of traitors that represent the most conservative groups and sellers of the country. They are the same who opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, the ones who betrayed Vicente Guerrero, they are the same who sold more than half of our territory to the foreign invader, they are the same who brought a European prince to govern us, they are the same who formed the dictatorship of the scientists ... they are the same who today take everything from us, absolutely everything (Declaración de la Selva Lacandona (Comandancia General del EZLN in EZLN 1994:33-34).

In this construction of the Indian revolt the Indians were not seen as a separate group from the rest of society, as had been always the case before: Nuestra lucha es justa y verdadera, no responde a intereses personales sino al ánimo de libertad de todo el pueblo mexicano en general y del indígena en particular (Our struggle is just
and true, not a response arising from our personal interests but expressing the wish for liberty of the whole Mexican people in general, and of the indigenous peoples in particular. (CCRI in EZLN 1994:82). It produced an effect on a wider group of people who found the arguments of the Indians applied equally to themselves. Their position as an inclusive movement at the national level, legitimated by the voice of the weaker groups in Mexican society, created an unexpected response from the rest of society, especially the civil society, which formed the main interlocutor of the Zapatista communications. It was their response, in one of the biggest demonstrations ever held in the Zócalo of Mexico City, on January 12, which stopped the government’s military action against the Zapatista army. They demanded an end to the war, asking the government to dialogue with the rebels (see EZLN 1994:67).

During the years this group has been at war, sometimes fighting, sometimes dialoguing, or trying to negotiate with the government, there have been many different positions expressed by the government, the political parties and the civil society. The civil society expressed its voice in public manifestations, supporting the Zapatistas through individual participation or more often through Indian organisations (such as the Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena A.C. and the Consejo Nacional Indígena) and different national and international groups from various countries (NGOs such as Alianza Cívica, Convención Nacional Democrática, Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional). All of them have been in dialogue with the Indian movement since this time, creating a new form of political culture, which in my view is the result of an interethnic exchange where the Indians introduced their narrative style at the national level as a new form of political discourse. This narrative, which came from their culture, their history and their interethnic knowledge and experience, introduced new meanings into the political arena. It recalls the deep Indian culture of Mexican society, through a form of language which is “fresh and direct, full of symbolic references and with a innate poetry which comes from structures of thought in the Mayan languages of the region” (García de León in EZLN 1994:28).

Some authors have reflected on the particular narrative forms produced by the Zapatistas (see Yvon Le Bot 1997, Carr 1998, Lemaître 1998). Sometimes the emphasis has been on Subcomandante Marcos who is the author of many documents published over the more than four years of the war. Many have discussed the charismatic quality of this leader and the particular kind of political discourse he constructs, combining literary references, fantastic characters and irony with a serious and incisive analysis of the national situation. Carlos Monsiváis said:

yo no sé el significado de ‘carismático’ pero si tiene algo que ver con la mezcla de admiración, intriga, relajo, sorpresa, aturdimiento teórico y pasmo ante el logro,
Marcos es definitivamente carismático. Y solidifica su acción su manejo de los símbolos, su creencia en que los símbolos pueden crear sentido si se usan en el momento oportuno con el énfasis debido. Con Marcos lo simbólico ... cobra para muchísimos el sentido transparente de que alguna vez dispuso.

I do not know the meaning of ‘charismatic’, but if it is related to the mixture of admiration, fascination, ease, surprise, suspicion, theoretical bewilderment and astonishment at his achievement, Marcos is definitively charismatic. And what he does gains weight from his use of symbols, from his belief that symbols can create new meanings if they are used at the right moment with the proper emphasis. With Marcos the symbolic ... acquires for many the transparent sense which it once had (In EZLN 1994: 321) (see also Carr 1998, Díaz Polanco 1997).

Furthermore, a legend was born around Marcos, increased by the government efforts to discover his identity and I suppose by society’s need for new myths which bring the old heroes back to life, so travestied and manipulated by the dominant ideology.

My interest here is not to explore extensively the Zapatista movement or the discourse of Marcos, but to show the importance of Indian culture as one relevant aspect of Zapatista discourse, which they introduced into the culture of contemporary Mexico. To me Marcos represents an example of the kind of relationship Mexicans should have with Indians. His discourse shows the possibilities for creativity Mexican culture could develop if it created an exchange with Indian culture imbued with respect, recognition and pride; a reciprocal dialogue between equals, the Mexicans of diversity. So what I want to emphasise is the Indian side of Marcos, and Zapatista discourse as an Indian discourse which resulted from the encounter of different groups. Barry Carr in this vein mentions:

The contact with communities slowly forced the Zapatistas [Mestizos] to modify their practice and their discourse to incorporate elements of the language and worldview of the indigenous population. Much of the language of the Zapatista discourses and communications shows traces of the encounter between urban Spanish and the language, rich in metaphor and, symbol, and full of indigenous imagery, which always comes forth in their halting Spanish (1998:8).

The Zapatista discourse was produced by a group and cannot be seen as a homogenous text. Since they are a multiethnic group who write in Spanish, the dominant language, as their second or third language, it is difficult to know who wrote each text, who decided what to say and how to say it. The only thing that is certain is the one who signed them, although many include various official names, (Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, and other leaders such as Comandante Tacho, Comandante David, Comandante Ana and the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena Comandancia General (CCRI-CG) del EZLN). Some documents include the signature of Marcos to authenticate the
documents, but it is not certain his signature guarantees he is the speaker.

The Zapatista discourse\(^1\) includes different genres, such as declarations of war, letters, justifications, commentaries on political actions or events, reports, narratives of actions, tales, etc. There are also different interlocutors addressed in the documents, such as the government, civil society (national and international), political organisations (of Indians, peasants, workers, students). Most communications address the people of Mexico (Al pueblo de México) whom the Zapatistas call hermanas y hermanos (sisters and brothers). The content of the documents expresses different political aims and specific topics in a dialogue with actions and statements by the official interlocutors. It is, in some respects, a set of dialogues between different interlocutors on different topics. But in spite of all the differences, as a whole the Zapatista discourse expresses a collective voice, in an interethnic text constructed by Indian and Mestizo voices in a dialogue, interethnic or intraethnic, with Mexican society.

Different sectors, especially the government, try to deny the Indianness of this social movement, and claim the Zapatista communications come mainly from Marcos as a Mestizo speaker. They accuse Marcos of manipulating Indian concerns for his own interests. There are even attempts to show an authoritarian quality in Marcos, using comments from Indian people who disagreed with the movement: "'Aht! no puedes participar' decían unos resentidos con Marcos. 'Lo que él dice es lo que se va a hacer'" ('You cannot participate there', said some who resented Marcos. 'What he says is what it is going to be done') (Tello 1995). Another sector accepts that the social base of the movement is Indian but considers Marcos the intellectual leader, who gives a voice to the Indian collectivity. In both cases the importance of Indians is diminished, and the success of the movement attributed to the abilities of an individual. I interpret this position as the result of a conscious or unconscious internalisation of the dominant ideology, which denies that Indians could be capable of self-determination.

The argument that Marcos is the absolute leader was used to deny the Indian character of the movement. The Indians explicitly rejected this view:

\[
\text{El gobierno repite el error de considerar a los indígenas de ser incapaces de organizarse solos y que sólo pueden moverse si alguien los lleva de la mano. Están equivocados; nosotros los indígenas somos capaces.}
\]

The government repeats the mistake of considering Indians as incapable of organising themselves, only able to move if someone holds their hands. They are wrong; we the indigenous people are capable (CCRI in EZLN 1995:323).

\(^1\) It has been published in some newspapers (La Jornada, Proceso, el Financiero, and Tiempo—a local newspaper from San Cristóbal de las Casas) and reprinted in books. I use the ones edited by ERA (EZLN 1994 & 1995).
Marcos and the Indians agree that Marcos is only one among many, and he represents Indian views as an interethnic mediator:

El EZLN no es sólo Marcos. En el CCRI-CG tenemos muchos compañeros igual o más capaces que Marcos para explicar nuestra lucha, para dirigir nuestro movimiento y para mandar obedeciendo ... La necesidad de un traductor entre la cultura indígena Zapatista y la cultura nacional e internacional provocó que ... [Marcos] hablara y escribiera.

The EZLN is not only Marcos. In the CCRI-CG we have many comrades equally capable as Marcos or more so to explain our struggle, to lead our movement and to give orders obeying ... The need for a translator between the Zapatista Indian culture and the National and International culture was the stimulus ... [for Marcos] to speak and write (CCRI/Marcos in EZLN 1995: 333).

The Indian construction of Marcos

According to documents produced by the Indian leadership they asked Marcos to represent their voice:

Tenemos que decir nuestra palabra y que otros la escuchen. Si no lo hacemos ahora otros tomarán nuestra voz y la mentira saldrá de nuestra boca sin nosotros quererlo. Busca por donde pueda llegar nuestra verdad a otros que quieran escucharla.

We have to say our word to be heard by others. If we do not do it now others will take our voice and the lie will leave our mouths without our wish. Look for the way where our truth can reach others who want to hear it (CCRI in EZLN 1994:138).

One reason they selected Marcos to express the Indian voice was their knowledge that he had been there, sharing the same way of life and respecting them as few people have done with Indians in the history of Mexico. In this way the words of Marcos, even if it were the case that he wrote them alone, are not the individual voice of a Mestizo, but the collective voice of this intercultural group:

ha escogido nuestro andar armado y sin rostro la voz de un mexicano para que por ella hable nuestra palabra. Siendo clara la piel de ese hombre y su paso anterior a estas tierras, vino a ser parte nuestra. Es su corazón indígena como cualquiera de nuestros muertos y tiene el alma morena como la entraña de estos suelos. No es más lo que fue antes. No es ya él sino nosotros.

in our journey armed and faceless we have chosen the voice of a Mexican because through it he speaks our word. Although the skin of that man was light and he was
formed in other lands, he came to be part of us. His heart is as indigenous as any of our dead ones and his soul is brown as the entrails of these soils. He is not anymore who he was before. He is no more himself but us (CCRI in EZLN 1995:102).

To earn this position among Indians who have experienced centuries of rejection by Mestizos, Marcos must have worked many years to win their respect. In my view, this would only have been possible by changing the common pattern where Indians have been subordinated. In reaction against this Marcos has over-emphasised his own position as subordinate. This is seen in the army hierarchy where he is subcomandante and Indians are comandantes, the highest rank in the Zapatista army. He expressed his humble position in relation with Indians in the following statement:

_Tengo el honor de tener como mis superiores a los mejores hombres y mujeres de las etnias tzeltal, tzotzil, chol, tojolabal, mam y zoque. Con ellos he vivido por más de 10 años y me enorgullece obedecerlos y servirlos con mis armas y mi alma. Me han enseñado más de lo que ahora enseñan al país y al mundo entero._

I have the honour of having as my superiors the best men and women of the Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, Mam and Zoque groups. With them I have lived for more than 10 years and I feel proud to obey and serve them with my guns and my soul. They have taught me more than they now teach the country and the world (Marcos in EZLN 1994:96).

I am interested to point out his role as an interethnic mediator with a strategic position in the intercultural conjunction, a role which concentrates the two cultures and produces new effects (see Vargas 1994 on interethnic mediators). For this reason I will study the public discourse of the Zapatista movement from this point of view, seeing the Indians as active social groups able to pursue their own interests and express their own voice.

Marcos's discourse itself also gives traces of this role, not only in the documents where he writes from the collective, but even in his personal writings. In the discourses signed by him (or by Durito, the beetle) he mixes references to Western culture -- European or Latin American -- and Indian oral tradition, which he was taught by an Indian elder, _el viejo Antonio_, from the Tzeltal ethnic group, one of the components of the army. The Western references appear in continuous allusions to literature (Cervantes, García Lorca, Vargas Llosa, León Felipe, Antonio Machado, Shakespeare, etc.), to songs, films or popular characters (such as Pedro Infante) and in the academic language and references he sometimes includes in his political analyses. Also remarkable in a political text is the way he inserts his personal experience, shown in poetry or metaphoric language as in the references to the sea and the port that alternated with reference to the
jungle. In them he and the Indians are travelling in a ship, him being the sub-pirata.²

One aspect I consider an important characteristic of the Indianness of Marcos’s discourse is his use of metaphors of nature, some associated with agricultural activities, and even sounding close to the Indian worldview where nature is animate and the dead alive:

_Y cuentan los viejos más viejos que el viento y la lluvia y el sol le dicen al campesino cuando debe preparar la tierra, cuándo debe sembrar y cuándo cosechar ... Y dicen los viejos que el viento la lluvia y el sol están hablando de otra forma a la tierra, que de tanta pobreza no puede seguir cosechando muerte, que es la hora de cosechar rebeldía._

And the oldest of the elders tell that the wind and the rain and the sun say to the peasant when he must prepare the soil, when to sow and when to harvest ... and the elders said that the wind, the rain and the sun are talking in another way to the land, that with so much poverty they cannot continue to harvest death, that it is time to harvest rebellion (Marcos in EZLN 1994:62).

In this kind of narrative he often uses plural personal pronouns (nuestros / our) and possessives which work to include him as part of the Indian group (nuestros / our). "Dicen nuestros muertos: ... ya no más el desván de las vergüenzas de un país construido sobre nuestros huesos" (Our dead say: ... no more the attic of the shame of a country built up over our bones (Marcos in EZLN 1995:433).

Another characteristic of his discourse, similar to what is found in other Indian stories, is his illustrations of history through descriptions of everyday life (see Taller 1994). In this way he constructs a vivid document. This can be seen as one of his merits as a poet, but such references to everyday life are an important part of the Indian view of history (as shown in chapter 1). Maybe his discourse combines his individual poetic skill with an Indian narrative style. In each place in the jungle where they stopped for a few days resting and hiding from the soldiers, he described how they try to reconstruct the kind of communal and family life they left, so close to other groups’ everyday life. This kind of content in his discourse has the merit of appealing to different groups, and thus has a strong impact on people who can recognise and feel how close to their own situation are the problems and pain of people who left their houses and towns to fight for a life of dignity. Many people from rural and urban neighbourhoods hear and react to this new

²"Sabien que la travesía apenas inició, que ningún barco que se respete llega a buen puerto casi inmediatamente de que zarpó. Son navegantes de muchos mares, tienen la piel y el corazón curtidos en las más ferozcs tormentas. Sabien que el mañana de la noche viene, Sigue siendo indígena el motor de este barco" (They know that the sea voyage just began, that any ship, which respects itself arrives at a good port immediately it has sailed. They are navigators of many seas, they have their skin and heart tanned in the most furious storms. They know that after the night, the morning comes. The motor of this ship is still indigenous) (Marcos in EZLN 1995:72).
form of political discourse, which, in my view, does not stay in papers or books, or attached to specific political events, but once heard it remains as a meaningful and living discourse.

**Indian oral tradition reaches the nation**

The new discourse of the Indians in the narrative of the Zapatistas shows a dynamic representation of Indian views in an interethnic dialogue, constructed in the present but with a continuous reference to the past. This narrative did not refer nostalgically to the old times. On the contrary, they constructed a new myth in their political discourse. In this myth, as in the myth of the oral tradition book from the Nahuas of Cuetzalan mentioned earlier, the present manifests their origins, giving meaning to the history, knowledge and experience of the interethnic relationship. In the same way as the Indians of Cuetzalan, in their myth of origins, represented the cyclic recovery of the past in retelling the story of the first human being (the story of *Sentiopil*), the discourse of the Zapatistas includes a similar view of history. This is clear in the way they construct their identity as warriors in the uprising. They say they are the same as those who fought at different moments in the history of Indian resistance and the history of Mexico. For this reason they reject the term neo-Zapatista, which has been used to name the movement, arguing against it because they are the same. For example the elder Antonio said: “*acá los Zapatistas de 1994 y los de 1910 son los mismos*” (here the Zapatistas of 1994 and the ones of 1910 are the same) (in EZLN 1995:381).

The association of this Indian movement with heroic national events has been seen as one of the successes of the Zapatista discourse in creating an impact on the rest of the Mexican population. As Barry Carr has said, “Greater impact came from the decision of the Zapatistas to link the movement more and more strongly into the Mexican tradition of revolutionary nationalism ... through the powerful symbol of Emiliano Zapata and the symbiotic creation of Votan-Zapata” (1998:9).

However, in my view this success is a logical result of the fact that for Indians Mexican history is their own, in spite of the way the dominant view excludes them as active agents. They have participated in different historical events with their own views and interests that sometimes were shared by other Mexicans and sometimes were specific to their situation in the local context. Their view of historical events is a kind of history “which joins and fuses old times and new” (*que une y confunde tiempos viejos y nuevos*) (Marcos/Antonio in EZLN 1995:160). This history is transformed continuously at each moment and in this way Indians construct their identity through a cyclic refuctionalisation of past memories. In this context the identity of the Zapatistas is the result of an interethnic process from the conquest to the present, which has been
characterised by a struggle against domination in different forms at different times:

_Hoy nosotros, los soldados Zapatistas, los guerreros de las montañas somos los mismos que peleamos contra la conquista española, los que luchamos con Hidalgo, Morelos y Guerrero por la independencia de estos suelos. Los mismos que resistimos la invasión del imperio de las barras y las turbias estrellas, los que con Zaragosa peleamos contra el invasor francés, los mismos que con Villa y Zapata recorrimos la República entera para hacer una revolución._

Today we, the Zapatistas soldiers, the warriors of the mountains are the same as those who fought against the Spanish conquest, who fought with Hidalgo, Morelos and Guerrero for the independence of this land. The same who resisted the invasion of the empire of the stripes and dirty stars, the ones who fought with Zaragosa against the French invader, the same as walked with Villa and Zapata through the whole Republic to make a revolution (CCRI in EZLN 1995:44).

This construction of an Indian view of history is very important to appeal to other sectors of society, who know those names and events and to whom they make sense. The text also includes other events that are not so well known at the national level. These events come from a more specifically Indian history, mixing regional events, known by local Mestizos with references to stories from the oral tradition. For example, they mention an incident where Indians were defeated by the Spanish troops as a lesson in dignity they received from their ancestors, which gives them the commitment in the present struggle to reject rendition:

_Nuestros antepasados fueron acorralados contra las márgenes del Grijalva y recibieron el ultimátum de rendición política y espiritual de las tropas españolas, prefirieron arrojarse a las aguas del río antes de traicionarse a sí mismos. Nosotros, herederos en la lucha y dignidad de nuestros abuelos Chiapas, no podemos sino hacer honor a esa lección de dignidad._

Our ancestors were trapped against the edges of the Grijalva and they received the ultimatum of political and spiritual surrender from the Spanish troops. They preferred to throw themselves into the waters of the river rather than betray themselves. We the heirs of the struggle and dignity of our Chiapas grandparents, we cannot but honour that lesson of dignity (CCRI in EZLN 1994:115).

Another common reference which fuses the Indian fight with the national fight is the synthesis of the national hero Zapata with a legendary Indian hero Votan, who is also identified with one of the first Indian leaders of the EZLN, ‘Señor Ik’ (Mister Black). _Señor Ik_ “disappeared” in the first battle against the army and became a kind of legend,
using the association of his name with a traditional story about the Black God of the Tzeltal oral tradition. According to Marcos it is said in the mountains:

*El señor Ik no murió, sino que vive como una luz que aparece de tanto en tanto, por entre cerros y cañadas, con el sombrero y el caballo de Zapata. Como el Dios negro del cuento del viejo Antonio, el señor Ik con su muerte dio luz y calor a estas tierras.*

Mister Ik did not die, but he lives as a light that appears from time to time between hills and dells, with the hat and the horse of Zapata. Like the black God in the story of old Antonio, Mr Ik with his death gave light and warmth to these lands (EZLN 1995:79).

The fusion of the three heroes in one contemporary character: “*Votan-Zapata, guardián y corazón del pueblo*” (Votan Zapata, guardian and heart of people) (CCRI in EZLN 1995:308) shows the kind of process that is typical of the Indian conception of history as a renewal of the past for the present. This is expressed in the same way as we have seen in the oral tradition of the Nahua of Cuetzalan where the mythical hero *Sentiopil*, the man of corn, constructed the cities of Mexico and Puebla, and he still lives in Mexico City (see chapter 3):

Apart from this view of history, which permeates the Zapatista discourse, there are documents, which show a stronger influence from the language of oral tradition. This Indian character is more explicit in some of the letters the Zapatistas sent to other Indian groups, which expressed support for the Indians’ demands. When I read the collection of documents produced by the Zapatistas, it felt remarkably like reading another of the stories included in the oral traditions of some Mexican Indian groups. Also surprising were the similarities between the political letters and some of the stories that Marcos included in his texts as they were told by the elder Antonio. My belief is that the documents the Indians wrote to explain their reasons for deciding to fight, according to the Indian view of history, were constructed as a new myth of origin. The uprising was another moment when the cyclic end and rebirth marked the different stages of human life.

To show the Indian character of these political texts I will use one letter sent to the Indian group *Consejo Guerrerense 500 años de resistencia indígena, negra y popular* (in EZLN 1994:118-120). This letter is in a sense a dialogue between Indians, however it was published in a newspaper, and so became part of the political communication from the group to the nation. Another letter sent to the people of Mexico to invite them to go to

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3 Called Ladinos in that region.
the jungle to dialogue with them⁴ is written in the same kind of discourse. These communications are not the only ones where the Zapatistas use this kind of language, however I selected them because of their strong impact on me.

One of the problems in finding traces of oral tradition in contemporary political texts by the Zapatistas is the fact that the documents are written in Spanish, maybe corrected by Marcos who signs the documents with the Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (CCRI-CG del EZLN). However, in the Spanish version of this text, as well as in the tales which were told to Marcos, probably in Indian Spanish, there are some features which show they were produced, orally or in written form, by speakers of an Indian language who had a regional Spanish dialect as a second language. Some of these forms of Spanish can be considered as mistakes from the point of view of Spanish readers, but they are common in regional and popular Spanish. To me they produce an emphasis that gives strength to the message, creating a deep impact on the reader. Some examples can be found in the two letters I selected:

CCRI:

Sus palabras de ustedes (your words of you) Las palabras de ustedes**⁵ (EZLN 1995:118)

La luz Zapatista se dio en alumbrar (The Zapatista light gives itself to light). La luz Zapatista se decidió a alumbrar ** (EZLN 1995:119).

Even more frequently they appear in the stories told by the elder Antonio: Se echaron en discutir. (they threw themselves to discuss). Ellos comenzaron a discutir ** (EZLN 1995:76). Se dieron en contarse (they gave themselves to count them) decidieron contarse ** (EZLN 1995: 75). His tales show much more the oral character, because what Marcos wrote repeated what Antonio told him: "el viejo Antonio me dicta al oído para que yo lo repita" (the elder Antonio dictated me to repeat it) (Marcos in EZLN 1995:88). The same kind of ‘odd’ Spanish can also be found in literal translations of old Maya documents, in the Pop Wuj (better known in the hispanised name Popol Vuh): Tenemos que componer un nuestro palo (we have to repair one our stick) Tenemos que componer nuestro palo ** (Chávez 1997:16), No lo encontraré tu hijo (I will not find him your son) No encontraré a tu hijo ** (Chávez 1997:19). The examples from the three types of documents illustrate clearly the oral and Indian language qualities of the narratives.

Another effect of the influence of Indian language on the Spanish linguistic form

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⁴ "Vengan hermanos" (Come brothers), in (EZLN 1995:276-277)
⁵ I include **to indicate a more common construction in Spanish.
is the word order in some sentences. It produces what could be considered the poetic style of Marcos's discourse but I think it is a sign of the interethnic exchange between Marcos and the Indians. Their discourse is transcribed from oral forms, maybe with corrections. In my view he has not imposed Spanish poetic forms but shows a respectful treatment of Indian forms of expression and meaning.

The poetic style is produced by a change in order that is so systematically used in both stories that it surely comes from the linguistic structures of the Mayan languages spoken by the Indians in that region. These expressions cannot be considered wrong but they are not very common in the use of Spanish speakers, excepting some literary uses to create rhythm or emphasis. Here are some examples:

CCRI (EZLN 1994:118-119)
Los mexicanos todos. Todos los mexicanos ** (all Mexicans).
Todo dejamos todos nosotros. Todos nosotros dejamos todo** (all of us leave everything).
La valentía vino. Vino la valentía** (the courage comes).
Vimos a nuestros abuelos luchar. Vimos luchar a nuestros abuelos** (we saw our grandparents fight).

Marcos/Antonio: (EZLN 1995)
A sacar acuerdo para hacer los trabajos aprendimos. Aprendimos a sacar acuerdo para hacer los trabajos* (to get agreement to do the work we learned) (89).
Los dioses solos estaban. Los dioses estaban solos * (the Gods alone were) (75).
Grande era el enojo de los dioses. El enojo de los dioses era grande * (Big was the anger of the Gods) (75).

Comparing these expressions with others I found in the literal translation from the Maya text Pop Wuj we can see clearly that the positioning of the verb at the end of the sentence and the object at the beginning is a common word order in Mayan languages:

Classic Text Pop Wuj (Chávez 1997)
Piedra entonces se convirtió Zipakná. Entonces Zipakná se convirtió en piedra ** (into stone then turned Zipakna) (20).
Blanca tierra emplearon. Emplearon tierra blanca ** (white soil they used) (22).

This is the case also with the position of the word todo(s) (everything/all), which is put at the end instead of before the noun or verb, as is common in Spanish:

Entonces era bueno todo. Entonces todo era bueno** (then it was good everything) (Chilam Balam, Mediz Bolio 1941: 25).
Le destrozaron la boca, la cara a todos. A todos les destrozaron la boca, la cara**
(they destroyed the mouth, the face of all of them) (Chilam Balam, Mediz Bolio 1941:10).

Besides these constructions, considered rare in standard Spanish, there are other expressions that sound odd. But what makes these examples strange is the view of the world implied in the semantic categories, where inanimate subjects produce actions and the animals act as humans. Although attributing human habits to animals is common in other cultures, as in European fables, in this case animals are included not only in tales for children but in other texts where animals are classified under the same broad category as humans, stones, plants and spiritual beings. This kind of worldview is typical of Indian groups in Mexico, and it implies a different conception of the position of men and women in relation to other elements of nature that surround them. In this case all beings, natural or spiritual, animate or inanimate, have the same importance in the wholeness of life. Some examples (underlined by me) from the three sources, show clearly this cultural view which is introduced in the contemporary dialogue between Indians and the national society:

CCRII (EZLN 1994:119)

Con su mensaje que llega brincando, montes y ríos (with its message, which arrives jumping hills and rivers).

Se llenaron de pena y dolor los corazones de animales y plantas, se llenó el corazón de las piedras (the hearts of animals and plants were filled with grief and pain, the heart of the stones was filled).

Marcos/Antonio (EZLN 1995)

Agarraron el silencio que ahí nomas por ahí andaba (they caught the silence that was just going around) (75).

Miraron a la ceiba y le dijeron, tu pariste los colores, tu cuidarás el mundo (They looked at the ceiba [a kind of tree] and they said, you gave birth to the colors, you will take care of the world) (113).

Classic text Pop Wuj (Chávez 1997)

Querían entrar en las cuevas y las cuevas se cerraron (they wanted to go in the caves and the caves closed themselves) (10).

Se rebelaron árboles y piedras, todos hablaron (Trees and stones rebelled, all of them spoke) (8).

In the same way the texts include metaphors that refer to the Indian conception of death, associated with the Indian worldview. In these texts they commonly refer to the dead, the ancestors, as living people who continually interact with them:

Nuestros muertos vieron y nos llamaron (our dead ones saw and called us) (CCRI in

Recibí la vida de los muertos de siempre (I received life from the dead ones of always) (Marcos in EZLN 1995:137).

pero el río arrastró el polvo de los huesos... se fue al fondo del río... al quinto día resucitó (But the river took the dust of the bones... it went to the bottom of the river... on the fifth day it revived) (Pop Wuj Chávez 1997:58).

The idea of the dead staying with the living also relates to the belief that death and life form a single whole. They conceive of death as strongly tied to life as the other side of the same phenomenon. In the same way human or animal sacrifices were performed as a way to reproduce the energy that gave continuity to life in prehispanic times. In these texts there are some metaphors that clearly recall this dualistic conception:

CCRI (EZLN 1994:120)

Grita nuestra sangre derramada floreciendo en las calles (our shed blood flowering on the streets cries out).

Nos quitamos la piel para vestirnos de guerra y muerte (We took off our skin to clothe ourselves in war and death).

Tomen nuestra sangre de alimento (Take our blood as food).

Vimos que teníamos que ganar una muerte digna para que todos vivieran un día con bien y razón (We saw that we have to win an honorable death so that one day everybody may live with goodness and reason).

Para vivir morimos (To live we die).

Marcos/Antonio (EZLN 1995)

El rojo llegó en su boca de los hombres y de los animales y lo comieron y se pintaron por dentro (The red came into the mouth of men/women and animals and they ate it, and it coloured them inside) (113).

Ellos (los dioses) ya se habían muerto... para vivir (They [the Gods] were already dead... so that they could live) (76).

Pop Wuj (Chávez 1997)

Luego le cortó el vientre, levantó en alto el corazón de esa gente... Rápido revivió al individuo (later he cut the belly, took out the heart of that people... Quickly he revived the person) (61).

Iban a echar la sangre en la boca del venado y de pájaro en la boca de la piedra... En cuanto se tragaban los dioses la sangre, luego hablaban las piedras (they went to cast the blood into the mouth of the deer and from bird into the mouth of the stone... As soon as the Gods swallowed the blood, immediately the stones talked) (83).

Chilam Balam (Mediz Bolio 1941:26).

Para que su flor viviese dañaron y sorbieron la flor de los otros (So that their flower would live they damaged and sucked the flower of others).
Blood represents death and flowers life, and Indians made war as a kind of sacrifice to restore life and the world destroyed by domination.

Another characteristic from the language of oral tradition, contemporary or ancient, in the Zapatista discourse is the use of words with multiple meanings to refer to abstract concepts. In this way they construct metaphors using words from everyday life, the natural surroundings and cultural practices of communities. I will include a few examples to give a general idea of the process by which they translate their forms of expressions into Spanish, a second language they make their own in order to communicate with the rest of society:

CCRI (EZLN 1994:118-120)

La noche de nuestras gentes = domination (the night of our people).
Solo pena y dolor habitaban nuestra lengua = house of words (only grief and pain inhabit our tongue).
La dignidad volvió a habitar nuestro corazón = house of feelings (Dignity returns to inhabit our heart).
Quieren que nuestro paso se vuelva lejano = forget (they want our steps to turn far away)

Marcos/Antonio (EZLN 1995)

Fuego le llamaron a esas palabritas que se bailan = fire (those little words that dance they called fire) (76).
Rincón de la madrugada = dawn (the corner of the beginning of the day).
Y se estaban pensando en su corazón = place of knowledge (and they were thinking themselves in their heart) (114).
todo era noche. Era un gran techo de sombra el cielo = night (everything was night, the sky was a big ceiling of shadow) (88).

Classic texts, Pop Wuj and Chilam Balam

Ellos enseñaron el miedo y vinieron a marchitar las flores = domination and destruction (They teach fear and they came to make the flowers fade) (Mediz Bolio 1941:26).
Flor de la noche = stars (flower of night) (Chávez 1997:13a).
En medio de nuestra casa, es decir en el corazón = house of the people (In the middle of our house, that is to say, in the heart) (ibid).

In the same context, they use metaphors of communal life to construct some political concepts that show their view of national democratic life. In some ways this political discourse can be seen as a contemporary construction, but in fact it incorporates

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6 The meanings are my understanding of the linguistic forms as a Spanish speaker, taking into account the whole context of the texts in which they appear.
older Indian forms of organisation and political culture into the present conditions of their relationship with the nation. For example, the use of the phrase “mandar obedeciendo” (give orders while obeying), and “sacar acuerdo” (arrive at an agreement) or “recoger la palabra” (to pick up the word, consult) are key terms that express their view of democracy. Those expressions are not neologisms to construct a dialogue with Mestizos but concepts that derive from the ancient texts as common characteristics in Indian forms of social organisation -- maybe adapted by the refunctionalisation of Indian life to the new conditions imposed by the Spanish:

*Hay que cambiar y que manden los que mandan obedeciendo* (There is the need to change and those that give orders should be the ones who order while obeying) (CCRI in EZLN 1994:176).

*Algunos tienen que estar apagados para que brillen otros, pero los que brillan lo hacen por los apagados* (Some have to be there but turned off for the others to be bright, but the ones who are bright do it for the ones who are turned off) (Marcos/Antonio in EZLN 1995:90).

*Y empezó a recibir su voz. Y empezó su mandato* (Their voice began to be received. And his mandate began) (Chilam Balam, Mediz Bolio 1941:13).

*Porque los dioses siempre sacaban acuerdo para hacer los trabajos* (Because the Gods arrived at an agreement to do the work) (Marcos/Antonio EZLN 1995:89).

*Todos se reunieron, se citaron entre ellos, luego se tomaron pareceres* (All of them met, they made appointments from among them, then they took decisions) (Pop Wuj Chávez 1997:86).

Apart from the use of similar resources to construct the Zapatistas texts there are also some references to elements included in the content of the oral tradition. Very significant in this sense is the mention of some characters who are included in the story of human origins. One example is the name they give themselves as “*hombres y mujeres verdaderos*” (True men and women): “*Nosotros somos los hombres y mujeres verdaderos, los dueños de estas tierras, de esta agua y de nuestros corazones* “ (we are the true men and women, the owners of these lands, of these waters and of our hearts) (CCRI in EZLN 1995:101). These expression have currency from the ancient texts to refer to the Maya people: “*Si es verdad que eres Verdadero hombre, si eres del linaje de los reyes de esta tierra*” (If it is true that you are true man, if you are of the lineage of the kings of this land (Chilam Balam Mediz Bolio 1941:42).

Another allusion to prehispanic stories is the mention of kinds of men, the batmen, the men of wood and the men of corn:
CCRI (EZLN 1995)

Ya los hombres murciélagos preparan otra vez su vuelo de mortal muerte (the batmen again prepare their flight from mortal death) (276).
Suenan los huesos de los hombres de madera en la montaña. Bailan los hombres y las mujeres de maíz (the bones of the wood men sound in the mountain. The men and women of corn dance) (277).

Marcos/Antonio

Y entonces los hombres y mujeres murciélagos tuvieron que resolver el problema (And then, the batmen and women had to solve the problem) (EZLN 1995:89).

Classic text. Pop-wuj (Chávez 1997)

En la casa de los murciélagos... Aquí se entregó a un raro vampiro que bajó del cielo (In the house of bats ... Here he gives himself to a strange vampire who came down from the sky) (27a).
Nuestra primera madre y padre, era de maíz amarillo y blanco su cuerpo (Our first mother and father, their bodies were of yellow and white corn) (65).
Que se hagan gentes de madera, de madera labrada, que hable, que platique sobre la tierra (Make people of wood, of carved wood, who speak, who talk over the earth) (7).

In the same vein it is important to mention the use of the number seven in texts, which refer to some important sets of meanings. Seven plays an important role in Mesoamerican numerology and it has been transmitted from ancient times to the present through oral traditions, rituals and even everyday cultural practices. One of its meanings is the wholeness of life, connecting the Four Corners of the earth with the three planes of the universe, sky, earth and underworld7. In the contemporary oral tradition as mentioned in the Zapatista texts there were seven gods and seven colours in ancient times (EZLN 1995:112-113). The Chilam Balam mentions “Seven sacred stones, seven warriors suspended on the spirit of the wind, seven flames chosen” (Siete piedras sagradas, Siete Guerreros suspendidos en el espíritu del viento, Siete llamas elegidas) (Mediz Bolio 1941:73). “Our seven shames” (Nuestras Siete Vergüenzas) names those who existed before the creation of the true men and women (in the Pop Wuj Chávez 1997:10).

The use of numbers with symbolic meanings is clear in the Zapatista documents, for example in a ceremony when the Indians gave Marcos the bastón de mando* (baton of authority). They gave seven elements as symbolic messages: the national flag, the Zapatista flag, one gun, one bullet, some blood, corn and earth (EZLN 1995:139-140). In this case the set of meanings combines elements from Indian culture and the national

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7 Personal communication Mtro. Juan Briseño and Dr. Andrés Madina.
culture, constructing an interethnic message about a war which was an interethnic confrontation, while also signifying the wholeness of contemporary Mexican culture as intercultural. Marcos’s reception of these symbols signified the acceptance of interethnic mediation as the means to produce an intercultural political message.

The new political discourse of the Zapatistas shows another connection with oral traditions in a more structural way. The oral tradition, as a genre which has been used by non-literate societies to transmit verbally the history, knowledge and experience across generations, has some specific characteristics associated with the kind of meaning, oral, and its function in those societies:

Due to its oral character such tradition also has particular forms: it is produced to be repeated, to be memorised and transmitted over time, that is why it makes continuous repetitions of some central elements of the verbal text that helps people to memorise and communicate it and which gives rhythm and melody (Coronado 1993:58)

Oral traditions use some tools as mnemonic aids such as ritual phrases and fixed expressions that make clear “the rhythmic periods in which the expression is supported” (Montemayor 1993: 78). In some texts produced by the Zapatistas the repetitions, as a kind of rhythm, are very obvious and create a poetic style that can also be found in other texts in the oral tradition:

CCRI (EZLN 1994:119)

...y se fueron llenando otros corazones de dolor y pena, y se llenaron los corazones de hombres y mujeres jóvenes, valientes todos ellos y se llenaron los corazones de los niños, hasta de los más pequeños y se llenaron de pena y dolor los corazones de animales y plantas, se llenó el corazón de las piedras y todo nuestro mundo se llenó de pena y dolor.

... and other hearts were filled with grief and pain, and the hearts of young men and women were filled, courageous all them, and the hearts of the children were filled, even the smallest ones, and the hearts of animals and plants were filled, the heart of the stones was filled, and our whole world was filled with grief and pain.

Marcos/Antonio (EZLN 1995:75)

No había luz para mirarse el paso, no había tierra para acostar el cansancio y el amor. No había tierra, no había luz, no era bueno el mundo.

There was no light to see the way, there was no ground on which to lay the tiredness and the love. There was no ground, there was no light, no good in the world.
Chilam Balam (Mediz Bolio 1941:25)

Todo luna, todo año, todo día, todo viento, camina y pasa también.
También toda sangre llega al lugar de su quietud, como llega a su poder y a su trono.
All moon, all year, all day, all wind, walk and go through also. Also all blood arrives to the place of its rest, as it arrives to its power and its throne.

The metre in these texts is not so clear because they are adaptations from Indian languages to Spanish, but even so, while reading the text in a loud voice you can feel some kind of underground metre that has been translated into the other language. I will try to translate this feeling dividing a short text in the points where the reading marks a break in the chain of words:

nuestro paso
our step
se hizo firme otra vez,
became firm again
nuestras manos y corazón
our hands and heart
estaban armados.
were armed
“¡Por todos!”
“For everybody!”
dice nuestro corazón,
our heart says
no para unos solamente,
not for a few only,
no para los menos.
not for the minority
“¡Por todos!”
“For everybody!”
dice nuestro paso
our step says
“¡Por todos!”
the blood we have shed cries out ...
grita nuestra sangre derramada ...
(EZLN 1994:120)

This text includes one typical form that captures the rhythm of oral texts. This is the repetition of a fixed phrase to give strength to the statement. In this case the phrase is: ¡Por todos! (For everybody!) Other phrases have been also used which have become slogans to represent the Zapatista political goals. Other groups have used them to express political solidarity with the rebels. One example is the phrase Para todos todo. Nada para nosotros (For everybody everything. Nothing for us), at the end of letters, as is done with texts from the oral tradition (see Montemayor 1993:91).

The presence of some of these characteristics in the political discourse of the Zapatistas makes it clear how this group is reffunctionalising Indian traditions. In some ways the discourse can be seen as a freer version of traditional oral genres, translating cultural meanings into symbols that transmit the new meanings they need, in order to construct a new discourse, a contemporary political culture, marked by interethnic interaction. These are collective constructions, based on group knowledge that has been
transmitted through generations, within a linguistic genre that is basically oral, though now in a written form. It is a new creation reproducing experience from the past. It is part of their cultural matrix "la costumbre" (the custom), which in a very dynamic process generating new meanings adapted to new situations, drawing on resources of their traditional culture.

The effect of this kind of narrative in the political culture of Mexicans is slowly permeating the public discourse used by other non-Indian groups. It is beginning to be included in the writing of journalists, and also in the language used by groups in civil society. I found an example in one group’s invitation to the people of Mexico to a silent march on the anniversary of the massacre of Acteal, committed by para-military armed groups in Chiapas in 1997. This event was a complex dialogue where the topic of silence invoked different events. It was a critique of the president’s silence about the Chiapas situation in his annual report, it recalled an impressive silent march by the student movement in 1968, and it picked up some expressions used by the Zapatistas on other occasions which referred to the political state of the negotiations when the Zapatistas publicly refused to make further declarations, just waiting for the government to fulfill the promises they had made, to fulfil their 'word':

\[ \text{Nosotros responderemos con el silencio digno de los indígenas de hoy... (we will respond with the dignified silence of the indigenous people of today)} \]
\[ \text{Teniendo como meta, el Zócalo capitalino; ahí, la palabra volverá a florecer. (Having as our goal the Zócalo of the capital, there, the word will flourish again)} \]
\[ \text{Invitamos a todos a sumar sus pasos silenciosos a los de los mil 111 indígenas Zapatistas. We invited everybody to add their silent steps to those of the thousand hundred eleven indigenous Zapatistas)} \] (La Jornada September 4, 1998: 2)

This is just one example of the effects of these Indian expressions in the civil society. It has not been so easy for them to spread in many other spaces of social life. These actions have been too small and too few to transform the dominant construction of the Indian presence in Mexican society, and they need to fight against the efforts of powerful groups who try to disparage the Indian movement. The dominant position is a powerful enemy, supported by the government and the mass media, which is controlled by the most powerful groups in Mexico. Besides, the people who are forming a positive sense of their proximity to the Indian culture and situation also need to fight against the unconscious internalisation of the dominant ideology constructed over more than five centuries.

The dominant ideology appears in contradictory ways as part of the complex transformation of ideology. Although there are expressions that directly reject the negative

\[ ^8 \text{The thousand 111 refers to the number of representatives that marched from Chiapas to México City in 1997. As we will see later, the number could have symbolic meaning.} \]
construction of Indians in our society there are also statements that externalise some forms, which create solidarity with the dominant ideology while pretending to be against its power (Hodge and Kress 1993). This solidarity with power is not conscious, but the effect of the deep influence of a hegemony we need to make transparent and fight against.

In the context of this ideological ambience that surrounds Mexican culture and social life Mexicans have reacted to the Indianness of the Zapatista movement in contradictory and ambiguous ways. Sometimes the response shows a clear change in the interaction between Indians and Mestizos, where Zapatista Indians are respected, admired and considered, as Indians, legitimate Mexican citizens. However, the pride expressed towards the Zapatistas is not necessarily translated to other Indians, in this way maintaining two different views of Indianness. The image of good Indians lives alongside the image of bad Indians, but now the difference does not refer to the contemporary versus the prehispanic, but to different kinds of contemporary Indians. Different segments of society judge the good and bad character of Indians in different ways. For the government good Indians are passive, without guns. The bad Indians for the government, those fighting against them, (the Zapatistas) are regarded as good Indians by the part of the population who opposes the government and the injustice the whole country is suffering. In either case the armed movement, as an Indian movement, shakes the taken-for-granted view of Indians that has been constructed by the dominant ideology as passive, submissive, ignorant, out of touch with modern life in Mexico, unable to lead themselves. This stereotype, so strongly held for centuries, is now questioned, and in the context of the new political culture of Mexico the population has been surprised by new forms of interethnic interaction, and consequently by new expressions of their relationship with Indians and with their Indianness.

The Zapatista march as an interethnic dialogue.

I will use an important event in this process of transformation of Mexican society to show the complexities of the new interethnic dialogue: the Zapatista march from Chiapas to the centre of Mexico City in 1997. This interethnic event, where Indians and Mestizos interacted in different moments and forms, shows the multiple voices that interact in any dialogue and the complexities that arise when a dialogue involves historic interethnic relationships.

Different interlocutors – the president, the government, political parties, civil groups, individuals, Indian organisations and the Zapatistas and different means (verbal -- written and oral --, visual, behaviours) constituted the voices in this interethnic dialogue. Sometimes the interaction worked as a face-to-face encounter, sometimes through the media and also as an imaginary dialogue, apart from the specific event. All this together
constituted an interethnic event involving a new kind of exchange between Indian culture and Mexican Mestizo culture. This exchange was framed in an ideological context coming from the history of Mexico, the close and distant past, constructing an interethnic event in the present in which knowledge of recent and older interethnic experiences is displayed.

The relevance of interethnic relationships as an important part of Mexican culture is even clearer at this moment when Indians have taken a public national space to express their voice, to critique Mexican history and their government’s actions, and to demand what they expect for the future relationship to break with the long history of domination. Their action has produced a direct or indirect effect on the expression of ideology, in discourse and social action.

The Zapatistas announced their decision to march from Chiapas to Mexico City as a political and peaceful strategy to remind the government of its commitments under the Agreements of San Andrés Larrainzar, signed in February 1996 by the representatives of the government and the Zapatistas, and to demand the withdrawal of the army from the communities where the Indian social base of the EZLN lives, and where the army’s presence means for the Indians the destruction of their everyday life: “donde se cosecha el maíz y el frijol el ejército está sembrando cuarteles, invasión, prostitución y están destruyendo familias enteras” (Where we harvest corn and beans the army is planting quarters, invasion, prostitution, and they are destroying whole families) (La Jornada Ojarasca September 1997:14). The presence of the Mexican army in the communities and the delay in translating the agreements into law -- the law of culture and Indigenous rights (Ley de cultura y derechos indígenas) -- were interpreted as a double message by the government to delay the end of the war. The double message was contained in the fact that the president was not fulfilling the agreement, but conducting a dirty war against the communities, using paramilitary groups while pretending to be in favour of peace and the resolution of the conflict.

At this time the word dialogue was prominent in the speeches of every interlocutor and, of course, in the president’s public pronouncements (see Hodge in press). However, the meaning of dialogue was different for different interlocutors and was used with different aims. By ‘dialogue’ the Zapatistas meant a close interaction with the people of Mexico, direct and face-to-face. They also maintained an indirect dialogue with the government, arguing for the agreements that resulted from dialogue in the previous negotiations. The president dialogued directly with foreign groups (from United States and Ireland), while constructing an indirect dialogue with the Zapatistas, explicitly denying the undertakings previously made.

The president himself officially endorsed the agreements, but after more than a year and a half his position was to renegotiate them, claiming that one of the points agreed on, the autonomy of the Indian territories, was in contradiction with the Mexican
Constitution and sovereignty. I will not include here the arguments around this topic, which have deep implications for the elites in the regions where these Indians live and hence for the whole country⁹. I only mention it here because it is central in understanding the kind of indirect dialogue the government had with the Zapatistas and Mexican society during this time.

From the time the March departed from San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas, on September 8, until the group’s return to their communities in the jungle on September 20, the newspapers included many articles about the event. Indian topics have never been so widely reported by the news, nor have they been on the front page, or with a daily column, as was the case throughout the march. Journalists from different media reported the unfolding of the march, and all the places they stopped along the approximately 1500 kilometres from their departure to their arrival in Mexico City. They reported interviews with different government representatives, the public position of the various political parties and published the content of Zapatista discourses and declarations.

As with every political event different newspapers reported it in different ways. One, La Jornada, included more than others on the many aspects of the Zapatista movement and explicitly showed their strong support for the Indian rebellion. They emphasised the positive responses of civil society, using many adjectives and emotive expressions. At the same time they gave less space to declarations by the government and other political parties, except for the opposition party PRD, which has been supporting the Zapatistas’ demands. They also included more than other newspapers long quotations from the Zapatista discourse and even whole documents presented at some of the public meetings. At the other extreme Novedades included more extensively the position of PAN, the political party of the right, through longer interviews and in editorials. Other newspapers, such as Excelsior, Unomasuno, El Financiero presented a more pluralist view. Apart from reporting the whole event, they included a wider coverage of government declarations. All, however, showed the complexities of the dialogue, giving the event the high importance it deserves in the political transformation of Mexican society.

The difference between the newspapers was clear when they reported the number of people in each public event. For example, in the visit to Oaxaca La Jornada reported “Más de tres mil indígenas ... ocupan la Plaza de la danza y otras tantas personas más llenan las gradas y calles aledañas” (More than three thousand indigenous people... occupy the Plaza de la Danza and a similar number of others fill the seats and surrounding streets) (September 12, 1997:5), while in another newspaper, Unomasuno,

⁹ For a wide-ranging discussion of this topic I recommend the book La rebelión Zapatista y la autonomía by Díaz Polanco (1997). He gives a complete state of art analysis of the topic of autonomy in the context of the legal and political contemporary framework in which the Indian fight is immersed.
the same occasion is described as “ante la presencia de algunos cientos de oaxaqueños” (in presence of some hundreds of Oaxaqueños) (September 11, 1997:8). In the same way in the opening of the Congreso Nacional Indígena, *La Jornada* (September 15, 1997:5) talked about 6,000 representatives, giving some of the names of the ethnic groups, while *Excelsior* just reported it as “en representación de más de 25 pueblos indios del país” (representing more than 25 Indian groups from the country) (*Excelsior* September 15, 1997:14A). The use of “pueblos” without capitals increases the ambiguity because it is not clear if it means towns or groups of people. In this way readers of the different media are given different images of the relevance and importance of the presence of Indians during that historic event.

**When Indians became brothers**

In the context of this interethnic dialogue the reaction of the Mexican people to the coming of a group of 1, 111 Indians representing their communities was extremely important. During the march the interaction between Zapatistas and the people of Mexico – workers, students, peasants, housewives, and people of different ages including whole families -- was an extended, close interaction with the Indian group, expressing through different means their social and cultural proximity. In each place the caravan passed through the population received them with flowers, coloured balloons, rockets and music (Illustration 11). All traditional ways to express happiness were used in the interaction:

*Xochimilco*: *Con flores, música y cohetes, la recepción del EZLN* (Xochimilco: with flowers, music and rockets, the reception of the EZLN) (*La Jornada* September 12, 1997:6). *Saludan el paso de los Zapatistas con antorchas, fogatas y banderas* (People greet the Zapatistas journey with torches, bonfires and flags) (*La Jornada* September 12, 1997: 3).

All these means of expressing support were familiar to the Indians, as if they were in a kind of *fiesta* where they were welcomed as honoured guests. Big groups of people waited to see them in the entrance of every town as they arrived, and of course the offering of meals could not be left out of the festive occasion: “*Tamales, atole, chicharrón en salsa verde, tortas, café*” (*La Jornada* September 13:1997: 3). Where the communities were Indian (as was the case of many of the ones selected during the trip) there were additional expressions of respect, such as a reception by the *Consejo de ancianos* * (council of elders), the delivery of batons of authority, the performance of some rituals with dances and incense. Sometimes an Indian language, no matter which one, was used to greet the Indian rebels as a symbol of their identity as Indians:
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Please refer to print copy
La delegación Zapatista recibe los bastones de mando de ocho pueblos oaxaqueños...

...y siete mujeres de siete organizaciones de las siete regiones que componen el estado de Oaxaca entregan a los Zapatistas la bandera nacional. Se las dan en todas las plazas por donde pasan; van a llegar al DF cargados y acompañados de banderas y bastones.

The Zapatista delegation receives the batons of authority from eight towns from Oaxaca... and seven women from seven organisations from the seven regions that make up the state of Oaxaca give the Zapatistas the national flag. They are given to them in every plaza they pass through; they are going to arrive to Mexico City laden and accompanied by flags and batons (La Jornada, September 13, 1997: 5).

El contingente indígena fue recibido con cohetes y música de concheros; a seis autoridades del pueblo huichol les tocó llevar a cabo la ceremonia de purificación.

The indigenous contingent was received with rockets and music by concheros (an Aztec group of dancers); six senior representatives from the Huichol people were chosen to perform the ceremony of purification (La Jornada September 13, 1997:3).

Some groups joined the caravan to arrive with them at the centre of the country: the Zócalo of Mexico City. In this way Indian groups as well as Mestizos expressed the fact that the Zapatista demands are shared by other Indians and non-Indian marginalised people of the country. Other Indian and non-Indian groups travelled from different states to join the march and be part of a new national body, Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, that was promoted by the EZLN as a political organisation for people without party. At the same time the Congreso Nacional Indígena organised a meeting, with the Zapatistas as guests and their demands as the key topic of the event.

They arrived in Mexico City on the same date, 12 of September, as when Emiliano Zapata sat in 1916 at the National Palace on the presidential seat with Francisco Villa, the other revolutionary leader of the time. On this occasion the 1,111 Zapatistas, representing the communities which support the EZLN, arrived to 'take' the Zócalo (Illustration 12), constantly named, “el corazón del país” (the heart of the country). The number of representatives, 1,111, not one more or less, from Indian communities who form the social bases of the movement can be interpreted as a numerological symbol. One meaning given by an analyst, Julio Moguel, is the infinite repetition of the one (La Jornada September 8, 1997:8). I do not know if the Zapatistas gave the same meaning to this symbol but it is certain they used it to symbolise something, considering their usual use of symbols to communicate. If Moguel is right it is not hard to suppose that through this number they expressed the sense that this representative group joined the interests of all Indians. All the symbols were consciously chosen as part of the interethnic dialogue to
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create a common meaning and interpretation of a shared history between Indians and non-Indians. The culture of both interlocutors became common; Indians and Mestizos expressed as never before the unity of the country through the same cultural practices.

In the same way the people of Mexico City, putting aside all the prejudices of centuries, interacted with the Indian group in different ways. All the racism or classism that have characterised the relationship with Indians was absent in that moment. In this case the difference between Indians and capitalinos (from the capital city) was a distinction between rural and urban backgrounds more than a cultural difference. The journalists emphasised that difference all the time, describing the astonishment of both groups. The Indians were amazed at the size and modernity of the city, but mainly with the unusual behaviour of Mestizos to Indians, sending kisses, holding hands with them, ringing the bells of churches to receive them, etc. The capitalinos were also surprised with the ‘improper’ behaviour of Indians who were not used to the urban megalopolis: “La alameda les pareció monte y se acuclillaron a cagar ... Todo lo verde para ellos es monte” (The Central Park seemed to them a hill and they squatted down to shit ...) Everything green for them is a hill) (La Jornada September 13, 1997:8). The other aspect was the lack of punctuality that was worse than the well-known Mexican style.

Attitudes on the topic of punctuality marked the different ideological positions of the media. La Jornada mentioned it without any negative judgement and even gave justifications: Estos cuates siempre llegan tarde pero siempre llegan a tiempo (These guys always arrive late but they are always on time) (La Jornada September 14, 1997:10), los que no son indígenas reciben hoy una lección de paciencia (the ones who are not indigenous today received a lesson in patience) (La Jornada. September 12, 1997:5). Other newspapers, however, always mentioned how late they were: “retrasados más de dos horas” (they are more than two hours late) (Excelsior September 15, 1997:14A). I thought how difficult it would have been to organise so large a group. The situation also reminded me of a large number of Nahuas I saw once, standing in front of the Municipal building in Cuetzalan from 7 in the morning till noon, when the authorities appeared simply to ask them to return the next day, because the cheques were not yet ready (Illustration 13). I wondered why we cannot wait a few hours to hear the Indians, if they have waited more than 500 years to be heard?

The people of Mexico City expressed their support in different ways, clapping and shouting Zapatista slogans while they were walking to the Zócalo -- “no están solos” (you are not alone) E-Z-L-N-E-Z-L-N --. They also greeted them with an impressive silence at the moment of their arrival to the Zócalo “de pronto la gente decide callarse, cuando [un joven Zapatista] entra al zócalo sólo se oye un silencio” (suddenly the people decided to be quiet, when he [a young Zapatista] entered the Zócalo only a silence
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was heard) (*La Jornada*, September 13, 1997: 8). People danced with them in Tlatelolco in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Illustration 14), they talked and laughed together in an easy interaction at the UNAM university campus and played a friendly match of football (Illustration 15). This new form of interethnic relationship was described in the title of an article “Surge en CU otra forma de dialogar, con respeto al indio” (Another form of dialogue emerges in the University City, with respect to the Indians) (*La Jornada* September 17, 1987: 8). The students lost 12 to 2 against the Indians. The students justified the unexpected result saying “¿cómo meterles gol a los zapatistas? ... los que meten los goles son ellos” (How can you score a goal against the Zapatistas? ... they are the ones who make the goals) (*La Jornada* September 17, 1997: 8). The people from the cities are used to playing football, even in the streets, while the Indians do not have enough space for a football ground in the mountains, but the students implied another kind of success, political success with political goals.

Another aspect of the interethnic dialogue between the Zapatistas and Mexican society was expressed through significant differences in the ways of addressing each group. Zapatistas addressed the people of Mexico as brothers, except the government and its representatives, and thus created a new meaning for the word hermanos (brothers) as being united by common dignity and a refusal to surrender:

Ustedes [la sociedad civil] contra todo, contra todos, levantaron una causa, la causa de la paz y la democracia.... Ustedes se han ganado ya y para siempre que nosotros los llamemos “hermanos”.

You [the civil society] against everything, against everybody, raised a cause, the cause of peace and democracy.... You have won now and forever we name you “brothers” (CCRI/Marcos in EZLN 1995:452).

The use of hermanos by the Zapatistas contrasts with the common meaning given to the word that usually refers to people from the same social group, indicating class solidarity, or racial identity. In this sense the word has always excluded the Indians, the lowest of the lowest class, from the right to be brothers of Mestizos. The Zapatistas added some words such as of blood, of race, of land, of history in speaking of other Indian groups: “es necesario encontrarse con todos los hermanos de raza y sangre” (we need to join with all the brothers of race and blood) (*Excelsior* September 15, 1997: 14-A). But they used the word in an inclusive way to join different groups from different social classes into one broad group sharing the same political position and economic and social conditions. This form of address was not always reciprocal. The response is varied and significant, showing subtle differences in the position of each group. The way others addressed them shows some of the ambiguities and complexities of the relationship with
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Indians.

It was not so common for Mestizos to call the Indians *hermanos* (brothers). The relationship as brothers between Indians and other sectors of Mexican society was more common during the march of the 1,111 un-armed Zapatistas to Mexico City. On this occasion it was the usual way to address the Zapatista Indians by their supporters. This was seen in a public welcome to the Zapatistas signed by inhabitants of Mexico City, individuals and organisations. The text was accompanied with three-quarters of the page full of names in microscopic letters: “*los invitamos a acompañar a nuestros hermanos indígenas*” (we invite you to accompany our indigenous brothers) (*La Jornada* September 12, 1997:11). The use of this expression does not necessarily include other Indians, non-Zapatistas. Usually the phrase *hermanos indígenas* referred to the armed group, alternating with the expression *hermanos zapatistas*. However, there were a few instances where the term brothers included other non-Zapatista Indians: “*indios y mestizos hermanados en la lucha por la construcción de una nación incluyente*” (Indians and Mestizos as brothers in the fight to construct an inclusive nation) (*La Jornada* September 15, 1997:6).

Since that event the word brother has also been used in local interethnic interactions between ruling groups and Indians not involved in the Zapatista movement (see chapter 4). But it never appeared in the discourse of the resident, the national government representatives or the members of other political parties, who referred to the group with expressions that imply negative attitudes or merely neutral ones (“Zapatistas” or “EZLN”. Indicators of distance from the Zapatistas were even more marked with speakers associated with the right-wing opposition party (PAN). They never used ‘brothers’, but instead used, even on the same page, different phrases such as: “*Los rebeldes ... guerrillera ... guerrillero ... Zapatistas ... las huestes de Marcos, grupo armado, encapuchados*” (the rebels ... women or men guerrilla ... Zapatistas... the hosts of Marcos ... armed group ... the hooded ones). In this way, the PAN emphasised the armed character of the movement as their main reason for rejecting them. Their explicit position was not opposed to Indians but to guerrillas, to terrorism as the action of the Zapatistas has been insistently characterised. The PAN also showed their ambiguous position in relation to the movement and at the same time their opposition to the ruling party. By naming the Zapatistas guerrillas they distinguished them from other Indians, and thus could support some of the Indian demands expressed by the Zapatistas. At the same time, by the demanding dialogue and negotiation to end the conflict they opposed the government and ruling party. Although they supported Indian demands for justice, the party agreed with the government in rejecting Indian autonomy. This stance represents a rejection of the Indians -- Zapatistas or not -- who demand autonomy as the only way they
can be part of Mexican society in a state of equality and social justice. In rejecting autonomy the PAN joined a government that implicitly defended the interests of powerful groups, which would be challenged by anything that strengthened the Indian populations in rural areas.

During the march there were also other groups opposed to the Indian movement but they were not present to express their disagreement. They stayed outside the interethnic event, ignoring what was happening, as was the case with the television media, which largely ignored or minimised the events. It seemed the only way of knowing what was happening was through the print media. In fact, the television not only ignored the event, it constructed a specific ideological image of Indianness -- that in some ways shows a positive image but still immersed in the stereotypes, probably to counteract the positive reaction of people to the Zapatistas.

Reinforcing the hegemonic stereotypes

Contemporary Indians have been winning a place in Mexican society in one mode, which reinforces the importance of Indians in Mexican culture. At the same time the idea of their full participation in Mexican society is still rejected, especially the 'bad' Indians, the politically active ones. The presence of Indian images on television and in advertising increased surprisingly after the beginning of the war. This new image of Indians kept some of the common stereotypes, including the emphasis on the beauty of their clothes, their ancient knowledge of nature and the richness of their dances.

One clear example was a soap opera that was being broadcast on television in October 1997: "Si tu supieras" (If you knew) in which the main character was a Huichol woman. It was no accident, I think, that they chose an ethnic group which has one of the most impressively embroidered dresses, depicting them as living in the island of Mexicaltitan, supposedly the original place from where the Aztecs migrated to found Tenochtitlan. The story was like many others before. It showed the changes when an Indian goes to the city, the rejection of signs of her culture, and her transformation by a man who falls in love with her, so that she becomes a perfect high society woman. Compared with other stories I have seen on Mexican television, in this case there were more expressions of pride in Indian culture, and Indian language was used with subtitles. But the abuse of Indians by the Mestizos, the existence of Indians who reject their own people for money (Latinos), and a general contempt for their culture and way of speaking Spanish were repeated as something taken-for-granted. Also typical, as in other TV programs of this kind, was the use of a beautiful woman, not very Indian in appearance, whitening the Indian image and making it look closer to the Western style. In the story the heroine's way of succeeding in Mexican society is, as usual, to reject Indian

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10 In Mexico, that meant the exclusion of a large number of people who are not literate or read very little.
ways and learn how to be non-Indian.

At the same time advertising was also introducing an Indian image in television. One example that showed a change in ways of representing Indianness was an advertisement for a natural shampoo. In this case they showed an old woman talking about the properties of plants used in the shampoo as an ancient knowledge. She is dressed in traditional clothes and speaks in her own language, translated with subtitles into Spanish. At the end of the advertisement a beautiful young woman with long bright black hair showed the benefits of the shampoo. It seems as if the shampoo has not only changed the hair but the behaviour of this young woman, who looks less Indian and does not speak in her language. As in the soap opera the message here is clear. It is good to respect the ancient knowledge, but transform the Indians in modern non-Indians.

The third example was an advertisement that used the Voladores dance. The filming of the dance was excellent, perhaps one of the best I have seen of that dance, with a beautiful background of a green hill full of flowers. When I saw it I did not know it was an advertisement because there were no words or images of a product. But at the end, when the dancer was close to the ground he touched the hand of a child who was on his father’s shoulders. The child gave him a pack of Macdonald potato chips, and a voice said: McDonald’s repartiendo sonrisas en México (McDonald’s delivering smiles in Mexico).

In this case I interpret the message that for Indians it is not enough to change by adopting Mexican ways, they need to follow the American way of life to be happy. I felt outraged. It was not what I have dreamed as a place for an Indian axis mundi in Mexican culture.

During the political event some typical stereotypes also slipped in, even among the supporters of the Zapatistas. Assertions that the Indians were being manipulated were made, assuming that Marcos, or foreigners, must be behind them, as if they were not able to speak by themselves:

en la boca de Maribel, era obvio, hablaban la voz de Marcos (through the mouth of Maribel, it was obvious, speaks the voice of Marcos) (La Jornada September 14, 1997:4).

los mil 111 zapatistas enviados por “Marcos” a la capital del país (the thousand 111 Zapatistas sent by “Marcos” to the capital of the country) (Novedades September 17, 1997: A10).

There were also references to pride in the prehispanic past: “se entonaron diversas melodías prehispánicas que dieron más profundidad al acto” (diverse prehispanic melodies were played which gave greater depth to the event) (Excelsior. September 15, 1997:14-A). There was also the stereotypic identification of Indians with
prehispánicas, i.e., one reference to the disappearance of Indians at the time of the conquest "¿quién lo iba a pensar, que en esta plaza donde murieron los últimos indígenas ... ahora estarían bailando unos rebeldes encapuchados" (Who would think, that in this plaza where the last indigenous people died ... some hooded rebels would now be dancing?) (La Jornada. September 17, 1997:10). The pride in the clothes and dances of Indian groups (Zapatistas or not) of course had an important space in pictures and comments about the event. (Illustration 16).

The indirect dialogue: non-invited voices

Out of the face-to-face interaction the interethnic event constructed a dialogue at another level. As the dialogue with the civil society was the main aim of the march the Zapatistas explicitly refused a dialogue with the president, but he still acted as a significant interlocutor. The government and the president were important but absent interlocutors. The government spoke through the voice of the Secretario de Gobernación and the army authorities in a dialogue constructed by the journalists. They took advantage of any occasion to make the government talk about the Zapatistas. Government spokespeople could not be coerced to speak much directly. They only expressed a welcome to the unarmed group, saying they expected no problems during the time and emphasising the Zapatistas' right to be there like any other citizen. They centred their comments on the topic of security, as though they only had the same concerns as with any other large demonstration. However, they deployed four policemen for each Zapatista on the march. Such a large number of 'guardians' for the security of the Zapatistas was seen as completely excessive, just a provocation, a message from the government that contradicted their stated welcome to the Indians to Mexico City.

If these government representatives made few comments, the president said even less. He did not speak directly about the march or the Indian demands, just as he said nothing about Chiapas in the annual presidential report a few days before the arrival of the Indians. His speeches ignored the event and its relevance. The only references were constructed by the news interpreting what he said on other occasions as clear allusions to the Zapatistas.

El gobierno de la República está obligado a velar por los principios que dan forma a la nación sin ceder en los de soberanía y unidad nacional, de integridad de nuestro territorio ... no cederemos en estos principios pues hacerlo sería deshonrar la memoria de los niños héroes y traicionar su sacrificio.

The government of the Republic is obliged to take care of the principles that give form to the nation without concessions in what affects sovereignty and national unity, and our territorial integrity ... we will not give way on these principles because to do so would be to dishonour the memory of the child heroes and betray their
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sacrifice (*La Jornada* September 14, 1997:5).

His discourse constructed an indirect dialogue. He spoke to the Zapatistas implying his position about their demands in other events, such as the anniversary of the heroism of the army cadets in Chapultepec Castle and the group of Irish soldiers (who refused to fight against Mexico with the United States army) during the North American invasion in 1847. There was no explicit reference to the march, only a stress on the importance of defending national sovereignty, to justify his refusal to honour the agreement he had signed. The speech explicitly celebrated the Mexican fight against invasion by a foreign army (the United States army) but it indirectly implied that Indian demands for autonomy threatened Mexican sovereignty. For the president it seemed that the risk of losing sovereignty if Indians gained control of their territory and political life was enough to justify using the army against them, as if this was equivalent to an armed defence of the country against foreign intervention. This was his response to the Zapatista accusations that it was illegitimate for him to use the army against the people of Mexico. Maybe in the president’s unconscious mind, Indians are foreigners as the dominant ideology represents them: foreigners in their own land.

The performance of the president in another event was also transformed in a subtle way by the presence of the Zapatistas. During the commemoration of the anniversary of the independence on September 15th, a few days after the Zapatistas took the Zócalo, the president introduced some phrases used by the Zapatistas from the beginning of the war. The traditional *Grito* (shout) -- as that event is popularly named -- usually just wishes a long life for the heroes of Independence and for the country, but on this occasion the president added new phrases, celebrating the concepts of democracy, liberty and the unity of the country. Those phrases have been used continuously to express the demands of the Indian movement. The meaning of this reference is ambiguous, given that the Zapatistas still loomed so large in the public mind. Did the president appropriate the slogan to express some recognition of the legitimacy of the movement? Or was he twisting the meaning of those words, pretending the government was following those principles? In my view it was just a rhetorical attempt to avoid a public reaction in a major public event, when the president interacts directly with the people from the central balcony of the National Palace. The answer, of course, was not delayed, and some people began to shout ¡Chiapas, Chiapas, Chiapas! (*La Jornada* September 17, 1997:14).

The dialogue between the government and the Zapatistas and supporters was not only verbal. There was another kind of dialogue without words during the march, an indirect dialogue reminding people of past experiences. When the Zapatistas entered the Zócalo helicopters flew overhead. Many people interpreted this action as an act of intimidation:
Más de un helicóptero oficial cruzó el cielo plomizo de la capital. Las rechiflas de descontento no se hicieron esperar, “nos están intimidando” aventuró un marchista. More than one helicopter crossed the leaden sky of the capital. The whistles of discomfort were not long coming, “They are intimidating us” a marcher suggested (Excelsior September 13, 1997:19-A).

For the Zapatistas it probably recalled the experience of the war in Chiapas, where menacing helicopters fly over the Zapatista territory, even after the pact of non-aggression. It was also a reminder to people from the city who were supporting the Indians, in this case reminding them of the time when government helicopters shot students during the 1968 massacre.

Whatever meaning the government intended, the message was clear: Indians should be ‘good’ Indians. Contemporary Indians should defend their cultures and languages, but not their political rights and land. They should not dare to question either power or the dominant ideology. This view of Indianness fits well with the government’s insistence that the movement manipulates Indian demands. From this point of view Indians cannot be making the war: it is just the influence of leftist Mestizos and foreigners.

The different examples from specific interethnic events illustrate well the kind of complex interaction created by a relationship between groups that have confronted each other for centuries. In all of them the historic knowledge and experience of the interaction continuously affects the reaction of each group to the other. This kind of dialogue, with the unconscious internalisation of hegemonic views by both groups, with contradictory values influenced by the colonisation of our minds in our attempts to become a decolonised society, is at the centre of the construction of contemporary Mexican culture and identity. Without understanding the Indian presence in our culture and society, we Mexicans deny the possibility of understanding ourselves.
Chapter 3
Creating space, making history, constructing identities

In the everyday life of large sectors of the population in Mexico the meaning of interethnic exchanges is even more relevant than at the national level, where the presence of Indians as Indians is confined to specific occasions. In some rural areas, where the Indian communities are, the interaction between indigenous and Mestizo people becomes not only part of the cultural construction of their social life in an abstract or imagined sense but a real face-to-face interaction that permeates the conditions of cultural, economic and political life. The place where these encounters happen then becomes a social space for the different processes of interethnic exchange.

In these cases interethnic exchanges are built in complex ways that involve different dimensions of social action, as well as different levels of society. Interethnic communication deals with multiple meanings from local and national levels and at the same time with different dimensions inside each of them. Among the dimensions I want to emphasise are the historical, the spatial and the ideological. All these dimensions are continually interconnected, constructing in each one, and in the interaction between them, the contemporary conditions for the development of Indian culture and Mestizo culture. Temporal and physical space are continually transformed by human action in a human social sphere, which simultaneously transforms the historical dynamic and the ideological construction. All combine to build up the interethnic knowledges that permeate all the specific interactions between Indians and Mestizos.

Interethnic knowledges, as subjective constructions of the different groups, enact individual and collective information, experiences and ideological representations that have been constructed over time (the historical dimension), in a specific space (spatial dimension) through the socialisation of behaviours and values (ideological dimension). These interethnic knowledges are permanently in transformation, re-creating themselves as a result of the continuous interethnic exchange at the specific place and at other levels of Mexican society.

In specific situations the interethnic knowledges that are at the disposal of the groups involved are varied and full of contradictions, partial information and different interpretations of the events. Each group tries to profit from their knowledge to succeed in the interethnic exchange, and their success or failure in each interaction updates their interethnic knowledge for future relationships. In this way the history of a place as it is lived and reconstructed by the groups becomes not just a knowledge of the past but more importantly a dynamic framework for the development of social groups, and hence the construction of their identities. To show this complexity I will refer to a
particular case where my research was focused: the town of Cuetzalan in the Sierra Norte de Puebla.

Cuétzalan is today the capital of the municipality, which is set in a range of mountains with a high rainfall and subtropical forests and little valleys with altitudes that range from 300 to 1110 metres above the sea level. The range of altitudes gives the place a rich variety of landscapes and climatic diversity, with agricultural products that include tropical fruits such as oranges, bananas, passion fruit, papaya, sugar cane, tobacco, the traditional corn, beans and chillies and also coffee, the most important commercial crop in the region (see Barrios 1991). According to the census of 1990 (INEGI 1992) the municipality of Cuetzalan has a population of 35,676 inhabitants, distributed (over 135 220 km²) between the capital and seven juntas auxiliares * (little towns with their own local authorities that are administratively and politically subordinate to the capital of the municipality). These include 143 localities, mostly Nahuat Indian, and the town of Cuetzalan, which is predominantly Mestizo. Of the total population 74.58% are Indians (Nahuas) living in small communities (towns and ranches, from a few families to 3,000 inhabitants). The non-Indian population is mainly situated in the juntas auxiliares of Xocoyolo and San Antonio Rayón and in the municipal capital. These were formed by migrants from other parts of Mexico and from overseas (French and Italian) who came to the region during the nineteenth century, especially during the second half of that century. The fact that the town of Cuetzalan is predominantly Mestizo, and is the capital of the municipality, makes it an important regional centre that draws people from the Indian communities to buy, sell and arrange administrative and political affairs. It is thus the privileged place for interethnic exchange.

The interethnic exchanges have been the result of a long history of social interactions that have shaped contemporary interethnic behaviour, and hence the specific views of history, uses of space and social identities. These views are diverse, sometimes shared, sometimes contested, negotiated or even ignored by the two main ethnic groups in the area: Mestizos and Indians to use Mestizo terms, or koyomej* and maseualmej*, in Nahuat¹, the language of Indians.

In this case I am not interested in a ‘true’ construction of the history or in an ‘objective’ description of the place. What I want to explore in this chapter is the subjective construction of the place as an interethnic site through different views of history and uses of space. The views of each continually interact with the view of the

¹ In this region the Indian language does not have the common sound ‘tl’ that characterises other dialects of the same language. It has instead just a ‘t’. I use the word Nahuat when it refers to the classic form of the language. Another name for this language is ‘mexicano’ but I prefer to use the Cuetzalan regional form ‘Nahuat’ to avoid confusion with the word that signifies the identity of the people of Mexico.
other, as well as with the general ideology generated and spread by the hegemonic culture at other levels of society through the education system and the media, and then appropriated by each group. The different versions that are in permanent interaction are, in my view, the ideological framework for all interethnic exchanges that occur in the town. What I want to emphasise, then, is a dialogue between groups who have constructed the conditions for the contemporary interethnic exchange between Indians and Mestizos, a dialogue that always draws on the interethnic knowledge from the past and transforms it for the future. And in this way it defines the collective conditions for the interethnic process.

In these terms it is possible to depict a general sense of history in Cuetzalan around some key events that define specific stages. These events marked the process as violent, and they were events that involved the whole country as well as this specific locality. These events transformed regional conditions in respect of interethnic forces. The first stage included Indian developments in the region from prehispanic times to the beginning of 19th century. This long period was characterised by interethnic conflicts between Indian groups (Toltecas, Otomies, Totonacos, Mexicas) that resulted in continuous settlements and displacements that became Nahuas communities². These communities were influenced by the policies of the Spanish, but the geographical marginality of the place permitted their reproduction as Indian, with Spanish influences, especially from the actions of a few friars who arrived to there to run the Church.

The slow process of migration of Mestizos from other parts of the country marked the second stage. This process was favoured by the conditions of political struggle at the national level during the War of Reform and the French Intervention (1857-1867), generating a local conflict that established the future arena for interethnic development. The result was a slow displacement of Indians from their lands, with constant struggles as Indians resisted. The third stage was defined around the transformation of Mexican society by the Revolution. In this case the Mexican Revolution intensified the previous local conflicts with violence increasing due to the widespread possession of arms, supported by powerful groups that formed the major factions at the national level. In this stage, the end of the war saw Indians continue to be displaced to the margins, with the Mestizos emerging in full control of the region.

The fourth stage saw a change in the relative strength of the two groups with the creation and development of an Indian cooperative. This fact slowly changed the position of Indians in the municipality, and their influence in the political arena.

² Guei Although this territory used to be Totonac at presents the communities of the municipality are all Nahuas. There is however interaction with Totonac people from towns at neighbour municipalities and few Totonac sellers travel regularly to the markets of the municipality of Cuetzalan. There is not doubt this is an important element to consider in the process of identities, however I only considered this ethnic group when they appear as part of the projects developed by the Nahuas groups of the municipality.
Through this change they constructed new forms of interethnic interaction which favoured the Indians and reduced the absolute power that Mestizos had enjoyed.

The differences between these stages are fuzzy. The classification is just a tool to give an overview from the point of view of interethnic constructions of society. How these stages and the events that defined them are interpreted and manifested by the different groups constructs the framework within which the social actors enact their strategies of interaction.

**Subjective histories**

The history of the town can be reconstructed in many ways. The usual way has been to use the documents in the national and regional archives. The Mestizos of Cuetzalan see this kind of history as the legitimate source of knowledge about the place:

*Lamentablemente no hay registros que hablen sobre lo que es la fundación, sobre cómo era ... ya es más reciente la historia ... sobre todo del presente siglo y del siglo pasado donde yo ya he podido documentar cómo era.*

Unfortunately there are no records that talk about the foundation, about how it used to be ... the history is more recent ... mainly this century and the previous one, where I have already documented how it was (Head of the municipal archive).

For this reason, when I was researching what Mestizos know about their history, I was always referred to professional studies carried out by historians from the town (CEHSNEP 1976, 1977, 1979, 1983) or from outside (see García Martínez 1987, Thompson 1991, 1995, Mallon 1995). According to these sources, Cuetzalan began to exist when its name appeared in written records, and especially from the time when the district and municipal archives reported the problems of Indians with the Mestizos, who constructed those archives. This is the first difference between the view of history among Indians and Mestizos.

For Indians history is not just facts, but more important, social meanings. Thus their history brings out meanings from the past to be understood in the present by constructing a symbolic history, one that is not necessarily written but transmitted through oral tradition. However, in the case of Cuetzalan an Indian group from the town of San Miguel Tzinacapan was interested in rescuing that knowledge, to transmit it and reclaim the importance of their views in the construction of Mexican history.

A group of young Indians worked in an Oral Tradition Workshop, supported by a few outside researchers with international funding, to collect and publish the history of the town and other tales (Taller 1984). The main outcome of the workshop was the
book *Tejuan tikintenkakiliayaj in toueyitatajuan. Les oíamos contar a nuestros abuelos* (We heard the tales of our grandparents) published by a national institution (INAH) in 1994. They expressed their explicit aim:

*Por medio del rescate, la reflexión crítica y la difusión de la Tradición Oral, estamos tratando de favorecer el desarrollo étnico cultural en la zona de Cuetzalan.*

Through the rescue, the critical reflexion and the diffusion of Oral Tradition, we are trying to improve ethnic cultural development in the Cuetzalan region (Taller 1994:28).

In analysing this book I want to show the richness of this kind of material as a source of knowledge about the Indian view of History, and also the interethnic component implicit in that view. It is not only a different history, but a creative response that contests ideological impositions from the Mestizos of Cuetzalan and from outside. It shows a history owned by the Indians but at the same time inclusive, an alternative and complementary version of the dominant history. In this way they questioned the history that is considered the legitimate one, written from the documents of Mestizos, in which the importance of Indians is hidden.

The authors conceived this book as a means of achieving knowledge about themselves: *porque mirando nuestra historia comprendemos quiénes somos y se fortalecen nuestras raíces. Nos reconciliamos con lo que somos* (because looking at our history we understand who we are and so our roots become strong. We reconcile ourselves with what we are) (ibid: 29). This quotation also shows how the Indian conception of themselves has been affected by the interethnic confrontation. The fact that they need to reconcile with themselves is, in itself, a sign of the negative effect of the hegemonic ideology. In this way the text shows some of the ambiguities and contradictions produced by the imposition of an ideology which dismisses the Indian culture, and by Indian attempts to reject those values.

As a result of this continuous confrontation the Indian view of history focuses on topics that show how their culture has developed as a result of relationships with culturally different groups. The recognition of those changes is also a theme in the Mestizo version of history, but for them those facts have other meanings which reflect their specific interest in Indian culture. The changes in traditional Indian ways seem, to Mestizos, to threaten the stereotype of Indianness, which they appreciate so much in their use (or misuse) of Indians. For Indians these changes are superficial, and they have kept the important part of their culture:
Los relatos nos llevan de la mano a vivir en la cultura nahua, cuentan cómo eran nuestros pueblos, cómo era la vida cotidiana de los maseualmej y vemos que nuestra cultura aún está viva, que algunas de nuestras costumbres parecen morir pero renacen después. Los relatos nos describen ese tronco vital en el que se han insertado los cambios.

The stories lead us by the hand to live the Nahua culture, they tell how our towns were, what the everyday life of the **maseualmej** was like, and we see that our culture is still alive, that some of our customs seem to die but are reborn later. The stories describe to us that vital trunk into which the changes have been introduced (ibid: 31).

In this sense the conception of continuity is rooted in the culture, seen not as the repetitive representation of traditions but as a core meaning which binds cultural identity together over time. It is the matrix, not just a simple representation. But the Mestizos cannot see that. For them the changes on the surface represent the loss of Indian culture. Indians are not as they were any more. Mestizos see the changes as the risk of losing two of the important aspects of Indianness, according to their stereotypical views: the Indian as a tourist commodity and the Indian as a submissive worker.

The mass of knowledges, experiences and daily actions are part of a history of relationships between groups that has shaped the interethnic and intraethnic process through which the region has been constructed sociopolitically and culturally. So, in their history each group emphasises those elements that are important for the reproduction of their identity as different to the other. By introducing their social organisation and the elements that show their contrasting identity, Indians give relevance to the role of culture in their view of history. For Indians the primary dynamic of history is not seen in isolated events or exceptional facts but through the everyday reproduction of sociocultural unity. For this reason, the processes of everyday life and the relationships between social groups are meaningful for the understanding of their past and their present. Thus the history they tell is cyclical, where concrete events are important not in themselves, but because of the values they represent for the reproduction of the social group. The events happened, but they can, or will, happen again:

*Hasta ahora los españoles nunca han vuelto a tener ambición de volver. Pero dicen que un día van a querer volver. Eso ya lo verán los que vivan. Este cuento se quedará como empezó ¿Cómo volverá a empezar? Porque esto comenzará otra vez.*

Until now the Spanish have never had the ambition to return. But it is said that one day they will want to come back. That will be seen by those who are alive. This
tale will remain as it began. How will it begin again? Because this will begin again (ibid: 88).

The vision of history displayed in this book, as a sequence of wars on one side, and as a permanent transformation in everyday life on the other side, is reminiscent of some of the 'histories' written in images in some codices, where wars are put alongside daily activities, in a worldview that makes sacred each act of meaning expressed in social life. For example, in the Mendocine Codex3 there are stories about the foundation and development of Tenochtitlan and its government, the wars, a register of the kingdoms that paid tribute, and also how a tenochca (citizen of Tenochtitlan) is formed from birth to death. As a whole the codex gives an overview of economic activities (it is a stock taking of the resources that came from the constant wars) and, at the same time, it expresses the meaning of the culture, ways of life and social organisation (see Berdan & Neiff 1993). In the same way and with similar themes, in the book of oral history produced by the Nahuas of the region of Cuetzalan they build up their own narrative about what has happened in the area since ancient times:

Queremos saber cómo se fundaron San Miguel y otros pueblos, cómo fueron su vida y sus luchas. Queremos saber de los sufrimientos y de los trabajos del campo, de cómo dirigían al pueblo los que tenían un cargo [posición de autoridad], de cómo los koyomej [mestizos] se aprovecharon de los maseualmej [nahua] y cómo estos fueron despertando.

We want to know how San Miguel and other towns were founded and about their life and struggles. We want to know about the sufferings and the work in the field, about how the ones who have a cargo* [position of authority] lead the people, about how the koyomej [Mestizos] took advantage of the maseualmej [Nahua Indians] and how the Indians awoke (ibid: 29).

This quotation synthesised the content of the stories that are included in the book, what they consider relevant in the representation of their history.

Importance of the past in the present.

In this kind of Indian history the idea of origins is more important than for Mestizos. For Mestizos what is important is how the place was, as a physical space, when they arrived. Thus their history is focused on how they transformed it, appropriating the territory to become what it is now. So history for Mestizos is the
process of transforming a rich natural environment into productive nature through the introduction of progress. In this vein they are proud of the fact that they built roads, they introduced cars, they brought electricity to the place, and they transformed the landscape by introducing commercial crops like sugar and coffee:

*Era un pueblo con nada planificado, con casas aisladas, con vida de indígenas principalmente, en donde se hablaba de sobrevivencia en el aspecto económico pues, matz, frijol. Con la entrada de los españoles o y de la gente mestiza surge otro Cuetzalan, desde el plano urbano, desde el plano económico, porque ellos traen consigo otros productos que habrían de hacer crecer económicamente a la región ... Con la llegada de los Mestizos con eso llega lo del café y esto empieza a generar otra forma de vida.*

It was a town without planning, with isolated houses, mainly following an indigenous way of life, where one can talk only of survival in the economic sense, with corn and beans. With the arrival of the Spanish or the Mestizo people another Cuetzalan emerged, on an urban plane, an economic plane, because they brought other products with them to make the region grow economically ... With the arrival of the Mestizos coffee arrived and this began to generate other ways of living (Head of the municipal archive).

For Indians, origins do not consist of the history of transformations of the place but the history of the group. They refer to the places where they come from and how these origins are marked in small differences between the towns, which can still be seen today:

*Los primeros pobladores de este pueblo vinieron de Texcoco ... los que vinieron a poblar Cuetzalan ... esa raza vino de Cholula ... Y los que poblaron San Andrés que hoy están por Zacatipan, esa raza vino de Tlaxcala por eso el habla es diferente. El de aquí [San Miguel] con el de Cuetzalan [que ahora viven en las orillas o en otras comunidades] es diferente y el de los de Zacatipan también es diferente, hasta la forma de vestirse y si tú quieres hasta la fisonomía cambia ... de muchas partes vinieron porque mi abuelo vino de Tenochtitlan.*

The first settlers of this town came from Texcoco ... the ones who came to found Cuetzalan ... that race came from Cholula ... and the ones who founded San Andrés, who are in Zacatipan now, that race came from Tlaxcala, that is why their language is different. The language from here [San Miguel] like that of Cuetzalan [those who live on the edges or in other communities now] is different and that of the people of Zacatipan is also different, and so is their way of dressing, and if

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3 Colonial document executed by *tlacuilos*, Indian specialists in iconographic writing, at the behest of the Spanish friars, but following prehispanic forms of writing.
you like, even the physiognomy changes ... they came from many parts because
my grandfather came from Tenochtitlan. (Taller 1994: 76-77).

All the places of origin included here refer to important prehispanic sites from the
Mexica area and so in this way they connect themselves to the Aztecs from prehispanic
times. But at the same time they introduced a new meaning from that fact which
explains differences between contemporary Indians. They are all Nahuas, but they are
characterised by their own dialect and clothes and identify themselves with the towns
where they live. The names included in the quotation refer to all the important towns
that existed before the arrival of the Mestizos.

The importance of origins in the Indian view is more strongly represented in the
same book through the inclusion of stories about the origins of humanity and corn. This
ancient history is included in two stories considered by them as factual as any history.
These two stories are called relatos (narratives) instead of mitos (myths) as would be
usual in Mestizo texts. They come from the oral tradition, but include meanings that are
relevant in the present or useful in understanding conditions of behaviour in
contemporary interaction. The classification of the different kind of stories under the
same category (relatos) is central in the Indian conception of history. In the Indian view
all the testimonies included have the same value as historical materials, whatever kind
they are, whether from collective memory or personal experience. The insistence on
calling them relatos might be interpreted as a questioning of the legitimacy of the
dominant history that decides what is true or false. To name this kind of cultural
product “myths” is to deny the legitimacy of their content as important in the
construction of a ‘true’ history. These so-called myths include references to the present,
which gives contemporary meanings to cultural symbols from the Mesoamerican past as
part of contemporary Indian culture. In this case, although not exclusively, cyclical
history appears in a more overt way. This can be seen in the continuity of the mythical
hero Sentioptil, who was the first human being and is still alive today: “Sentioptil sigue
viviendo hasta ahora. Sentioptil vive con la víbora. Vive allá donde la amarró [la
ciudad de México] ... Allá está. Ajá. Ese hombre vive hasta ahora.” (Sentioptil is
still living now, today. Sentioptil lives with the snake. He lives there where he bound it
[in Mexico City] ... He is there. Aha. That man still lives today) (ibid: 49). The
continuity of this man from ancient times reinforces his symbolic role as the content of
the stories, so that its meaning transcends the historic status of the personage. If
Sentioptil was the first human being and he still lives today, we can presume he does
not represent an individual but everyone who comes from that first being and behaves
like him. The relevance of the stories then comes not from who he is but from his
actions, which emphasise the works and battles of the sons of corn, the Nahuas.
“Sentiopil, el Hijo del Maíz” (the Son of Corn) is a story shared by different Mesoamerican groups (see López Austin 1994). The first part of the story tells how Sentiopil was formed from the hummingbird whose seed, transformed into a ball of blood and put into the water, became a red corn that gave birth to a child. It also tells how this child grew and managed to avoid being eaten by the tsitsinimej (cannibal, supernatural beings) and then how he collected the bones of his father to restore him to life. The fight against the tsitsinimej is the beginning of the history of the maseualmej, the Nahuas. According to this story this is the first time interethnic conflict appears as the axis of the history that continues until the present.

In the version published as history it is possible to identify the elements from Mesoamerican culture (corn, tsitsinimej, hummingbird, generative water, bones, etc. (see López Austin 1994) as well as the elements that have transformed it in interrelationship with the Spanish culture. This is evident in the use of terms from Catholic religion inserted in the story as a reference point to emphasise the legitimacy of Indian beliefs. One example is the comparison they make between Sentiopil and Jesus Christ:

_Ese hombre era hijo de Dios. Todavía no había sacerdote, todavía no había nada, pero era hijo de Dios ... Así como cuando Jesús vino a vivir en la tierra, así era también ese hombre, era igual_.

That man was the Son of God. There was no priest, there was nothing yet, but he was the Son of God ... as when Jesus came to live on the earth, so was that man, he was the same (Taller 1994: 48).

This comparison can be interpreted as a way to legitimate the subordinate culture as equal in value, in terms of the values recognized from the dominant point of view. To some extent the authors are appropriating the imposed values of Christianity to contest the negative valorisation of their culture. It is possible to see that by updating the myth they introduce the interethnic relationship as an important aspect of Indians everyday life in the region.

The second part tells of the works done by Sentiopil, first sowing the lands with the help of the animals that eat corn, and then founding the cities of Puebla and Mexico. This part can be associated with the meaning of the word they use to name themselves, maseualmej, which means ‘the ones who work’. And they also eat corn. This reinforces the interpretation of the symbolic meaning of Sentiopil as representing the group. Sentiopil as the founder of Mexico City could also be associated with the Mesoamerican Copil, son of Malinalxochitl, whose heart is in the centre of the city (Florescano 1998:23). This association can be also inferred from an interpretation
(personal communication by Cecilia Rossell, an expert in Mesoamerican history), of the name Sentioipil as coming from a fusion of the name of the mythical personage Copil and the word Sentí, son of corn (Sentí + Copil > Sentioipil). The third part of the story is Sentioipil’s return to the city to punish its inhabitants, who are characterised as foreigners, ignorant and ungrateful. In this way the story makes a negative judgement on the Mestizos, seeing a superior value in the Indians.

This part of the story mentions the flooding of Mexico City (mentioned in chapter 1). This reference brings out the symbolic character of events at the national level with their local interethnic meaning. The Indians transformed the facts, stressing their role not as servants of the Mestizo citizens but as the ones who caused the problem in order to punish them.

Through this tale Indians symbolically invert the hierarchical relationship between themselves and the other. The arrogance of the Mestizos is devalued, not justified. What it is important is not whether the historic fact is true but the image the Indians are transmitting to readers or hearers in the present. The value to emphasise in this case is not their subjugation by the Spanish, but the role of the mythical hero, Sentioipil, as the founding Father. The Indians insist the maseualmej offered their labour but demanded respect and recognition. The symbolic value of the texts is reinforced as it includes not only the story of origins, but the continuity of the character as the symbol of the group. Sentioipil is more than a mythical hero, he represents the maseualmej.

The second story, Cuando apareció el maíz. (When corn appeared), describes how a couple of carpenter birds broke the hill where the corn came from, how it was transported by ants, and how people from the region, following the ants, found the corn and shared it with everybody: “el maicito lo hay para todos, para todo el pueblo, para toda la república, para todo el mundo”. (The lovely corn is for everybody, for the whole town, for the whole republic, for the whole world) (ibid: 58). This same text gives a symbolic characterisation of the social groups in the region. The story uses the different kinds of corn to construct the value of the two peoples that, to some extent, internalises the dominant stereotype. The story explains the different types of corn that are used in the region as follows:

> ellos fueron los primeros en ir a traer el maíz ... el bueno era el que estaba saliendo del cerro, ese era el que les gustaba y se lo llevaron los arriábeños.... Entonces los de aquí, los de San Miguel, no fueron a traer luego su maíz, casi no lo tomaron en cuenta ... recogían el que los arriábeños ya habían pisado.

they were the first ones to go to bring the corn that was the kind they liked and the arriábeños [those from the uplands] took it.... Then the ones from here, from
San Miguel, would not go quickly to bring their corn, they paid it almost no attention ... they picked up what the arribeños had trampled on (ibid: 56-57).

The differences between the seeds of corn mark the distinctions between groups with ideological connotations, given that the people from the uplands are the Mestizos (see Valderrama y Ramirez 1994). In a subtle way the story emphasises the disadvantaged position of Indians in the region, but justifies it as Mestizos usually do by the passivity of Indians, this way contrasting them with the avidity of the koyomej. In this way what might be the result of the introduction of new seeds by the Mestizos is constructed as coming from 'natural' differences between the groups.

For Mestizos the only relevant topic concerning origins is their interpretation of the name of the town. According to one Mestizo interpretation the name comes from the quetzal, a bird with beautiful colours. They insist on the truth of this story against the evidence that the physical conditions of the place make it uncertain that there were ever quetzals in the region. They also ignore what Indians say about the meaning of the name; from kuesaltotot (a reddish brown bird with a blue head, Martín del Campo 1979) and therefore “its true name is Cuesalan and not Cuetzalan as the Mestizos name it” (su verdadero nombre es Cuesalan y no Cuetzalan como lo nombran los koyomej) (Taller 1994: 77). The confusion is reinforced by the similarity between the words Cuetzalan and Quetzal. Mestizos also mention that the icon of Cuetzalan appears in the Mendocine Codex as a tribute of feathers, but they ignore the fact it refers there to a town in another region (see Bardan & Neiff op.cit.) To these interpretations I want to add mine. The name of the town might also come from the word Cuezalín, which is the name of the God of the dead (see López Austin 1994:27). If this is the case the name of Cuetzalan could be associated with the name of the ancient site, the Totonac temple (archaeological ruin) in an Indian town very close to Cuetzalan. Its name in Nahuat now is Yohualichan, which means “House of the night” but it was previously named Miquixhuacan, “Place of death”. This connection between the names of the place at different times might imply that the Nahuas who arrived in the region appropriated the older religious meaning of the place. Thus Cuetzalan may not have been a place with quetzals but a religious sanctuary devoted to the worship of the dead, an important cultural phenomenon in contemporary Indian cultural practices, and in Mexican culture.

In interpreting the meaning of the name, Mestizos are as subjective as the Indians (and me), and the meaning they emphasise constructs the town as a beautiful, exotic place. Mestizos prefer to keep this idea instead of being as objective as they claim to be when they reject the value of the stories that come from the Indians.
The role of interethnic conflict in the view of history

From the moment the Mestizos arrived to settle in the region history for both groups began to be represented as an interethnic history. However, the view of these events is different for each group. As I have mentioned earlier, progress was the axis of the story for Mestizos. For Indians the central theme was conflict. That is why any event that transformed the life of the communities and the capital Cuetzalan is seen in different ways by each group. One clear example is the significance of roads and electricity. Mestizos see the roads, the introduction of electricity and cars as their gift to the people of the area. These ‘benefits’ represented an opportunity for better conditions of life, so the Mestizos were the ones who transformed the place into what it is today; a modern, prosperous municipality with roads and regular transport.

José María Flores] se interesó mucho por la carretera, por abrir el camino ... El hizo aquí la primera planta en 1907, fue la primera planta hidroeléctrica de la zona. Imagínese usted en aquella época, sin camino, para traer la turbina con yuntas ... Mi abuelo paterno [Jesús Flores] ... era un hombre también progresista, él trajo el café.

José María Flores] was very interested in the road, to open the road ... He built the first plant here in 1907, it was the first hydro-electricity plant in the area. Imagine in that time, without a road, dragging the turbine up with yokes ... My father’s father [Jesús Flores] ... was also a progressive man, he brought the coffee (Mestizo woman, 80 years old).

The roads, the electricity and the buildings of Cuetzalan (church, municipal palace, schools, kiosk) were benefits for the Mestizos who lived in the town, but for the Indians they represented compulsory work (faenas). They had to carry out these faenas as a communal responsibility, because they were administratively part of the town of Cuetzalan:

Con faenas de las comunidades, iban de 150 a 180 faineros cada 8 días, pero no crea que del centro, venían de San Miguel, de Xiloxochico, de San Andrés y de otros ranchitos de por allá ... nomás nos dijo [José María Flores] que iba a hacer la carretera, y la hizo pero se valió de gentes. Ofrece la carretera a Cuetzalan pero todos los de esta zona van a pagar.

With faenas from the communities, between 150 to 180 workers went every 8 days, but do not believe they were from the centre, they came from San Miguel, from Xiloxochico, from San Andrés, and from other little ranches around ... He [José María Flores] just said he was going to make the road, and he did it, but he
took advantage of people. He offered the road to Cuetzalan but everyone from the area was going to pay (Old Indian from San Andrés).

The content of the oral history book is built up around the central and reiterative idea of conflict as inherent in the interethnic relationship. Throughout the book there are references to many struggles, all representing a kind of interethnic confrontation. In the story of origins, mentioned earlier, the fight is between Sentiopil and the tsitsinimej (supernatural beings):

Prendió el horno, lo calentó y allí echó a toda la mata de los tsitsinimej ... los tsitsinimej habían matado al que le había dado la vida, lo habían matado y se lo habían comido....

He lit the oven, heated it and there he threw the bunch of tsitsinimej ... the tsitsinimej had killed the one who gave him life, they killed and ate him (Taller 1994: 45-46).

Later this same personage fought against the people from the city. He gave them a lesson punishing them because of their pride:

Y le dijeron: -- tú no. Es mejor que te vayas, porque si no, te vamos a pegar. Sentiopil les contestó: -- ¿Me van a pegar? Yo construí este lugar -- les dijo. Yo lo hice ... fue a abrir un hoyo y ahí empezo a brotar mucha agua ... El pueblo empezó a inundarse...

And they said to him: -- you don’t. It is best that you go, because if you don’t, we are going to beat you. Sentiopil answered them -- Are you going to beat me? I built this place -- he said to them. I did it ... he went to open up a hole and a lot of water began to flow ... The town began to flood (ibid 49-50).

In this interpretation of the struggle they emphasise characteristics of the interethnic interaction in which the Mestizos usually despise Indians. In this way, the Indians underline the negativity of that behaviour and therefore their own right to be valued.

The importance of conflict is more obvious in other stories where there is frequent reference to wars they engaged in at different historical moments. First they mentioned ill treatment at the hands of their Indian chiefs which caused the first migration to the area. "Los primeros pobladores de este pueblo vinieron de Texcoco, de allí vinieron, porque sus jefes de aquel entonces los maltrataban mucho en trabajos muy duros" (The first settlers of this town came from Texcoco, they came from there, because their chiefs at that time mistreated them badly, giving them very hard jobs) (ibid: 76). At a later stage the conflict was with the Gachupines (Spanish): Y
en época de cuando vino la conquista, vinieron los gachupines ... [los indios] eran muy maltratados por los gachupines (At the time of the conquest, the Gachupines came ... [the Indians] were very badly treated by the Gachupines) (ibid: 83). Since the nineteenth century, when waves of different migrant groups began to come to the region, the history of the place is built up as a succession of fights in which they had to confront these successive others, in their character as Indian.

The text constantly stresses the importance of the conflictual relationship between groups in the development of the region. The story is told as a sequence of fights between the maseualmej and various groups, which appeared in the region, called Mestizos, koyomej (exploitative Mestizos), analtekos (French), cuetzaltecos and villistas-coyotes. The importance of conflict also appears in the way the text itself is organised around two important stages referring to the most significant wars in the region, which produced important changes in the interethnic conditions of the relationship: the French intervention covered in the section “La lucha contra los analtekos” (The struggle against the Analtekos) and the Mexican Revolution in “Cómo vivimos la revolución” (How we lived the revolution). Although these two events are presented as they impinged on the region, they were important for the whole country.

The way the story is written portrays a specific regional history, with an Indian vision embodied in the emphasis on certain events and in the characterisation of the actors. Their vision of history, as a history of wars between groups in the local context, gives details that contest the official history, which excludes the relationships between local groups as they interact in their everyday life, especially when Indians are involved. In general, hegemonic history tends to show a uniform, generalised monolithic view of a situation (see Bell & Bell 1993). In the Mexican case it depicts the relationships between groups in all regions as if all of them were homogeneous, in such a way that the participants in the struggle at all places seem to share the same aims and motives.

For example, in the public history of the fight against the French intervention (1862–1867), the factions were divided between conservatives, who supported the intervention, and liberals, who were against it. This view did not differentiate between groups inside each faction. This interpretation of the action of the groups (Indians supporting the liberals, the Mestizos allied with the French) ignores the local character of the confrontation. From a regional perspective the groups were more than just liberals or conservatives; they were historic enemies: maseualmej versus koyomej. The Nahua stories include specific aspects of the participation of different groups and in that way they show a history that is not only a struggle between factions for power at some moments, or a defence of national sovereignty in others, but a daily conflictual
relationship which implies negotiations, confrontations and concessions between
different sectors of society.

The following quotation from the story of the war against the French is an
example of the motives that drove the Nahuas to support one of the national groups in
events that went beyond the local situation, but whose meaning cannot be understood
only from the national perspective:

La guerra la inició el papá de Juan Francisco ... vinieron a correr a los
analtekos que estaban en Zacapoaxtla. Los analtekos ya estaban allá y de allí se
vinieron y a todos los corrieron ... no pelearon contra la gente del mismo país,
sino que sacaron a esos koyomej. Porque les hacían mal, cobraban diezmo a
cada barrio o a cada pueblo.
The father of Juan Francisco began the war ... they came to destroy the Analtekos
who were in Zacapoaxtla. The Analtekos were already there and they came there
and destroyed everybody ... they did not fight against the people of the same
country, they only destroyed those koyomej. Because they did them harm, they
charged diezmo [church rates] to each guild or to each town) (ibid: 102-103).

In this reference it is clear that what was more important in the war against the
Analtekos was not the alliance with the Mexican government against foreigners, but a
struggle where maseualmej fought against the French because they were allied with the
Mestizos, the koyomej. For them, the French settled in Zacapoaxtla and were allied
with their enemies the Mestizos. “La gente rica de allí estaba del lado de ellos [los
franceses] con tal de que terminaran con la gente maseual” (The rich people from
those parts were on their side [the French] so that they could crush the maseual people)
(ibid: 109). For the maseualmej it was a fight to defend their territory and their
autonomy, not the national sovereignty.

In this case the confrontation was not only direct, between analtekos and
Maseualmej, but mediated by the other important group at that time, the koyomej. At
the beginning of the conflict the references to analtekos mix with koyomej, due to the
fact that both were dangerous to the Indians. The war against the French was associated
then with the war against the allies of the French -- the koyomej of Zacapoaxtla (which
at that time included Cuetzalan). Later, maseualmej and Mestizos from outside (the
liberal army) fought together against the French (see Pare 1980: 31-61). The alliance
with these Mestizos was not an alliance with the historic enemy, but with sectors not
directly involved in the local confrontation. They were Mestizos but not koyomej.

The description of this event stressed that the maseualmej fought harder than
any one else, with machetes against guns. In this case Indians are equally celebrated in
the official public history. Both accounts emphasise the courage of the unarmed Indians. I remember vividly the school history text when I was child. In the lesson about the battle of Fifth of May in 1862 it said: "los franceses fuertemente armados fueron derrotados por un puñado de valientes indios que portaban tan solo machetes y palos" (The well armed French were beaten by a bunch of courageous Indians who only carried machetes and sticks). Contemporary schoolbooks of history do not express it so dramatically but still mention it, emphasising the courage of the Indians. I found an example in some texts used in schools today:

Entre los destacamentos que más se destacaron ese día estuvo el de los indios zacapoxtles que se ofrecieron como voluntarios para defender a su patria, armados sólo de machetes y lances.

Among the detachments that stood out the most that day were the Zacapoxtla Indians who offered themselves as volunteers to defend their country, armed only with machetes and spears (Didactic monograph: Intervención francesa 1. La batalla del 5 de mayo).

It is important to note that this historical event at the national level is one of the few where the participation of Indian peoples is mentioned in positive terms. What differ in the two histories are the goals attributed to each group. In one case Indians join the struggle to defend the country, the nation, while for the Indians it is part of an interethic fight in the defence of their lands and autonomy from the Mestizos.

During the revolution at the beginning of the 20th century, a new division appeared between groups associated with the national factions, the villistas (followers of Francisco Villa) and the carrancistas (followers of Venustiano Carranza). But there was a clear distinction in the region here. In Cuetzalan a member of one family of landowners, who ran a distillery, became a villista and the people who followed him were all koyomej, “se metían a robar y a hacer abusos sobre la gente maseual en las rancherías” (they entered houses to steal and assault maseual people from the ranches) (ibid: 404). The Indians reacted by joining the other revolutionary group, the carrancistas. In this case the war between villistas and carrancistas was actually “a fight between maseualmej and koyomej, between poor and rich” (una lucha entre maseualmej y koyomej, entre pobres y ricos) (ibid: 400).

In school texts on the history of Mexico, Francisco Villa the leader of the so-called villistas is presented as the leader of discontented groups against the owners of large estates with many cattle (SEP 1996:144). In Cuetzalan the villistas were the richest landowning koyomej in the region, “terrenatentes y productores de refino [alcohol de caña] ... no representaban al pueblo como en otras partes. No lucharon
en favor de los maseualmej” (landowners and producers of refino [spirits from sugar cane] ... they did not represent the town as in other places. They did not fight in support of the Indians) (Taller 1994: 399). Their action in the area is seen as not revolutionary but opportunist, “hacia su lucha en beneficio propio, no es que fuera revolucionario” (He fought for his own benefit, not that he was a revolutionary) (ibid: 415). Their involvement did not come from the ideological commitment of the villistas elsewhere as groups opposed to local rich.

As a reaction to this group of Mestizos the Indians ran off to the hills to avoid ill treatment: la gente corría como hormigas negras a esconderse en las cuevas ... en ese tiempo no respetaban nada, no hablaba perdón todo era a la fuerza (the people ran like black ants to hide in caves ... in that time they [Mestizos] did not respect anything, there was no mercy, everything was done by force) (ibid: 413). After some time the Indians changed their attitude: de tanto miedo que ya tenían, se unieron algunos de San Miguel, algunos de Cuetzalan y otros de las rancherías y fueron a ver al general Barrios, quien armó gente maseual (due to this great fear, some joined from San Miguel, some from Cuetzalan and others from the ranches, and they went to see General Barrios, who armed the Indian people) (ibid: 417). In this way the Indians became carrancistas (followers of Venustiano Carranza), not because they shared his political ideas, but as a group made up of poor people, led by an Indian from the region who was in the army of Carranza.

The inversion of alliances within the revolutionary factions (rich villistas versus poor carrancistas, instead of rich carrancistas versus poor villistas) shows a particular inflection of the national situation in the local context. It demonstrates the ability of Indians to adapt as a strategy within the framework of frequent interethnic conflicts where they are at a disadvantage against Mestizos supported by external forces. This strategic use of interethnic knowledge at the local and national level is also mentioned in other works about the area at different times. It is clear that the Indians in that region have manipulated their allegiance to one or other group depending on the particular circumstances. In the works of historians who did research in this region there are other references to this kind of situation. One example occurred during the 16th century when Cuetzalan (all Indian at that time) accepted the new spatial order (towns concentrated around the church) imposed by the indigenous policies of the Spanish. This acceptance was a means to gain advantages from colonial laws that assured their rights over their lands that otherwise could have been lost (García Martínez 1987: 163). In the same way, Thompson (1991) mentions the case of an Indian leader, Agustín Dieguillo at the end of the 19th century, who used his links with the Liberal army and different national and regional political leaders, to defend their
lands against the Mestizos. His Liberal affiliation allowed him to acquire arms, but he used those arms to defend the lands against Liberal edicts that favoured the Mestizos. The Liberal laws forced Indians to sell communal lands to the Mestizos and that situation favoured the increase of Mestizo migration. Dieguillo used the strength and the arms given to him by the Liberals (at the national level) against the local Mestizos who were also allied with the Liberals at that time.

Mestizos of Cuetzalan also saw the Mexican revolution as a local struggle, a quarrel between the two competing rich families of the town, those of Salvador Vega and José María Flores. According to a Mestizo woman “they were enemies all their life. So they were opposing forces in Cuetzalan but represented others, the forces that fought at the level of the revolution, they raised the pennant but the truth was that they were fighting for power” (Eran grupos contrarios toda la vida. Entonces ellos eran fuerzas antagónicas en Cuetzalan pero que representaban otras, las fuerzas que peleaban a nivel revolucionario se ponían el banderín pero lo cierto es que disputaban el poder).

In the context of this battle, Mestizos saw the Indian communities as part of the revolution, sometimes by force and at other times because of alliances with one of the groups, “los de las comunidades a lo mejor un buen porcentaje ajeno pero un otro buen porcentaje ya con simpatía hacia uno de ellos” (Of those from the communities maybe a good percentage were not involved but another good percentage were sympathetic toward one of those) (same woman). What is interesting here is that the alliances between Indian and Mestizos are not mentioned as such in the Indian history. They only mention that they fought with a general, Gabriel Barrios, who was a friend of one of the factions in Cuetzalan, the group of Flores. They followed Barrios because he was Nahua, and in the same way as in the French intervention, their participation in the army, supporting the maseual Juan Francisco Lucas, was legitimised by identifying the leader as Indian.

An important characteristic of Indian organisation was their preference for following Indian leaders, and this proved useful interethnic knowledge for the Mestizos, who used it after the revolution to control the Indian population and exploit their labour. At the end of the war, the Mestizos armed an Indian leader to protect the communities against the ravages of bandits that were still around. This Indian “leader” however, was under the control of local Mestizos. Some time later this leader grew too close to Mestizo interests and became tyrannical, forcing Indians to work for the benefit of Cuetzalan. That was how Indians participated in the construction of the roads, transporting the electricity plant and the iron fence for the kiosk:
Entonces ideó Don José María Flores, abrir la brecha de Zacapoaxtla a Cuetzalan pero él le hacía de ingeniero, él andaba trazando pero se consiguió a Agustín Cruz para que obligara a la gente a dar faenas y abrieron el camino de aquí a Zacapoaxtla. Eso le sirvió a Agustín Cruz para hacerse tirano ... el obligó a la mayoría de la gente a que fuera a trabajar, y usar faenas ... y hubo mucha gente que comenzaron a golpearla, la mandaban golpear porque no obedeció.

Then, Mr. José María Flores decided to open a route from Zacapoaxtla to Cuetzalan but he did it as if he were the engineer, he made the plans but he got that Agustin Cruz to force the people to give faenas [compulsory work] and they opened up the road from here to Zacapoaxtla. This made Agustin Cruz become tyrannical ... he forced most people to go to work ... and there were many people he began to beat, he sent people to beat them because they did not obey him) (same Indian).

This Indian abuse of power was objected to, and there were many protests asking the government to stop it. Agustín Cruz was put in jail in Zacapoaxtla, and the people of the community where he came from destroyed some of the works he had completed during his time:

La cárcel que todavía estaba allí la rompieron con marro una gran parte porque estaban enojados porque ahí los venían a encerrar ... pero la gente estaba tan lastimada que todo querían desaparecer.

They smashed a big part of the jail that was still there with a big hammer because they were angry because they had been imprisoned there ... but the people suffered such indignities they wanted everything to disappear (same Indian).

Mestizos also remember this Indian, but they stress his Indian identity as the root of his unacceptable behaviour towards everybody, not the fact he was allied with Mestizos:

El lugarteniente de los grupos de acá era un indio tremendo ... era el mero mero tatixca de toda la gente era un hombre valiente ... tenía ascendencia sobre la gente... este individuo con el poder que tenía se las cobraba de todas todas.

The deputy of the groups from here was a terrifying Indian ... he was the most important tatixca* [authority] over all the people, he was a courageous man ... he had ascendancy over the people ... this individual used his power in a vindictive way on every occasion. (Mestizo from San Antonio Rayón).

In both cases there is an interethnic knowledge from the past that both groups are using for their own benefit against a background of advantages and risks in the interethnic interaction. This Mestizo knowledge of Indian ways lies behind a position

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inside the municipality, the *alcalde de costumbres*. This position is occupied by an Indian from the communities and functions to mediate between Mestizo authorities and Indian communities. Through this mediation both groups try to push as much as conditions allow in order to gain advantages from interethnic exchanges (see chapter 4).

**Creating local identities**

An important role for versions of history is the way they create local identities. If it is important to consider that history is the way that people partially construct their identities (see Goodall 1992) it is also fundamental to understand identity as embedded in the process of representing history. This is especially relevant in the case of the Nahua given that expressions of identity are a nuclear part of the conditions of relationships between groups in the same region, which are economically and culturally differentiated. This fact is clear in the oral history text, where group identification is obligatory, as Indian or Mestizo, whenever historical figures are referred to.

Also significant is the fact of repetition of positive or negative aspects applied to the various identities from one or the other perspective. Indians see their *maseual* identity in positive terms when it comes from them, and contrast this with what is produced in interethnic interactions with others -- Mestizos, *koyomej*, or French:

*Haz de cuenta, yo voy al pueblo y también me siento de mucho valor, pero no valgo nada, porque no tengo arma, ni conozco una letra.*

*Cuando se conoce una letra y se toma experiencia, también uno ya se vuelve listo, pero cuando está en la casa, vive uno con miedo, no quiere uno ir lejos.*

Imagine I go to town and also I feel myself full of courage, but I have no value, because I do not have a gun, nor do I know how to write.

When you know how to write and you have experience, you also become smart, but when one is in the house, one lives in fear, one does not want to go far away (Taller 1994: 211 & 212).

In these quotations there is a contrast with the values of the other group, which are sometimes internalised in interethnic interaction, but not necessarily as absolute values. Use of arms and the need for education are seen as the values Mestizos use to impose their power on Indians, so to succeed under those conditions Indians must appropriate those values for themselves.

The heroes in this Indian history, contrasting with those who are eminent in the public national history, are not individuals who perform heroic acts, but groups of usually anonymous social actors. They lose their anonymity when given a defined
social identity marked by the ethnic designation: maseualmej or not-maseualmej. This can be seen in the next quotation:

En los relatos se habla del General Juan Francisco Lucas, maseual de Xochiapulco. Se le recuerda en la región no sólo porque era un buen general, sino porque hasta el final de su vida se reconoció maseual y ayudó a su pueblo. In the stories they talk about the General Juan Francisco Lucas, a maseual from Xochiapulco. He is remembered in the region not only due because he was a good general, but because until the end of his life he recognised himself as maseual and he helped his people (ibid: 101).

In this vein the text often repeats the ethnic identity of the actors and describes the attributes associated with the collectivity, and emphasises the success of their action. The positive attributes are those that lead to successful confrontations against other groups whose superiority was based on the possession of arms. The continual Indian disadvantages in the confrontation turn out to be occasions to demonstrate the virtues of the Maseual identity, especially their courage and their cleverness:

Los soldados se agarraron unas mujeres de allá y las llevaron al fortín. Pero las mujeres iban prevenidas, tenían instrucciones, así que no resistieron y dijeron a los soldados que hicieran de ellas lo que querían. Mientras estos bebían, las mujeres dijeron que iban a la plaza a comprar para hacer de comer y fueron, pero compraron sólo una carga grande de chilpocle [chile] y unas botellas de aguardes. Regresaron, echaron el chilpocle en el suelo, lo regaron bien de aguardes y le prendieron fuego y luego salieron todas. Al poco tiempo los soldados no podían respirar y salieron tosiendo y buscando aire. Ahí los esperaban los maseualmej y a machetazos terminaron con ellos.

The soldiers captured some women from there and they carried them to the fort. But the women were prepared, they had instructions, so they did not resist, and they said to the soldiers they could do with them whatever they wanted. While the soldiers were drinking, the women said that they were going to the market to buy things for the meal and they went, but they bought only a big lot of chilpocle (chilli) and a bottle of solvent. They got back, threw the chilpocle on the floor, spread the solvent thoroughly, set fire to it and left the place. A few minutes later the soldiers could not breathe and they left coughing and looking for air. There, the maseualmej were waiting for them and they finished them off with their machetes (ibid: 109-110).

In this quotation there is another contrast with the hegemonic history, the significant place given to the women who collaborated with the men in the struggle. The Indian
history recognises the participation of women as important and not exceptional. No woman is individually named, as happens when a woman is referred to in the dominant history. In this case they are anonymous but central in the organisation of the group, and as such are a key to success in the interethnic struggle.

The conflictual character of history is also stressed through the way different groups of the area are constructed throughout the past and in the present. All are defined in terms of the confrontation with the Indians, who control the word in this narrative. The continuous interethnic conflict defines identities, especially significant here being the opposition maseualmej - koyomej. The term koyomej (coyote) has negative connotations as applied to Mestizos, who throughout the history of the region have mistreated the Indian people. This connotation is not well recognised by Cuetzalan Mestizos. Some Mestizos told me that the word only referred to Mestizos who grew rich buying coffee from Indians. Others thought it had a positive value, "el koyome en nahuat es el de razón, el importante" (the koyome in Nahuat is a man of reason, an important man) (Mestizo manager of a hotel).

In their book, the Indians distinguished between the ones they named Mestizos, the first immigrants into the region (a non-conflictual relationship with the maseualmej), and the koyomej, the second wave of migrants who settled in the territory occupied by the Nahuas. This second relationship was characterised by the struggle for territory and power. The distinction is not so clear in everyday language. In the Nahuat language koyomej is used for everybody who is not Indian and so the distinction made in the book, in the Spanish translation by the authors, has a stronger ideological connotation, emphasising that there are good koyomej, such as the ones who work with them in the workshop.

The authors of the book also introduced distinct terms to characterise Spanish people, making a contrast between good and bad: Españoles and Gachupines. The use of the term Españoles appears as a generic word to refer to the friars, contrasting with the term Gachupín, always used to name soldiers. This distinction marks an ideological position arising from that experience:

Y en época de cuando vino la conquista, vinieron los gachupines ... atrás de ellos vinieron los religiosos frailes a defender a nuestras pobres gentes indígenas porque eran muy maltratados por los gachupines

And in the time of the conquest, the Gachupines came ... behind them the religious friars came to defend our poor indigenous people because they were mistreated by the Gachupines (ibid: 83).
The French were commonly named analtekos (translated by the authors as the ones who come from the other side), which is another word used to mark cultural distinctions in the region, but without a distinct ideological value.

Throughout this history the interethnic conflict between Indians and Mestizos played a clear role in defining the identity of each group. In contemporary social life they normally introduce these categories to represent themselves and the other in interethnic exchanges. Their interethnic knowledge of course does not give a reductive view of the groups in a simple dichotomy, but introduces the complexities to gain a broader picture of alternative ways of being Indian and Mestizo today. The identities are not fixed but in permanent transformation according to the local and national development of political forces. Thus contemporary identities include interethnic knowledge from the past as well as the series of transformations up to the present.

**From struggle to political negotiation**

Interethnic conflict did not cease with the ending of armed struggle in the region, however it changed its characteristics. Cuetzalan became, more clearly than before, a Mestizo town which progressively expelled the few Indians who used to live in the centre to the margins of the town or to set up other more distant communities. The town space was then defined as Mestizo, used by Indians as a regional centre mainly for the market and religious activities in the church. Mestizos run the municipal palace for the benefit of Mestizos.

That situation apparently was maintained for many years more or less without major conflicts, but in a stability characterised by the dominance of one group over the other. The rich Mestizos increased their profits by controlling coffee production and all other commercial products. In this context interethnic interaction was reduced to specific situations around religious fiestas and in economic activities where the Indians were always at a strong disadvantage, exposed to the economic power of the Mestizos. The event that transformed these conditions of interethnic relationship was the development of an Indian organisation beginning in 1977. A few years later, in 1980, the organisation incorporated 32 communities formally integrated in a cooperative named in Nahuat Topeon Titataniske, which means "together we will win".

There are different views among Indians and Mestizos about the cooperative, but both agree it has changed the conditions of Indians in Cuetzalan, for better or worse, depending on the point of view. The history of the development of the organisation from the Indian point of view is that a group of agronomists arrived to the town to support productive activities:
Hubo un grupo de muchachos que venían a dar un apoyo a los campesinos con la finalidad de ver si la producción ya estaba bien, que faltaba, y para que orientaran para mejorar la producción agrícola que había en aquel entonces por acá.

There was a group of young people who came to give support to the peasants with the aim of seeing if the production was going well, what was needed, and to orient them to improve agricultural production as it was at that time (Indian member of the cooperative).

But the Indians did not respond immediately. They saw no need to produce more just to get a lower return in market conditions controlled by the Mestizos. Their priority was to get cheaper products to avoid the high prices charged in the Mestizo shops of Cuetzalan.

El primer problema que resultó para la gente, más sentido, era la carestía de la azúcar. El azúcar es un alimento super básico aquí, junto con el maíz y el frijol son los productos que más se consumen en la dieta alimenticia. En aquel entonces el precio oficial era 2.15, aquí en el comercio particular se conseguía a 8, 10 y hasta 12 pesos el kilo. Entonces la gente empezó, necesitamos azúcar pero está muy cara vamos viendo como le hacemos.

The first problem the people felt strongly about was the high price of sugar. Sugar is a very basic food here, together with corn and beans they are high consumption items in the diet. At that time the official price was 2.15, but here in the shops you would pay 8, 10 and even 12 pesos a kilo. Then the people began to say, we need sugar but it is very expensive, we will see what we can do about it (Mestizo adviser of the cooperative).

This group of Mestizo outsiders responded to Indian demands by respectfully supporting the Indian needs, even going against their own views about how to do things to improve the Indian situation. This kind of relationship created the conditions for a long process of organisation and development of a cooperative for production and marketing many different goods. The success of this process is seen by Indians, and by the Mestizo advisers, now residents of Cuetzalan, as the result of a creative interethnic exchange. In their view Indians constructed an organisation in their own terms, appropriating the Mestizos' knowledge of national political conditions to gain funds and political support, and drawing on their specialised knowledge in order to achieve greater productivity. This combination gave Indians better tools and skills to confront the power of the koyomej.
For Mestizos the cooperative was an external project promoted by "communist students revolutionaries", who just came to manipulate the Indians against the Mestizos who had their capital invested in the coffee industry:

Vinieron un grupo de Ingenieros de Chapingo ... los postgraduados se llamaban, eran rojillos ... ya después se involucraron algunos, incluso andaban vestidos como indígenas, hicieron toda la forma de llegarle a los grupos con esa visión, de poderlos manejar, de poder tenerlos cautivos. Esa gente los siguió por ignorancia y por la necesidad y mucho también por flojera.

A group of engineers from Chapingo came ... post-graduates they were called, they were reddish ... later some became deeply involved, some even dressed as Indians, they did everything to reach the groups with their vision, to be able to manipulate them, to be able to ensnare them. Those Indians followed them out of ignorance and need and many also through laziness (hotel manager Mestizo).

The success of the cooperative is not recognised explicitly as such by Mestizos. They consider the cooperative just as another competitor, which has made Indians less respectful toward their bosses. They believe the leaders are corrupt, taking advantage of Indians for personal enrichment:

Cuando nosotros oímos 'cooperativa' y tenemos un concepto de lo que es cooperativa, pues uno ya no entiende que esto sea cooperativa, verdad, vino a afectar muchos intereses establecidos, muchas canongías de negocio que no se discutían entonces lo cierto es que dicen que no representa ya, no es la contraparte fuerte de los demás [cafetaleros], los afecta, sí, porque hablan del intermediarismo, hablan del coyotaje, hablan del abuso a los indígenas, se generan muchos comentarios, pero ya en la realidad por todo lo que se dice de la cooperativa no es que haya acaparado el negocio y se haya convertido en la fuerza numero 1 del café, no es, representa un competidor más, pero no lo afectó ... yo creo que no es gran cosa.... La gente [mestizos] siguió próspera, la cooperativa está por celebrar sus veinte años y la gente [indígena] sigue viviendo de lo mismo.

When we hear 'cooperative' and we have an idea of what a cooperative is, we don't think it is a true cooperative, truly, it came to affect many established interests, many privileged commercial relationships that were taken for granted, the truth is that it is said that they do not represent them, there is not strong opposition to the others (coffee producers), it affected them, yes, because they talk about mediation, they talk about the action of coyotes, they talk about abuse against Indians, they generate many commentaries but actually for all that is said about the cooperative it is not the case that they have monopolised the business and have become the number one force in the coffee trade, it is not, they represent
another competitor but it did not affect them ... I believe it is not a big thing.... The people [Mestizo] continue to be prosperous, the cooperative is close to celebrating 20 years and the people [Indian] still live the same (Mestizo woman)

The conflict lasted many years as a struggle between the Indians and the rich Mestizos, monopolists, merchants and authorities. Mestizos tried to block support from outside institutions by accusing Indians of illegal use of the sugar, illegal trade and invading land.

\[\text{nos fueron a acusar de acuerdo con los comerciantes que estábamos invadiendo el comercio, que no pagábamos impuestos, que éramos gente mala, que invadíamos tierras, y no era cierto, no era cierto. Es que les estabamos afectando su comercio.} \]

They went to accuse us, in alliance with the merchants, that we were encroaching on commercial operations, that we did not pay taxes, that we were bad people, that we invaded lands, and that was not true, it was not true. It was because we were affecting their business (Indian member of the cooperative).

The Indians in response tried all legal processes available to protect themselves, using all possible connections with the authorities, especially from federal institutions. Although some people outside Cuetzalan have successfully mobilised to pressure the governor of Puebla to stop these hostile acts against them, the authorities at the state level more often shared interests with the local Mestizos and supported them. In the context of these negotiations between authorities and the cooperative the knowledge of the political dynamics between different levels of society was very important for Indians to take advantage of specific political situations inside and outside the town. In these terms the advisers provided important knowledge to be appropriated by Indians as a political tool to gain support and funds. The Mestizos clearly recognised that knowledge was a reason for the continuity and success of the cooperative:

\[\text{Lo que en teoría maneja la cooperativa ha impresionado mucho a altas autoridades y han conseguido apoyos increíbles ... o sea que se han acomodado muy bien, muy bien ... yo creo que sus estrategias de información son muy impresionantes para que ellos puedan seguir teniendo esos apoyos.} \]

What the cooperative manages in theory has impressed the higher authorities very much and they have gained incredible support ... that is, they have accommodated...

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* According to one Mestizo whose land was invaded, the ones who did it were people from the neighbour state of Veracruz. They invaded the lands of terratenientes (owners of large extensions of land) and then some others not so large that were in the borders.
themselves very well, very well ... I believe that their information strategies are very impressive for them to continue to have that support (Municipal employee).

This quotation shows that Mestizos could deny the importance of the cooperative but not its political strength in the region. Slowly they had to look for ways of negotiating with the cooperative. This was especially clear when the cooperative decided to propose a candidate for the municipal presidency to compete with the Mestizo candidate. For Indians it was the only way to stop the Mestizos continually blocking everything they did to win better conditions of life. It was their way of changing the position of the Indian population in the distribution of municipal resources.

Por eso en 1986 dijeron vamos a participar pero vamos a analizar y a revizar cómo le vamos a hacer, a través de la asamblea se estuvieron haciendo análisis y se llegó, vamos a participar pero con una persona nuestra y mediante un programa de trabajo. Se puso a elaborar un programa de trabajo sobre lo que se quería que fuera la autoridad municipal.... Se participó, se triunfó, se llegó a la presidencia con muchos problemas porque allí también se nos atacó muy fuerte ... era una persona que conocía bastante de la organización ... entonces tuvo el respaldo de la gente y llegó a presidente municipal. Quisieron hacer fraude, quisieron hacer muchas cosas pero de todos modos se llegó a la presidencia ...

That is why in 1986 they said, we are going to participate but we are going to analyse and review how we are going to do it, within the assembly they did their analysis and they concluded, we are going to participate but with one of our own and through a program of work. They began to work out a program for what they wanted the municipal authority to be. They participated, they won and they achieved the presidency with many problems because there we were also fiercely attacked ... he was one who knew the organisation very well ... then he had the support of the people and he won the municipal presidency. They wanted to commit fraud, they wanted to do many things but he won the presidency anyway (cooperative Mestizo adviser)

For Mestizos, it was just a temporary and unsuccessful attempt by the cooperative to increase its power and gain access to municipal resources; not the loss of their own position as the ones in control of the municipality: hasta pusieron un presidente y lo tenían ahí como un muñequito haciendo lo que ellos querían (they even put in a president and they had him there like a little doll doing whatever they wanted) (Mestizo woman).

The Indian candidate won, and the Indians began to arrive at the Municipal Palace to ask for what they needed, to demand responses from him about what he had offered. The new Indian president worked with Indians at the beginning but slowly
tried to build alliances with the Mestizos to avoid them blocking his work. In the Mestizo view the Indian president was only a puppet controlled by the leaders of the cooperative who failed as a president, and for this reason the cooperative should not have another Indian candidate:

*El señor sale de Presidente municipal y muy mal porque empieza a negarles los apoyos que la cooperativa quiere, empieza a tratar de ver que no era presidente de la cooperativa, era presidente de Cuetzalan y cuando sale los de la cooperativa lo hacen a un lado de su organización.*

The man rose to be municipal president and did very badly because he began to refuse the support the cooperative wanted, he began to try to see that he was not president of the cooperative, he was president of Cuetzalan and when he left the presidency they pushed him to the margins of his organisation. (same woman).

What the cooperative said is that they were not interested in power, but in achieving a position of strength to prevent the Mestizos excluding them from the general benefits of the municipality. The success of this strategy is clear in practical terms. Since then the Indians have become more present in Cuetzalan, demanding, negotiating, and collaborating with Mestizos. In this way the persistence of Indians and the strength of the cooperative modified the interethnic space of Cuetzalan and the relative position of Indians in the use of that space.

*Con los 3 años estos primeros en que llegó una persona de la cooperativa a la presidencia municipal se revirtieron las cosas y ahora quienes no iban eran los de aquí. De aquí no iban porque decían 'como iban a ir a rebajarse a hacer eso porque era un indio, alguien de las comunidades pues no podían tener un trato con él. Cuando a la siguiente ocasión ellos llevan al triunfo a una persona que iba a responder a sus intereses ya no pudieron hacer lo que hacían antes porque de todos modos la gente exigía que ahí hubiera respuesta. Ya se había abierto el camino.*

In the first three years when a person from the cooperative became municipal president, things turned upside down and now the ones not going were from the town. They did not go because they said ‘how are we going to lower ourselves to do it?’ because he was an Indian, someone from the communities, so they could not have a relationship with him. The next occasion when they won the election with a person who would reflect their interests they could not do what they used to do before because the people still demanded a response from them. The way has been opened (Mestizo adviser of the cooperative).
The transformation of the political conditions because of the growing presence of Indians (as a strong group able to demand a change in the relative power of each group within the set of regional and national political forces) became an important part of the ideological ambience that changed with respect to the position of Indians in future negotiations. The interethnic knowledge of the ideological ambience incorporates experience and ideology from the past with a broader knowledge of the position of Indians in the present. This includes the impact of the Indian revolt in Chiapas that has changed, for good or bad, the conditions for interethnic negotiation in Mexico.

**Indians and Mestizos creating the interethnic space**

The town of Cuetzalan as it is today is the result of a long process of negotiation between Indians and Mestizos. The history of interethnic conflict constructed the conditions of use of space in the present through accommodations with the new political situation. From being a fully Indian community until the second half of the nineteenth century, Cuetzalan was transformed into a Mestizo town. The process included the transformation of nature by the introduction of corn by the Indians, and sugar cane and coffee by the Mestizos, in the areas that used to be dense tropical forest. The spatial organisation of the municipality and the capital is clearly a manifestation of this process of struggle. In Diagram 7 I show a schematic history of the displacement of Indians by Mestizos, and the evolution of the contemporary distribution of space. This representation symbolises the historical process, which shaped the space as a social space.

The diagram shows how Cuetzalan changed from being a completely Indian community with the church as the only space from outside (I), to a place marked by the Mestizo migration (II). The church at first continued to be the centre of the town with the Indians and Mestizos sharing this common space. The interaction at that time began a long conflict that is remembered by Indians as violent and unjust:

*Llegaron gentes de dinero, empezaron a comprarles a los inditos y los mandaban a vivir a sus ranchos. Algunos ni les pagaban, ¡que va! A otros les prestaban dinero a cambio de sus escrituras y ya no se las devolvían.*

Rich people arrived, they began to buy from the Indians and sent them to live in their ranches. Some did not even pay them, not at all. To others they lent money with their title deeds as security and they did not give them back (Taller 1994:133).
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Contemporary Mestizos hardly acknowledge the violence involved. There was a conflict, of course, but it is not emphasised, presented as a peaceful process of continuous movements of population:

comenzaron los indígenas a salirse ... se fueron alejando y la gente [mestiza] fue comprando, fueron ellos [indígenas] vendiendo.

The indigenous people began to leave ... they moved further away and people [Mestizo] bought and they [Indians] sold (Mestizo old woman).

The only violence they refer to in their public history of the town was committed by the Nahuas against the old Totonac settlers. In this Mestizo history the Nahuas were the violent ones, not themselves:

Al parecer los antepasados de estos nahuas, expulsaron violentamente a los antiguos constructores de un centro ceremonial amplio, armónico y elegante.

It seems the ancestors of these Nahuas violently expelled the ancient builders of a large, harmonious and elegant ceremonial centre (Municipality of Cuetzalan n/d: 3).

The increasing Mestizo population transformed Cuetzalan, and the pressure drove away the few Indians still living there. They concentrated in neighbourhoods on the margins of Cuetzalan or moved further away to form new communities around the town (III):

Había un grupo importante de gentes pero vinieron y los desplazaron, lo que pasa siempre ... los que vinieron ya a descubrir esto fueron desplazando a los indígenas siempre para las orillas, iban ocupando la parte del centro y al indígena lo iban echando para fuera.

There was an important group of people but they came and displaced them, which always happens ... the ones who came to discover this area displaced the indigenous people always to the margins, they occupied the centre of the town and the indigenous population were driven away (Mestizo hotel manager).

Although the Indians moved out of the town they still called themselves Cuetzaltecos and continued to use the space of Cuetzalan, mainly as a place for their religious activities associated with the Patron Saint, San Francisco, and other divinities such as the Virgin of Guadalupe. They also continued to come there as a commercial space to sell their crops and buy products, using the centre as a market place. The church moved from its central position when a new one was built in 1906 along the same side of the square as the municipal palace. They were the two most important
manifestations of public life, one beside the other: religious activities in the church and
the atrium, political and administrative activities in the municipal palace. The Indians
were indirectly excluded from the use of the municipal space because they had no
success going there. The Mestizos controlled the municipality for their own benefit.
Later, a few decades ago, after the triumph of the cooperative’s candidate, Indians
began using the civil space more frequently (IV):

*Cualquier día de la semana que se vaya a la presidencia vamos a encontrar ahí
gente indígena, gente de las comunidades. Que es lo que se logró con esto [el
presidente indio], que la gente se diera cuenta que ahí es donde está la autoridad
del municipio y que tiene que dar respuesta y atender las demandas de la gente.*
Any weekday at the presidential office we will find indigenous people there,
people from the communities. What was achieved by that [the Indian president]
was that the people realised that is where the municipal authorities are, and that
they have to give answers and attend to the demands of people (Mestizo adviser of
the cooperative.

The conditions of use of spaces at Cuetzalan by Nahuas and Mestizos have
created specific sites of interethnic interaction related to economic, cultural and political
activities. In these, Indians and Mestizos enact their interethnic knowledges to fulfil
their needs. In order to achieve success they put into practice in those spaces the
experience and information coming from face-to-face exchanges and also from their
understandings of national and regional political and ideological conditions. All these
interethnic events are built up as both groups express their aims, experiences and
ideologies, generating multiple strategies of interaction to create conditions in the
present and for the future. Other groups from outside, especially from federal
institutions and international organisations, influenced the conditions of these
interethnic relationships by generating new kinds of interethnic exchanges as well as a
new framework for local exchanges. In the next diagram (8) I represent the multiple
groups and levels shaping contemporary Cuetzalan. The sites where interethnic
encounters occur become important social spaces for developing Indian as well as
Mestizo culture as a dialogic process of negotiation, confrontation and appropriation.

In this social map of interethnic interaction I include some of the main sites
where Indians and Mestizos regularly interact. All interactions in those sites are
influenced by the local culture created out of Indian and Mestizo social practices and by
the dominant culture that comes from outside, through national institutions. At the same
time this dominant culture is reproduced in the context of national historical processes
and international economic and political conditions. Among these sites I include some
traditional places where Indians have publicly displayed their culture for centuries. Such
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is the case with ceremonial events and fiestas, which honoured the ancient deities in the past, and then the saints, after the coming of Catholicism (see chapter 5). These cultural expressions are performed inside the church and on the atrium. In this site priests are the main interlocutors and mediators between the Indians and Mestizos of Cuetzalan. Priests have thus controlled and mediated negotiations over the use of that space. The strength of the beliefs of each group and the cultural importance of the activities associated with the church has created the conditions of use of that space, since the church is the central space where the Indian population is concentrated in the municipal capital (see chapters 5 and 6).

Other spaces arise from the contact between Indian and Mestizos where both patterns of organisation combine, those of the communities and those of the Mestizos. This is the case with the municipal administration, the place to negotiate duties and benefits (see chapter 4) and the market, where Indians and Mestizos interact, exchanging products, representations of identity, values and cultural behaviours. Other important sites promoted by external bodies (government institutions or civil organisations) are used creatively by the communities who use Cuetzalan as a regional centre. These local institutions, such as the cooperatives, the local radio station, and the hospital and traditional medical clinic, have become important spaces for interethnic interaction. In these cases there is a new type of Mestizo, coming from outside, employed in federal projects on behalf of the indigenous population (see chapters 7 & 8).

In all the sites of interethnic exchange there is a conjunction of elements derived from national policies and ideologies and from the specificity of the local interethnic context. The interaction of different ideologies and behaviours creates concrete forms of cultural transformation that draw in the whole framework of interethnic exchanges between local Mestizos and Indians from the communities. From this continuous process of interethnic exchange, the Mestizos of Cuetzalan and the Nahua communities today share a common space where both groups act out their strategies for success in the interaction as well as reproducing each as a differentiated cultural group. The common space is used differently by each group in a rule-governed distribution of space. The town of Cuetzalan (see map) is mainly a Mestizo space, but Indians have the right to use some public spaces there, partly because of their rights as municipal citizens, partly because it used to be their own space, but also for the benefit of the Mestizo economy, which depends so much on Indian labour and consumption, and their image as a tourist commodity (see chapter 4).

Walking around the town it is possible to watch men and women and whole families coming from Indian communities in local trucks or on foot, carrying their crops and handicrafts to sell in the market, or leaving town after buying groceries they need. The Sunday market is held in the town centre, the plaza, and also on roads that reach
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the centre as continuations of the approach roads coming from Indian communities. This then becomes a shared space where Indians and Mestizo interact as buyers and sellers, creating a colourful display which mixes Indian and Mestizo costumes, handicrafts and agricultural and industrial products, fulfilling economic needs but also delighting tourists and locals.

This picture is especially rich during the annual fiestas when Indians travel to Cuetzalan not only to buy groceries or sell products but also to celebrate the Saints. On those occasions they arrive completely dressed in traditional clothes (white cotton shirts and trousers and embroidered shirts) or wearing colourful clothes as they dance to express their distinctive culture (Illustration 17).

The presence of Indians at the town of Cuetzalan on Sundays or festive days also becomes an occasion for other activities. Frequently Indian people take advantage of the trip to Cuetzalan to arrange business at the municipal palace, to attend meetings of the cooperatives, to go to the radio station to deliver a message or some story they want to include in a broadcast, or to see the doctor or traditional medicine man or woman if they have a health problem. In this way the town of Cuetzalan, like many other towns where there is a high proportion of indigenous people, becomes a complex site where the interaction expresses the conditions of negotiation or conflict between Indians and Mestizos, and it is also a space in which to represent and transform their specific cultural patterns and identities. In such towns the three dimensions -- history, space and ideology -- interact, constantly creating a contemporary space for interethnic communication and cultural patterns of interethnic exchange through different strategies of interaction, which also engage with the ideological ambience created by the relationship between the local situation and cultural and political conditions at other levels, regional and national.
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Chapter 4

Indianness as commodity

To understand how interethnic communication works in a place like Cuetzalan it is necessary to frame it in the general structure of the Mexican political and administrative system. As I shown in the introduction different fractal levels of social organisation are structured and linked together by the strength of centralised centripetal forces in all levels, from the wider national authorities and institutions to the lower level, the social base.

The importance of these levels for understanding interethnic communication is that the links between them play an important role in fulfilling the economic, social and cultural needs of people -- Indians as well as Mestizos -- who are involved in interethnic communication. For instance, it is important to mention that most programs offered as assistance by the government to Indians are federal programs. Thus the Indian population has to connect the community -- the lowest local level where most Indians live -- with the national level. The different actions required for them to get what they need depend on the strength they have to access the different levels.

The existence of this structure and the way economic resources flow through it in the Mexican system make it necessary to take into account the whole structure to understand interethnic communication as a complex multilevel phenomenon. It involves specific individuals from the different levels of the structure, different social groups and kinds of organisation in each interethnic event. It is also important to consider the more general conditions that determine interethnic interaction, considering that interethnic exchanges are not only local, concrete face-to-face interactions, but are a major social event which permeates the ideological ambience in Mexico.

When I was in Cuetzalan doing my fieldwork, looking for the relevance of politics in interethnic relationships, I was told that the best way to see how the municipality tries to manipulate Indians was by following a political election campaign. In such events the candidates express very explicitly their positive attitudes towards Indians, to influence the Indian population to vote for the Mestizos. The one who told me this, who is also part of the political group in the municipality, said that on such occasions politicians developed a wide range of ways to show solidarity with Indian culture, values and needs, as a useful political tool. It was clear that political interaction was important in understanding the complexities of the relationship between Indians and Mestizos. But the fact that the one who said this was involved in local political life showed how consciously Mestizos use this strategy to manipulate Indians.

The main reason for this ideological display of solidarity with Indians at such times is clear if we consider that in this municipality Indians are the majority. So in a democratic election, or one that pretends to be such, to become municipal president or
federal deputy requires the votes of Indians. Even more, in a municipality like this one -- consisting mainly of rural Indians -- the best way to gain resources from federal programs is on behalf of the poorest population, in this case the Indian majority.

I was not in Cuetzalan during an election campaign, but I had the opportunity to watch another political event and it confirmed for me the importance of political aspects of interethnic communication. The political event, a meeting with the Governor of the State of Puebla, which took place in Cuetzalan while I was there, shows in a more explicit way than any other interethnic event I witnessed the different levels of relationship involved in interethnic communication. This single occasion displayed a set of relationships between representatives of the different political layers, interethnic interactions of different kinds, and dialogues between present and absent interlocutors. This event was also linked with a previous political event where the same people were present with other aims, to win the support of the voters.

This does not mean that all these levels are absent in other events. Sometimes they are actively present, but at other times they are only present in the imagination of those performing the interethnic interaction. As I will show by analysing some events, political interethnic interaction, including election campaigns, is important in the internal dialogue that drives other kinds of interethnic exchange.

Political networks are very important in each interaction. They are the foundation on which relationships build up between Indians and Mestizos and they allow us to see the actions of the different groups, not as simple responses to the immediate situation but as part of a broader process. Otherwise, if you take these acts in themselves, there is the risk of interpreting the actions of different groups in only one way, as passive responses to domination in the case of Indians, and as direct unilateral domination on the part of Mestizos. I consider this a wrong way to interpret social relationships in general, and particularly when the interaction involves different ethnic groups with social and economic as well as cultural or linguistic differences.

What I want to show in this chapter is how the relationship between Indians and Mestizos is constructed through the interethnic knowledge each group draws from history and previous experiences. I will use two specific examples of interethnic interaction: a political event -- the governor’s meeting -- and a socioeconomic and cultural event -- the Coffee Fair of Cuetzalan. In both cases I will analyse how different groups interact to fulfil immediate and broader aims. I focus on the interethnic exchange and how participants use Indian images. It is important to state that the two groups who participate in the interaction are not uniform groups but complex in themselves, having different stories, different aims and using different strategies within the wider structure of power. Through the analysis of these different interethnic events I want to emphasise some of the specific ways the different groups involved use the Indian image, in one case for Indians as voters, in the other as tourist commodities. I also want to show how the interethnic
interaction becomes important in the construction of identities by both groups at the local level, but also as a possible and functional representation of a complex national identity.

Political interethic dialogue

In a little town like Cuetzalan, the arrival of an important authority, in this case the Governor of the State of Puebla, produces a strange feeling of disruption to the calm of everyday life. It is a special occasion, which happens rarely in the life of the town, and it is taken as an opportunity to be heard by high level authorities. The meeting was carefully planned and organised by the municipal authorities assisted by state government officials to make sure everything would be right to enhance the political image of the governor. With the help of these people from outside, municipal employees began working hard from early morning. Chairs needed to be in place, in this case in a public square in front of the municipal building. The written advertisements and pictures must be ready on time, hung behind the dais where the selected speakers would sit, as the main backdrop for the event. The guest speakers and selected audience must be invited and told what kind of speech is expected from them. All electronic equipment must work perfectly. The list of the names of the audience -- to ensure support for the official authorities -- must be ready, and everybody -- municipal authorities, journalists and acarreados (attendees paid to artificially swell support for the governor) and representatives of the different committees -- must fill the space before the governor arrives.

Surprisingly there were no invitations to the general public although everybody knew what was going to happen, and everybody was ready to welcome this large number of people, including potential customers for hotels and restaurants. The only public reference to this occasion I heard was a radio announcement in the indigenous local radio station where the alcalde sent a message to regidores de costumbres* to be there dressed in their traditional clothes. The alcalde is an Indian from a Nahua community appointed by the municipal president to work to maintain the continuity of Nahua traditions and he also mediates between the communities and a municipality usually ruled by Mestizos. The staging of this event in an Indian municipality like Cuetzalan foregrounded, of course, the “nice” side of Indianness.

The use of images of Indianness was clearer when the meeting began with the arrival of the governor. He was received with a traditional Indian ceremony of welcome performed by the alcalde de costumbres. It included the presentation of a special bastón de mando, a baton with ribbons of different colours signifying the different Indian communities in the municipality. This baton is a sign of authority that shows respect and recognition to those who receive it. The use of this symbol on such occasions clearly shows an appropriation of Indian meanings by the Mestizos. What is strange is that
Mestizos are symbolically excluded from this event. It is an Indian performance with Indian symbols and no sign that includes the Mestizos. It seems they still need Indians to play this role instead of adding a ribbon that represents Mestizos to the baton and performing the ceremony themselves. What I will venture to say is that maybe the Mestizo ruling class would not be comfortable behaving like Indians, using Indian clothes or performing their cultural behaviours. But at the same time they cannot renounce the magical effect that the Indians produce in the staging of Cuetzalan, an effect that is always mentioned in characterising the beauty of the town. So the appropriation process was successful enough to allow them to be part of the event as a way of reproducing this magical image but also, and more important for a political event of this kind, implicitly creating the meaning of solidarity between the two ethnic groups as working together for the whole municipality. The need to show solidarity with Indians has increased, I suspect, as a political response to the outbreak of the Indian war in Chiapas. It is now more important than ever for the government to prevent conflicts with Indians in other parts of the country, because of the risk of alliances that might strengthen the Zapatistas.

The performance on this occasion was not perfect. The alcalde was only dressed in typical cotton clothes, his everyday ones. He did not wear the ceremonial clothes that include a special hat and a black woollen jacket named cotón. These clothes arrived later when he was part of the special group of guests seated on the dais. Only then could he be fully dressed as an elegant Indian.

In the meeting there were many participants from the municipality representing different groups of Indians and Mestizos, some of them authorities and others just citizens. Some others were from outside, having official positions as part of the governor’s team. Each local speaker addressed the main interlocutor, the governor, telling him of his or her successes and demands regarding specific programs of assistance that involved the intervention of different levels of the national political organisation. The way this meeting developed may be seen as typical of many other political occasions in Mexican social life, with the same slogans that are commonly used in other states or urban areas where the relationship between governors and people is not marked by the sign of Indianness. In this case I am interested to see how the interethnic fact is central in constructing a political communication which evolves as part of the interethnic knowledge used in other interethnic non-political events. Although it is only one example among others I will take it as an illustration of a wider interethnic construction of reality that permeates many other specific experiences of interaction between Indians and Mestizos.

This event can be analysed as part of a continuous dialogue that evolves through different layers. It is an actual dialogue between individuals and the groups they represent, but it is also an internal dialogue that relates each communicative act to the knowledge of national and local resources, the ideological characteristics of each ethnic group, the different political affiliations and their strengths or weaknesses. At another
level it is also a dialogue with former experiences and with the expected future (see Bakhtin 1996, 1993).

As a communicative interethnic event I will explore the significance of the different aspects that are part of the event, such as the kind of participant, the content of the speeches, the interaction between interlocutors, present or absent, and the references to Indianness and ethnic affiliation.

For the union of governors and population.

The meeting began with a speech by the municipal president. It was a welcoming speech directed in a personal way to the governor as a friend (amigo). The only reference to his representative role as president of the municipality was his use of the phrase “my people” to refer to those who expect to receive benefits from the governor’s actions: el beneficio que mi pueblo espera de usted (the benefit that my people are expecting from you). In this phrase the president was also positioning himself as not personally interested in the governor’s support, just in the needs of others. There were no signs in the speech that he represented the Indians, and the only reference to them was the use of a phrase that was frequent in the Zapatista movement -- nuestros hermanos indígenas (our brothers the Indians). In this phrase (which is not commonly used by the ruling class in the national context but mainly by left-wing speakers who are clearly pro-Zapatistas (eg. La Jornada, September 14, 1997:7), “nuestros” (our) is ambiguous. It creates a proximity with the governor, if he is understood to be included with him in the nuestros, and a paradoxical solidarity with the Indians, considered as brothers, and at the same time a distance in the sense that they are from a different kind. They are brothers, but they are different to the Mestizos because they are Indians. I have never heard anyone say hermano mestizo. Even in this speech the municipal president used just “hermano” (brother) for another Mestizo who was a political representative from the town -- “la persona que como hermano y amigo ha visto por el progreso de Cuetzalan” (the one who as brother and friend has cared for the progress of Cuetzalan). The president emphasised that he shares with the governor the fact of being from the ruling class and a Mestizo, while also expressing the view that they share an interest in supporting the Indians.

The aim of the speech was mainly to thank the governor for his presence in the town and to acknowledge support from the state to the municipality, in a way that constructed the governor as benefactor. This word depicts him more as a good, generous individual than as a political leader whose duty is to serve the citizens. This image, in some ways, lingered in the spirit of the whole meeting but it was mainly expressed by the local Mestizo speakers and some Indians who represented specific committees in some projects. These two groups both spoke as allies of the government party (PRI), as
authorities or as members. The two groups interacted with the governor to emphasise the good results of his political interventions at the national level to access resources for different programs. There was also a use of some political party slogans such as “si son hechos, no sólo promesas” (they are facts, not only promises). The use of this slogan by Indians at the local level shows the presence of absent acts from the past in local events where these promises were made or maybe heard on the national mass media. This knowledge plays out an internal dialogue a speaker performs while constructing the actual dialogue (Bakhtin op.cit.).

In the same speech there was another phrase that clearly expressed the presence of absent facts as part of the knowledge involved in every interethnic interaction:

La presencia de nuestro gobernador y amigo permanece siempre en el corazón de los cuetzaltecos, aunque físicamente no esté usted. Porque Manuel Bartlett está en todas las clínicas que aquí se están construyendo para promover la salud de nuestro pueblo ... está en cada una de las aulas que brindan cultura y preparación a la niñez cuetzalteca. Está en los caminos que por largos años fueron solicitados, pareciendo que estos fueran sueños inalcanzables. Porque su presencia está en los nuevos empedrados que brindan comodidad a la ciudadanía, está y por siempre estará porque en nuestra región el progreso camina a pasos acelerados de la mano de usted.

The presence of our governor and friend stays always in the heart of the Cuetzaltecos, although physically you were not here. Because Manuel Bartlett is in every health clinic, which is being built to promote the health of our people ... he is in each classroom that offers culture and training to the Cuetzalan children. He is in the roads that for many years were demanded, seeming unrealisable dreams. Because his presence is in the new cobbled streets that give comfort to the citizens. He is here and he always will be, because in our region’s progress walks with quick steps holding your hand.

In this paragraph we do not find a ‘true’ internal dialogue with the governor, because he is present as an interlocutor. But it clearly expresses the importance of his past and future actions for the progress of Cuetzalan, and hence the existence of this necessary relationship to successfully link the communities, the municipality and the state. This need became part of the internal dialogue on other occasions when the interethnic relationship was invoked without direct political interests at stake.

The effort made in all the speeches to acknowledge the governor is also a consequence of his important role as representative of one of the higher levels in the political structure of the country. So these acknowledgments look towards successful interactions with a key political interlocutor, in this case the governor, who is an authorised voice as a potential interlocutor with the higher level of the federal government.
The relevance of all levels for the local interactions between governors and population also explains the systematic and explicit references to different levels of government, in general as "gobierno federal, gobierno estatal" (federal government, state government) or in particular to specific institutions, as in one speech when the "Señor Secretario de Educación Pública" (SEP) (Minister of Public Education), absent from the meeting, was acknowledged for his actions in the past.

In the same way, with differences in tone indicating the degree of dependency on the local government, most speakers included demands for more support as central to the content of their discourses. The different expectations arising from the position of each interlocutor were expressed, not only in the words used, but also in the volume of voice, emphasis on the words and also in how confidently they used their body and the public space. In some cases demands were made in an abstract way and in others with specific demands accompanied by a written letter given to the governor as an official submission.

Among the different discursive participants the most interesting for me was a representative of the regional cooperative Tosepan Titataniske. The reason they were invited was explained to me in a later conversation. The cooperative members believe that the municipality needs to be on good terms with them because of their strength and influence in the region, and also due to their success in getting support from the higher levels, specifically to get funds from federal programs. They accepted the invitation to attend because most projects controlled by the cooperative receive funds from institutions, which are part of the administrative structure of the government, and they need official support from the municipality to get them. The signature of the municipal president is sufficient most times. In this way it also becomes important to the municipal president to invite them, to be able to include their projects as part of his activities. Besides, their participation in this event was pertinent because of specific support the state government gave them.

This support was acknowledged in a way that implied it was not a generous gift but the direct result of the governor’s responsibility, as "public servant" (servidor público). And as the result of the work done by the cooperative in an agreement with the federal and state governments "trabajando todos con un acuerdo con el gobierno federal y estatal" (everybody working in agreement with the federal and state government).

This speech was also notable because it was the only one that included the use of Nahuat as part of the interaction. The character of the event as Mestizo, organised by the state and the municipality, did not lead me to expect that kind of interaction. Even the welcoming ceremony, which as a Nahua ritual is always performed in Nahuat, was in Spanish on this occasion. The alcalde explained to me later the reason, that the governor cannot understand Nahuat. In putting these two acts of speech together, Nahuat in a
Spanish-speaking context and Spanish in a Nahua context, the use or non-use of a language that is not shared by the interlocutors takes on a different communicative function as a symbolic exchange. The use of Nahua by representatives of the cooperative carries a symbolic meaning to emphasise the fact that they are speaking as Indians and creating distance from the one addressed who is not Indian. On the other hand, the absence of Nahua in the ceremony performed by an Indian shows a willingness to let this cultural event be appropriated by local Mestizos to receive another Mestizo. At the same time the alcalde draws closer to the Mestizo ruling class by performing his cultural knowledge for them to fulfil their interests. As we will see later the position acquired by the alcalde plays an important role as a mediator between the communities and the municipality.

The ethnic character of the interaction made explicit in the use of Indian language was reinforced in the content of the discourse by using phrases such as: “nuestros los indígenas” (we, the indigenous people), “como cuetzaltecos e indígenas” (as people from Cuetzalan and indigenous people), which identify the speaker as part of an extended group that includes all the Indians in the municipality whose political influence encompasses a wider region with other expressions such as “en nombre de los demás municipios” (in the name of other municipalities). By mentioning this broad representative status the Tosepan speaker underlined the strength of this group at the political level. This strength was recognised by the governor in his response: “Cuetzalan ha trabajado unida con grupos muy fuertes como Tosepan” (Cuetzalan has been working together with very strong groups such as Tosepan). The political weight of the cooperative was also conveyed through the tone of their demands: “es necesario seguir recibiendo” (it is necessary to continue to receive), “extender más este apoyo” (to extend more this support). This form of expression contrasted with the weaker demands of other Indian speakers, who used different words and a lower tone of voice, hesitating while talking, using phrases that express their subordination, with exaggerated respect: “solicitamos el apoyo de nuestro señor gobernador” (we beg the support of our honourable governor).

The political position this group has achieved in the region was also explicit in their references to the different political levels with which they freely interact. This was done by informing the governor of the projects that they are developing with federal support, which he did not know about until then: “darle a conocer que hemos recibido” (let you know that we have received). It was also beautifully expressed at the end of the speech: “esperamos seguir trabajando gobierno federal, estatal, y ... el Señor presidente municipal ... y también el Señor. (diputado federal) ... que acaba de llegar” (we hope to keep working with the federal government, the state and ... the
municipal president ... and also Mr. ... [Federal deputy] who has just arrived). This makes reference to the work they expect in the future in which all levels of the structure will work together with them.

**Government control of dialogue.**

The second part of the meeting included the speech of the visiting authorities, all directed to the audience without a specific appeal to their Indianness and only some particular instructions to the municipal president. In all these cases the interlocutors were referred to with some labels such as “población” (population), “pequeñas comunidades” (little communities), “quienes más lo necesitan” (the ones who need it most) and more frequently as “poblanos” (from the state of Puebla).

The governor controlled the interaction in this case. He personally chose who would speak, whether different members of his team, or local people. He opened his speech with a phrase that got loud applause from the public and local participants:

*Llegar a Cuetzalan es siempre algo maravilloso, creo que ésta es la comunidad más hermosa, iba yo a decir de Puebla, pero creo que del mundo (aplausos). Hay en Cuetzalan, sus montañas, una magia que conmueve y emociona.*

To come to Cuetzalan is always something wonderful, I believe this is the most beautiful community, I was going to say of Puebla but I believe of the world. There is in Cuetzalan, its mountains, a magic that touches and arouses the emotions.

His praise of the beauty of Cuetzalan had a clear effect on the whole communicative event so it evolved slowly to a freer interaction, even losing some of the formality that had been the norm earlier. This effect was complemented by the use of expressions such as “muchedumbre de amigos” (multitude of friends) and his free movement around the dais carrying the symbolic baton in his hand, drawing closer to the audience, as a kind of interaction he put in words as a “diálogo directo con la población” (direct dialogue with the people). But this proximity, constructing everyone as part of the same group, was not about being poblanos, or having solidarity as ethnic groups. It expressed a political alliance within a particular party, as became clear later when he referred to previous meetings when he was a candidate for the government party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI). He took it for granted they would agree with his rejection of opposition parties’ actions.

To me it was clear a change was happening; a change that transformed the meeting into a dialogue with the future, winning potential votes for his party, and with the past, recalling his former presence with them to get votes. This also creates the conditions to exhort the public to increase their participation to guarantee the success of the programs
they were developing with state and federal funds. This was the main aim of this meeting, as proclaimed on the banner draped over the front of the stage: “Gobierno participativo” (participative government). This slogan was ambiguous, since it can be interpreted as if the government wants to participate with the communities, but the actual meaning that came across in the whole event, on the contrary, emphasised how communities need to participate with the government.

Although in his speech the governor kept a friendly tone in interacting with the people he opened the way for a different (in my view very aggressive) kind of interaction by a health official from the state, who was there to speak as part of the governor’s team. This speech aimed to emphasise the big changes in the municipality that have occurred during the time this governor has been in his position. The official implied that every good thing in the municipality was the result of work done during the governor’s term, although he included some programs that had nothing to do with the state or the governor’s actions. The speech included impressive figures, and finished with a very questionable claim “nadie se queda sin cobertura de salud, éste es un éxito sin precedentes” (nobody is left without health services, this is a success without precedent). However, the central part of this speech talked in a very threatening and aggressive tone about population increases creating a serious health problem.

The complete absence of any reference to the population as Indians, in my view, was deliberate so he could avoid being seen to be discriminatory against Indians. This allowed him to be more aggressive in an acceptable way, without disrupting the friendly image of the governor. The stereotype of “bad Indians” as ignorant and dirty, which I have mentioned before, lay behind his implicit accusations of irresponsibility as a main factor in the population increase. He talked about the actions of an irresponsible group of people “pulling down the forests to harvest some corn” (tirando más los bosques para cultivar algo de maíz), or “planting in very steep hillsides ... like termites” (sembrando en laderas muy empinadas...como termitas). This image refers to Indians -- they are the ones who grow corn in this municipality -- as a destructive plague that is multiplying in an uncontrolled way: “el año pasado nacieron 1600 poblanos más” (last year 1600 more poblanos were born). In his view this uncontrolled increase of population was the main cause of all the problems in the municipality, wasting “this enormous quantity of funds” (esta cantidad enorme de recursos). He suggested it threatened “the richness of this area and the beauty of Cuetzalan” (la riqueza de esta zona y con la belleza de Cuetzalan).

The uncomfortable silence that greeted this speech was broken when he finished, followed by other more friendly interventions from the governor and a woman who was the former federal deputy from Cuetzalan. She expressed understanding of the difficulties preventing poor people from participating in the different projects. She proposed alternative ways to participate that are common Indian forms of collective organisation
giving "work and materials from the region" (mano de obra y materiales de la región). In this case she used her local interethnic knowledge to produce a successful interaction that supported the collaboration between the municipality and the communities.

The meeting finished with a big group of people invited by the governor to introduce themselves and what they had done in the local health program. This group slowly filled the front of the stage with a mix of Indians and Mestizos from different levels of the hierarchy, while the governor continued talking in a more direct way with Indians as main interlocutors about aspects of one government assistance program. His speech finished with a phrase that appealed to the good image of Indians. "Y como ustedes son gentes sensatas y sus autoridades son gentes democráticas, con sentido social, estoy seguro que lo vamos a lograr" (And as you are sensible people and your authorities are democratic people, with social sense, I am sure we are going to succeed).

This phrase referred to the local organisation inside Indian communities, implicitly comparing them with other groups. It is difficult to suppose he was contrasting them with the Mestizos (who invited him), saying that Mestizo authorities are not as sensible and democratic as those of Indians. So I interpret his phrase as referring to other Indians at the National level, the Zapatistas. He used two adjectives usually regarded as positive. One is shared by the two groups, democratic, a quality which has clearly become part of the Indian way, against the wishes of some groups who try to deny the Indian social base in the Zapatista movement. The fact they are both Indian and democratic has been shown by the way that the Zapatistas have negotiated agreements with the government. It has also been repeated in the Zapatista communications, declaring democracy the aim of the movement and the basic Indian principle of organisation. The governor’s reference to another quality -- "sensible" -- coming from the governor would apply only to Cuetzalan Indians and it makes them different. These two words together suggest what makes Cuetzalan Indians, in the government view, better than the Zapatistas; they are collaborating with the government instead of fighting with arms against it. This is described as doing things in a democratic way as is expected in a country that claims to be a democracy.

The governor’s acknowledgment of positive qualities of Indians can be also interpreted as an effect of the Zapatista movement on the national interethnic dialogue. The threat of armed movements by people living in the worst conditions in Mexico -- Indians in most cases -- exerts a strong pressure on the governor to express more solidarity with Indians in order to avoid acts of protest. The governor responded to this pressure by showing a friendly approach to Indians throughout the whole event.

After the meeting all speakers were invited to dinner in one of the luxury hotels. Here the Indians were able to use a space that is usually inaccessible to them. Normally they can be outside the place selling handicrafts for tourists, but not customers inside -- partly because of the cost but partly because of the risk of discrimination. So the reward
for collaborating in that public event was a good expensive meal, interacting as friends with Mestizos. But more important was their hope that their demands might be met. Another important result of this occasion was a kind of legitimisation, by sharing the political space with the Mestizos, as ones with the interethnic knowledge to successfully become key interethnic mediators between Indian communities and the Mestizo political structure.

The magic of Cuetzalan

The word magic that was so successfully used by the governor in the political event just reviewed was also heard on many other occasions. However, the use of the word appears to have different meanings depending who is using it, and what their purpose is. In this case I will centre my analysis of this expression on one event that is very important in the life of Cuetzalan: The Coffee Fair. The importance of this event is multiple. It is a fiesta that joins people from different Indian communities with the Mestizo town. It is an occasion of economic importance because of the influx of tourists; and it is also a cultural event that reinforces and recreates the local identity through the interaction of cultural practices and beliefs that connect the present with the history of the town. Together with other events, it allows us to explore the dialogic movements between different levels and kinds of interethnic interactions and ideologies in Mexico.

During my stay in the town I was surprised to hear all the time from locals and outsiders that Cuetzalan is a beautiful, magic place. At first it did not seem odd to me; I thought it was true. But some time later, reading and hearing about the place the word magic seemed to be used to signify the diversity of the society in that place. My first impression was that it was one of the many ways Cuetzaltecos offer the place to tourists, encapsulating in the word “mágico” (magic) all different aspects that make Cuetzalan an interesting place to visit. This image is clearly shown in the main tourist booklet that is offered when tourists arrive in the town. This booklet includes different ideas and beliefs of the Mestizos from Cuetzalan to construct a tourist commodity along similar lines to the general ideology about Indians in Mexico as I have described them earlier. It refers to prehispanic origins, their abilities to produce handicrafts, their beautiful costumes, and their colourful dances.

The first time that the word magic is used in the booklet is in the editorial page. It is a synthesis of other characteristics that describe Cuetzalan, which are also mentioned on different occasions in the same booklet or in other materials, posters, invitations to the different activities, programs for the fiesta, and public discourses. From the first page of the booklet the reader can deduce that Cuetzalan is magical because it is:
- paradisiaco rincón serrano (paradise corner of the sierra)
- el más completo y pintoresco (the most complete and picturesque)
- creatividad de hombres y naturaleza que unidos han conformado laberintos de románticas calles empedradas (creativity of people and nature, joining to shape its labyrinths of romantic cobbled streets)
- su neblina (its mist)
- su incesante chipi-chipi (its incessant drizzle)
- lo copioso de sus aguaceros (the copious nature of its storms)
- ríos, cascadas, grutas (rivers, waterfalls and caverns)
- legendario tierra de Quetzales (legendary land of quetzals),
- naturaleza viva (living nature)
- armonía de la convivencia indígena y mestiza (harmonious coexistence of Indians and Mestizos)
- Yohualichan (a prehispanic ruin)
- policromía de culturas (polychromy of cultures).
- tianguis dominical (Sunday street market) ... esos que visten impecablemente de blanco en el atuendo autóctono (those who dress impeccably in white with the indigenous attire) ... trueque (commercial exchange without money)
- mistisismo (mysticism),
- destellos de color y música (glint of colour and music),
- viviente sincretismo (full of syncretic life)
- mundo multicolor y bicultural (multicoloured and bi-cultural world),

The whole set of expressions draws a rich picture of the place in material ways that include natural characteristics of the geography as well as the architecture, pre-hispanic and modern, with a subjective picture that mixes, not always very clearly, the culture of Indians and Mestizos. This image that is so well drawn by the editorial in the tourist booklet is summed up in one page submitted by the municipality with the words “Naturaleza, folklore, Arqueología. Así es Cuetzalan” (Nature, folklore, archaeology. That is Cuetzalan) (Illustration 18). In this way the municipality constructs the town of Cuetzalan and the Indians’ presence as a commodity.

Tourism is important for the town, the second most important economic activity that sustains its people, Mestizos as well as Indians who produce handicrafts. The construction of a tourist image is important for everybody, but more so for the Mestizos. However, it is not the only way people from Cuetzalan construct themselves, and people express the ‘magic’ in different ways on different occasions. Through the use of the multiple senses the word magic evokes, Cuetzaltecos express their ideologies about Indians and how the interaction with them has evolved into a specific construction of their identity as Mexicans, as Mestizos and as Cuetzaltecos. In this way it is possible to understand better how the interaction between two ethnic groups has evolved to create a
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real and imagined conception of themselves, and I believe this image is also similar to the way Mexican culture in general is constructed through interethnic exchanges.

**Selling magic: the Coffee Fair.**

Looking at the way Cuetzalan is presented on different occasions during the Coffee Fair, my attention was drawn to the way Mestizos speak about Indians as part of the magic of Cuetzalan. Mestizos do not refer explicitly to Indians as often as the tourist booklet, and the way they construct the Indian presence changes depending on the aim of the event and who is speaking. For example, you cannot find out when Indian activities are going to be performed from the official program of the Coffee Fair. The only activity that it is announced is the election and crowning of the Queen of Huipil* (Indian cloth), which, as we will see later, is an activity organised by the Mestizos with the Indians. All other activities that are the main attraction for tourists are part of the religious fiesta, where the municipality is not directly involved. According to the secretary of the municipality they see the fiesta “from a point of view more economic and profane” (desde un punto de vista económico y profano) while the Indians see it “from a more mystical point of view, more related to their customs ... they come to dance for the Patrón [Santo]” (desde un punto de vista más místico, más apegado a sus costumbres...ellos vienen a bailarle al [santo] patrón). Although in this tourist program the municipality does not explicitly include all the Indian elements that make up the Magic of Cuetzalan, the Mestizos know they are useful for the tourist performance. It is clear that the Indians are there, and the municipality tries to take advantage of this to show a strong living culture. Looking deeper at the way the fiesta is organised we can see the two groups are, in some ways, performing a different fiesta with different aims. However, on the surface they are all there together showing an image of harmonious interethnic relationship that, as we will see later, is carefully constructed in discourse during the fiesta.

The activities Mestizos organise for this occasion refer to Indian culture as part of their own resources, sometimes owned by them. For example one of the activities that is part of the Coffee Fair is the election and crowning of the Queen of Coffee. This event has no relationship with Indians. It is a contest to select the woman who represents “the beauty of Cuetzalan women” (la belleza de la mujer cuetzalteca) (Municipal Secretary). It is organised by Mestizos, involving people from the town and some tourists, and it is performed at night (which makes it difficult to expect Indian involvement). So the reference to Indian culture in that context might be interpreted in two ways; as a topic that could be interesting for tourists, or as a construction of local identity as bi-cultural. Both aspects are represented in the magic of Cuetzalan. In any case, whatever the aim, Indians
were present as part of the life of Mestizos in that region. But on this occasion the speeches referred to Nahua culture in specific ways.

One speech, performed by a representative of the Ministry of Tourism began with a poem that extolled the beauty of the place:

\[
\begin{align*}
Gocemos, oh amigos & \quad \text{Rejoice, oh friends} \\
Abracémonos aquí & \quad \text{embrace each other here} \\
cuando andamos en la tierra tan hermosa & \quad \text{when we walk in a land so beautiful} \\
Donde no pueden acabar & \quad \text{Where flowers and songs can never end} \\
ni las flores ni los cantos & \quad \text{For this is the home of the one gives us life.} \\
pues es la casa del que nos da la vida & \\
\end{align*}
\]

What was not said was that this is an ancient Nahuatl poem. It was performed as if it was the spontaneous inspiration of the speaker. However, I found it later -- along with its Nahuatl version -- in a well-known local book in Spanish and English named La sierra mágica. The magic Sierra (Merlo 1995) which was published by the same tourist department where this woman works. Her performance suggests that Nahua culture is good enough to be used but not acknowledged.

In the ceremony for crowned the Queen of Coffee the master of ceremonies, representing the municipality, was the secretary. It surprised me that the municipal president was not there, because, according to this speaker this is “the crowning moment for the town of Cuetzalan” (el momento cumbre para el pueblo de Cuetzalan). The absence of the president suggests the priorities in that Fair, because the president was ready, very early in the morning, for the crowning of the Queen of Huipil.

The secretary included in his speech a reference to Indian culture as part of the fiesta:

\[
\begin{align*}
En el día de San Francisco de Asís la complejidad del mundo náhuat cobra vida y presume ante los asorados ojos citadinos ... a uno de los más seductores municipios de Puebla. \\
\end{align*}
\]

On the day of San Francisco of Assisi the complexity of the Nahauat world comes to life and proudly shows itself to surprised urban eyes ... one of the most seductive municipalities of Puebla.

This phrase expresses contradictory feelings. In one way it shows a kind of pride in the Nahua world -- as complex and able to seduce -- but it also implies that it was at that moment, on this specific occasion, it became alive. What then is Nahua culture in the speaker’s view? From the rest of the speech we can deduce he is referring to the specific dance that was performed immediately after he made the speech: the Voladores (flying
men) dance. He referred to the history of this dance and the meanings Indians give it. In his description the dance is a "millennial dance" (danza milenaria), a "cosmological religious ceremony" (ceremonia cosmogónica religiosa), "its origins probably go back to the middle of the fifteenth century" (se remonta quizá a mediados del siglo XV), "its ancient name has been lost" (su nombre antiguo se ha perdido). Linking this way of describing a cultural practice by referring in the same discourse to "mundo Nahuat" (Nahuat world), the Indian image is expressed positively as something that comes from the past, from prehispanic times, and only alive in the moment when it is performed; in this case to impress outsiders. He expressed a similar contradictory feeling in an interview with me:

*para mí ... de veras es un pueblo muy importante, para mí es un pueblo que a lo mejor ha decaído un poco en cuanto a lo que fue, pero lo que tenemos con orgullo lo mostramos al mundo.*

to me ... truly, it is a very important group, to me it is a group that maybe has declined a little considering what it was, but what we have we show with pride to the world.

In this case the pride in what they show to the world also comes from the past, the good things that have not disappeared. Another interesting trace I want to highlight is the use of the word "deveras" (truly) which suggests he is not saying these things for my benefit. This shows me the dialogic process that it is working in every discursive action. In this case, the interlocutor is dialoguing with a dominant ideology from the past in which contempt for Indians by Mestizo is expected.

The way his discourse emphatically refers to Indians and their culture is very common in other speeches, in other events, at the same fiesta. As shown in chapter 1 it is also an easy way to refer to the construction of Mexican nationality at the national level. Another important point to mention is that Indians make virtually no references to Cuetzalan as magic in their public participation in this and other events. I interpret this as a logical consequence of the meaning given that word by Mestizos, associating magic with Indian mysticism and culture. Why would Indians describe as magic something that it is for them an everyday feeling or practice? If magic refers to Indian costumes, to Indian dances, to prehispanic Indian customs, even to actual practices that are constructed as if they were from prehispanic origins, there is no reason for Indians to think that those everyday activities make the Mestizo town of Cuetzalan a magic place.

But Indians are also interested in "selling" the Indian image, and the magic word, or the word magic, appears in a poster inviting Indians to participate in an event, *Convivencia Nahua* (Nahua social occasion). It is a contest, where traditional cultural practices are performed in public in the plaza of Cuetzalan. This event was organised by a
group of Indian teachers -- from the communities of the municipality -- and the committee of the Fair - -some of them Mestizos. The invitation was as follows:

Los maestros de Educación Indígena en coordinación con el Comité Central de la Feria del Café y del Huipil de Cuetzalan, Puebla, conscientes de sus tradiciones culturales que aún prevalecen en las comunidades del municipio y reivindicando estos valores que hacen de Cuetzalan un lugar mágico y lleno de misticismo...

The teachers from the indigenous education system coordinated with the Central Committee of the Coffee and Huipil Fair of Cuetzalan, being conscious of the cultural traditions that are still alive in the communities of the municipality and claiming the importance of these values that make Cuetzalan a magical place and full of mysticism...

This text uses the word mágico (magic) but in a different way than other texts produced by Mestizos. It clearly states that what is considered the magic of Cuetzalan is due to Indian cultural traditions, and that those traditions are not from the Aztec or Totonac past but ones that “are still alive” (aún prevalecen) in the communities deserving recognition by both groups. And also by tourists who come wanting to see all the images they are offered: prehispanic recreations, mysticism, magic, harmony between Indians and Mestizos, synthesis of cultures, music, colour, all together creating the imagined construction of an identity -- the Mexican identity -- that is dreamed but not seen.

**Economic, ideological and cultural exchange.**

In October, at the same time as the fiesta of the Santo Patrón, protector of the town, the Coffee Fair is held. The religious fiesta has been performed by Indians since the time of evangelisation, when the friars decided to give a specific saint as protector of the different towns, maybe to displace the Gods of the mountains that protected each town, altepetl* In this case the one selected was San Francisco of Assisi, who is frequently associated by scholars with the cult of the sun (Merlo 1995:92).

There are different stories about the origins of the Coffee Fair of Cuetzalan and the reasons for its creation. Some old documents mention this fiesta in the last century as an Indian initiative by a Nahua leader Pala Agustín -- the last Indian president of Cuetzalan municipality -- when the town was still inhabited by a majority of Nahuas. He decided to create a fair for coffee instead of the traditional fiesta for the Santo Patrón as a clever way to evade the pressure of groups within the liberal government who wanted to suppress religious fiestas. To accede to this liberal demand would have had a terrible effect on his image with his Nahua supporters given the importance of the religious fiesta
in Nahua culture. As one Nahua said “cuando hablas de comunidad hablas de religión y fiesta, siempre que hables de religión y fiesta la comunidad allí está” (when you talk about the community, you talk of religion and fiestas, whenever you talk of religion and fiestas the community is there). By holding the fair on the same day as an economic fiesta Pala Agustín solved the dilemma by giving both groups what they wanted -- the traditional religious fiesta masked by a secular fiesta (Valderrama & Ramírez 1994:204). There is no reference to what happened subsequently, but maybe events in the revolution made things happen differently, so that this initiative proposed by an Indian was not repeated. Maybe they did not need to do it again.

In contemporary Mestizo beliefs, the Coffee Fair is a Mestizo invention, created in 1949 to celebrate the successful economy that resulted from the production and export of coffee. As the secretary of the municipality said “la fiesta se dedica ya al cultivo del café, al inicio de la cosecha del café, se dedica al grano como base de la economía de Cuetzalan” (the fiesta is devoted to the growing of coffee, to the beginning of the harvest, it is devoted to the crop as the foundation of the economy of Cuetzalan). From its inception the fiesta has joined the interests of the different groups by building the Mestizo fair around the most important economic activity -- coffee -- and the religious Indian fiesta around the Santo Patrón.

In 1963, as part of the Coffee Fair, the then president of the municipality decided to include a contest where Indian women were the centre of the activity, naming it the Huipil Fair, following the name of a women’s upper garment which is part of Indian traditional costumes. One of the explanations in the tourist booklet for this activity is that Mestizos wanted to include Indians in their fiesta because the Indians “feel themselves displaced” (se sentían desplazados). So “seeing that the Indian tradition was in some ways lost, an altruistic group tried to recover this custom” (viendo un tanto perdida la tradición indígena, surge un grupo altruista que intenta rescatar esta costumbre). This statement comes from a Mestizo point of view that sees Indian customs as lost, but it is unlikely that such an activity invented for Indians will make the Nahua tradition stronger. Another reason for the invention of this activity seems more credible to me, that the Mestizos wanted to reinforce the use of traditional dresses, and maintain traditions that enriched the scenic value of their town.

From the point of view of the secretary of the presidency the Fair of Huipil has created an interaction between Indians and Mestizos, which “is a relationship not from the Nahua people to the Mestizo people, but from the Mestizos to the Nahua. We invited them” (es una relación no del pueblo Nahua hacia el pueblo Mestizo, sino del Mestizo al Nahua. Nosotros los invitamos). At the time the fair was invented, and in the present, it is clear there are Mestizo interests for increasing Indian participation in the
event. What I doubt is that those reasons were as altruistic as claimed. My interpretation is that the fair satisfies different interests for the groups involved. These interests are articulated by constructing an activity that joins economic, cultural and ideological meanings in an event that has become the most successful tourist activity in the region.

The tourist importance of the fair is clearly expressed by most people I talked with, especially those who have hotels, restaurants or handicraft shops. In all these places there is a careful construction of a scene that will be attractive to tourists, centred on the use of images of Indians. Everywhere you find Indian handicrafts used to decorate restaurants, painted pictures of the town that frequently include a couple of Indians wearing traditional clothes, and Nahuat words are used to name shops or restaurants (*Yohualichan*, *Yoloxochitl*, *Quetzalin*) or traditional drinks and dishes (*xocotl*, *yolispa* and *tlayoyos*). The preferred images that decorate Cuetzalan walls are images of the *penachos* (ornamented hats) from the dance of quetzals which comes from prehispanic times. These are very beautiful and full of colour. They also appear in the municipal palace as well as in the church (Illustration 19). Another recurrent image is the photograph of the *voladores* (flying men) dance and works by a Cuetzaltec painter Gregorio Méndez Nava. His pictures are very characteristic, usually showing Indian images in a very stylised way that emphasise the bright colours, women’s headdresses *mxtahuat* *, the typical white clothes, with people barefoot or wearing the local traditional *guaraches*. Every significant place in Cuetzalan — restaurants, hotels, hospital, the radio station, the traditional medicine building, the cooperative — has one of his works (Illustration 20).

The Fair lasts two weeks and includes different activities to cater for everybody’s taste. The program announced *jaripeos* (rodeos with horses and bulls), cock fights, dance parties, musical folklore spectacles, concerts, regional music, and dancers, in addition to the main activities, the crowning of the Queen of Coffee, the crowning of the Queen of *Huipil* and the *Convivencia Nahua* (Nahua social interaction). During the Fair of 1997 a film produced in the area with local themes — *Santo Luzbel*. (Saint Luzbel) — was screened (see chapter 5).

At this Fair the importance of coffee was not obvious. Apart from being named a Coffee Fair and having a Queen of Coffee, coffee was not present. Even the Queen of Coffee did not have much relevance. In the market there were many products but no coffee and few references to coffee except for some coffee plants in the place where the queen was crowned. This contrasts greatly with a Coffee Fair in Mexico City at a fashionable commercial centre featuring the participation of different Indian cooperatives which produce coffee in the country, among them the Cuetzalan cooperative (*Tosepan Titataniske*) (Illustration 21). This Fair was named “Feria indígena del café” (Indigenous Coffee Fair). It is useful to compare these two fairs, similar in emphasising
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the economic importance of coffee in Indian regions, but constructed in very different ways in the way Indians were involved in the selling.

Indian sellers versus Selling Indians.

In the Cuetzalan fair, although it was not explicitly stated, what is sold is the Indian image. Instead of stands of coffee, there were stands with handicrafts, local food and special stands to promote specific projects run by Indians or for Indians, such as the program in adult literacy in Nahuat language; a handicraft cooperative (which included a demonstration of how a huipil is made on the traditional/prehispanic waist loom); the health and education programs offered to Indians communities; and the Tzinacapan secondary school which produces organic coffee and recycled paper. Coffee was only present in the beautiful handmade paper made with the waste from coffee beans.

During the fair the plaza is totally "invaded" by Indians; some buying, others selling, others watching the dances in the atrio), others waiting for an activity organised by the municipality -- the distribution of free birth certificates for community members. Although this latter activity was not part of the program for the fair, and could be interpreted as just taking advantage of the fact that more people come to the town because of the Patron Saint’s fiesta, it had a very useful effect, whether consciously planned or not. The result was a clear image of many Indians coexisting with Mestizos in the centre of Cuetzalan. On this occasion the Mestizo municipal president gave a public demonstration of his Nahuat language skills (which were not great) by saying few words in Nahuat to welcome the participants. One Indian said to me "sí, debe de saber algunas palabras, ahí [señalando al edificio municipal] deben enseñarle algo" (yes, he should know some words, they [pointing to the municipal building] must teach him some). His use of Nahuat was a useful signifier to state authorities and guests of the good relationship between Indians and Mestizo authorities in Cuetzalan.

By contrast the fair in Mexico City included the word indígena (indigenous) in its name and Indians sold coffee from different areas of the country. But they did not dress as traditional Indians; most wore the same black T-shirt displaying the logo of the fair. The main product for sale was coffee, sold as beans, blended or ready to drink. The Indian image was displayed in a few handicraft products, mainly as a decoration, not as blatant as in the other fair.

The Indian image was present because coffee in Mexico is mainly produced in Indian regions, although not always on their own lands. As stated in the information booklet distributed at the Mexico City fair, Indians are the ones who produce it "El café se cultiva en las zonas cafetaleras de nuestro país, en su mayoría por manos indígenas" (The coffee is grown in the coffee areas of our country, mostly by Indian hands). In this case the ones selling coffee had grown it on their own lands, not as coffee
workers on big plantations. The reference to the land is important here because it is used on the poster for the Fair, creating ambiguous links between Indian culture and the production of a non-Indian crop, such as coffee, and between Mexico and Indians: “Expo 97. Café indígena ... el café de nuestra tierra” (Expo 97. Indigenous coffee, the coffee of our land). Looking at this and other sentences in the poster it is not clear who is speaking and who is the owner of the land. As in other materials, the use of pronouns and possessives is ambiguous. One interpretation could be that the Indians associated with the adjective indígena, qualifying the coffee, are the ones issuing the invitation, so that nuestra is an inclusive possessive that refers only to Indians as owners of land. But this is only implied. The poster is authorised by the commercial centre, as was the case in another poster where the commercial centre Plaza Loreto invited people to “enjoy and share a delicious cup of coffee” (disfrutar y compartir una deliciosa taza de café). Indians are there, in action and discourse, just offering their coffee: Indígenas de las principales regiones productoras del país ofrecen la excelente calidad de su café (Indigenous people from the main coffee-producing regions offer the excellent quality of their coffee). In this phrase the use of the possessive is transparent; Indians are the owners of this coffee. Certainly, the commercial centre is not the owner of the land, and we can infer they are talking as members of an abstract entity that might be Mexico, which appears in the same poster linking the growing of coffee with Mexican culture “El cultivo del café en México manifiesta su cultura” (The growing of coffee in Mexico reveals its culture). Connecting the different elements displayed in the same poster we can deduce that Mexico is the owner of both culture and land. As Indians, in this case, manifest the culture it is implied that Indian culture is a possession of “us” as Mexicans. It is “our” property.

The same claim of ownership was expressed by one of the organisers who told me the success of the fair was “due to the combination of both [indigenous people and coffee], because it is also important to know the culture of our indigenous people” (por la combinación de los dos [indígena y café], porque también es importante conocer la cultura de nuestros indígenas). A similar reference was made by the master of ceremonies at the same fair. He presented a dance group as “grupo interesado en rescatar los valores de la cultura mexicana y de revalorizar la cultura de nuestros grupos étnicos” (a group interested in rescuing the values of Mexican culture and revaluing the culture of our ethnic groups).

In both phrases it is not the culture of “them” that is part of our culture. It is a different way of claiming ownership of their culture. Although Indian culture is explicitly distinguished from Mexican culture in the second sentence, it is the Indians who are “nuestros” (ours) and we can use them or their culture for our own purposes. And it
includes the claim that Mexicanness as a nationality is related with Indianness, with a specific kind of Indianness. However, ‘our’ culture does not simply include Indian features. As we have seen, Mexicans often reject the acceptance of Indianness as ‘our’ culture and ‘us’, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. And when it is accepted it is usually expressed by reference to a specific image of Indianness, which allows ‘us’ to feel comfortable as being related to Indians.

In spite of the differences between the two fairs the image of Indians is constructed in similar ways in both, using some features that depict the “good Indian” -- artistic skills shown in handicrafts; beautiful costumes, used specially on ceremonial occasions; dances and recreations of prehispanic elements. In the case of the fair in Mexico City the prehispanic reference appears in the exposition logo, which combined with the words “café indígena” (indigenous coffee) connecting “indígena” (indigenous) to prehispanic meanings (Illustration 22).

In both cases there were groups of dances that claimed to represent Indians but used Westernised images. They construct this image in both cases by wearing clothes that differ from contemporary Indian clothes, with elements that evoke Indian and prehispanic designs (such as cotton costumes with colourful geometrical designs, Illustration 23), with Nahua names (Huicapilli in the case of Cuetzalan, Tonalli, Aztlan in the case of Mexico City). Neither group was from an Indian region; both were urban-based groups (from Mexico City and Puebla City respectively) who perform folkloric dances.

The Westernised representation of Indians, so simply constructed in the indigenous fair in Mexico City, was only one of the ways Indians were imaged in Cuetzalan. Dances from outside were performed mainly in Mestizo activities organised by the municipality around the fair they consider a Mestizo invention. Images of Indianness were more diverse and complex in the whole context of the fair, where different social groups constructed their own interests in the interaction with each other and with different aspects of a joint, yet separate fiesta.

The Huipil Fair

The Huipil Fair was introduced in the Coffee Fair in 1963 by a Mestizo municipal president. Mestizos regarded the initiative as a successful way of preventing further loss of Indian traditional culture. This idea is expressed by different people, and clearly stated in a monograph published by the municipality, written by a group of local Mestizos:

esta feria [del café] sin que haya sido su objetivo empezó por ir desplazando lentamente la fiesta indígena, llegando a ser la fiesta del mestizaje, tomando en cuenta esto, personas con cariño a nuestras raíces, fundaron ... la feria nacional del huipil que al fin rescataría nuestra fiesta tradicional, que pondría de manifiesto
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nuestras costumbres y tradiciones y le daría a nuestro pueblo indígena su lugar y el sentirse orgulloso de sus raíces alimentaría con esto la conservación de la pureza de la fiesta indígena.

This fair [of coffee] without wanting to, began to slowly displace the indigenous fiesta, becoming a fiesta of meztisage. Taking account of this, some people who cared for our roots, founded ... the national fair of huipil, which would finally rescue our traditional fiesta, which displayed our customs and traditions and gave our indigenous group their place and a feeling of pride in their roots, by this means feeding the conservation of the purity of the indigenous fiesta (CEHSNP 1990:26-27).

The ideology expressed in this quotation shows a complex of contradictory feelings about Indianness and the kind of interethnic relationship between Indians and Mestizos. It is clear the relationship is seen as hierarchical, where Mestizos are strong enough to change the Indians, slowly displacing them, as well as stopping them from changing if Mestizos need or “love” something the Indians own, in this case “our roots”. At the same time it expresses the same ambiguity we have noted before about possession of Indian customs, Indian traditions, Indian groups. This ambiguity shows both a remoteness from, and involvement with, Indianness in the construction of Mestizo identity.

As in other contexts, the construction of identity among Mexicans, in this case Cueltzaltecos, expresses a permanent conflict between accepting Indian origins and rejecting them as not intrinsic to group identity. This dilemma has been solved by making a sharp difference between “pure Indians” -- connected with the past, the traditional, the authentic, that is to say, the prehispanic Indian -- and contemporary Indians who have been acculturated as “impoverished Indians” (ashamed of their culture and language, changing their old traditions, not wearing folkloric costumes). This distinction allows Mestizos to appropriate some Indian elements while rejecting others.

Paradoxically, the effect of changing Indians by Mestizo culture is seen negatively, while the Indian part of Mestizo culture, the “good” one of course, is considered positively as it is transparently expressed in the same article:

El proceso de aculturación es notorio y los valores reales se han cambiado por otros, esta adopción o imitación solo ha empobrecido la cultura local ... es labor de todos, o quienes así lo entiendan de reconocer lo auténtico, en conceptual el indígena de lo que es: un ser con dignidad e individualidad. Nos corresponde, la responsabilidad de conservar todo esto, en bien de la riqueza cultural de Cueltzal.

The acculturation process is notorious, and true values have been exchanged for others, this adoption or imitation has only impoverished the local culture ... it is a task for everybody, or those who understand it in this way, to recognise the
authentic, to rate the indigenous as he is: a being with dignity and individuality. It is our task to take responsibility to preserve all this, for the well-being of the cultural richness of Cuetzalan.

Another aspect of the paradox is the idea that Mestizos are the ones able to do something to make Indians “good” Indians, by helping them to keep their good qualities and stopping them from changing. The influence of Mestizos, in an acculturation process that changes Indian behaviours, is seen as a negative influence, while encouragement to Indians to maintain their customs, as a process of conservation, is seen positively because of the kind of image it produces. This means that sometimes Mestizos produce the impoverishment of “authentic Indians”, and at other times they make impoverished Indians “authentic”. What it is not clear is when the Mestizo influence is considered positive for “real” Indians and what is the difference between the two kinds of “authentic” Indians.

It is clear that “authentic” prehispanic Indians were very different from the image of Indianness constructed by Mestizos for this interethnic event. Spanish and Mestizo traditions have influenced the clothes considered traditional now. Furthermore, I was told by an old woman from the town:

antes usaban el huipil de algodón pero sin blusa, yo todavía me acuerdo, pero luego empezaron a usar la blusa, quien sabe como empezaron con esa pero seguro fue un curita que las estuvo regañando diciendo que era inmoral. Al principio la blusa bordada era sólo negra, luego roja, ahora le ponen cualquier color y ya los bordados no son lo mismo.

in the past they wore a cotton huipil but without a blouse, I still remember it, but later on they began wearing the blouse, who knows how they began that but surely it was a priest who scolded them saying it was immoral. At the beginning the blouse was embroidered only in black, then only in red, now they use any colour and the patterns are not the same any more.

However, publicity materials often stress that the clothes worn by young Indian women in that contest are authentic. So who is this “authentic Indian” Mestizos want to preserve?

There can be different answers to this question depending on the context of interethnic interaction. For example, someone said to me with sadness that Indians have become less “dóctiles” (docile) with Mestizo employers, that they “do not let you mislead them any more” (ya no se dejan, ya no los engañas fácilmente). Another person said “they are not dancing just for nothing, they want to be paid” (ahora ya no bailan así nomás, quieren que se les pague). In these cases the regrets about Indian transformation was only part of what was said, and different to what was said in other contexts. However, I presume those feelings are also latent in all other interactions.
because they involved the same Indians, and the same Mestizos in different interethnic events.

The preparations for the contest of *huipil* begin some months before the event. A special committee *Comisión del huipil* (*Huipil* commission) is appointed to work on the different activities in the contest, preparing public announcements and inviting participants. One month beforehand, all hotels in Cuetzalan display the announcement with an image of the former Queen of *Huipil* dressed in her traditional clothes and the *maxtahuat* crowned by a *huipil*. Through this publicity tourists know specific information about the event. It is clear the poster is displayed in hotels not for Indian women who are the only ones able to enter, but for the main spectators -- the tourists. In the poster we can read some information about the activity, including the explicit aim of the municipality in promoting it. "*Por el rescate y engrandecimiento cultural de la tradición más bella del origen prehispánico de esta ciudad Típica Monumental*" (to rescue and enhance the cultural grandeur of the most beautiful tradition from the prehispanic origins of this typical and wonderful city). From this statement it is not clear which tradition needs to be rescued, or what has prehispanic origins. The tradition or the city? This kind of ambiguity is repeated in other materials to forge links with images of Indians from prehispanic times to create a higher quality tourist commodity.

The actual performance of the contest leaves no doubt about how successful it is for tourist entertainment, how carefully it has been designed for tourists. The background is full of different beautiful and colourful images of Indianness constructed specifically for the occasion, coinciding with the performance of dances and music that Indians play to honour their Patron Saint. The images of Indianness include:

- ornaments that are typical in all *fiestas* in the region, like the *flor de cucharilla* (flower knitted out of palm fronds),
- Indian judges, *tatiaxcas*, from the *consejo de ancianos* (council of elders, who have authority within the community) and *alcalde* (*gran tatiaxca*) elegantly dressed in ceremonial costumes,
- women dressed in traditional clothes -- the young candidates and the *Gran Nanotsi* (a very respected old woman),
- Mestizo women organisers wearing embroidered Indian blouses,
- ceremonial rituals performed by Indians, such as the blessing of the queen with a traditional clay censer (*popoxkaxit*) with *copal* (Mexican resin) and acts of deference to the symbolic baton of authority (*tanautil*) and
- the use of Nahuat language during the ceremony, translating the speeches or using Nahuat names for the Nahua elements included in the event.
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Another tourist success was an event that immediately followed the choice of the queen. She did a tour round the atrio, seated in a special chair decorated with colourful penachos from the quetzal dance. The time and space given for people to take pictures made it clear it is consciously planned as a tourist show, "invitamos a todos los fotógrafos y a todos los camarógrafos para que realicen su trabajo" (we invite all photographers and all cinematographers to do their job). At that moment it was clear to me that everything was carefully and consciously built up to become a photo opportunity (Illustration 24). It was my first thought and as a tourist I was really impressed.

The event was constructed for tourists deploying the same image of Indianness I have analysed previously, so I will not elaborate on this theme with materials from the Huipil Fair. What I want to emphasise in this event is the way Indians collaborated in the construction of this "ideal" interethnic event, because I want to understand their distinctive aims and views compared with those of the Mestizos.

*Same event, different aims.*

There is another perspective on the imagined interethnic identity expressed through the way Indians participated in the event. Apart from their role in the contest there were two Indian speakers, one a municipal authority and the other from the council of elders. The Mestizo speakers included a woman who co-chaired the event, the municipal president and someone representing the state governor. The Indian from the municipality was the main master of ceremonies at the event, using both languages, Spanish and Nahuatl, sometimes translating the speeches, sometimes giving his speeches in both languages. What was interesting in the performance of all these speakers was their collaboration in the construction of an ideal interethnic interaction, very close to what came from the Mestizo participants.

The image of Indianness and the relationship between Indians and Mestizos used some of the elements mentioned before as aspects of the image of Indianness to construct the local identity as a unitary one that includes Mestizos and Indians. In the municipal president's speech this unitary identity was specially marked by the ambiguity of his references to either group, and his unclear use of possessives. It is difficult to know from his words when he is referring to Indians, when to Mestizos, and when to both:

*La grandeza de un pueblo se mide por el espíritu de sacrificio y lucha que posé su gente y por el bagaje cultural que lleva consigo ... quienes tenemos la fortuna de convivir día a día con este pueblo testificamos la dura lucha que por su sobrevivencia nuestra gente libra, sin embargo pese a todas las adversidades que a través del tiempo han asolado a mi pueblo ese espíritu indomable, herencia firme de nuestros abuelos ...*
The greatness of a people is measured by the spirit of sacrifice and struggle that their people bring, and by the cultural baggage they take with them ... we, the ones who have the good fortune to share everyday life with these people testify to the hard struggle for survival of our people, but however, in spite of all the adversities that have devastated my people for so long, that indomitable spirit, the sure inheritance from our grandparents ... 

From this paragraph it is difficult to know whether the words underlined refer to Indians or not. Sometimes, because he positions himself as the other (as a witness) it is clear Indians are included. For example, they are part of those, or maybe the ones, who suffer adversities and have the spirit of sacrifice and struggle, but it is not clear if the indomitable spirit is characteristic of the Indian or Mestizo grandparents. Or are the Indians included as grandparents? This ambiguity could construct an image where Indians struggle and suffer and Mestizos gain greatness and an indomitable spirit. What it is expressed more clearly later is that the ‘cultural baggage’ comes from the Indians, but it makes Cuetzalan and the people who live there proud of that culture (which is on display at that moment): a representation of Indianness built up by Mestizos. This culture constructed by Mestizos from Indian traditions and practices allows Mestizos to name Indians as “nuestros hermanos” (our brothers). It is interesting to point out that, on this occasion, the phrase does not include the word indígena as it did in this same man’s speech at the political event (see earlier). Here he does not mark Indians as brothers of a different kind. He depicts his identity, and the identity of the people he represents, as a single image including Indians and Mestizos. In the political event he positioned himself in solidarity with Indians, but having a different identity, closer to that of the governor.

The governor’s representative at the fair also appropriated Indianness to build up a Mestizo identity at the local level, but in this case he appropriated what Cuetzalan offered as a joint interethnic identity to take it to a higher level as a national identity:

Encontrarnos en este hermoso lugar ... recordando las tradiciones prehispánicas que nos hacen volar el pensamiento, encontrar esta identidad nacional nos llena de orgullo ... es llenar ese origen de todos los mexicanos, esto que no se debe perder de tradición, esto que es patrimonio cultural de la humanidad...

To meet us here in this beautiful place ... recalling the prehispanic traditions which make our thoughts take flight, to find this national identity fills us with pride ... it is to complete that origin of all Mexicans, this tradition which must not be lost, this which is the cultural patrimony of humanity...

The appropriation and its refonctionalisation can be easily achieved because the national identity has been historically constructed by the appropriation of an Indian heritage that is recognised only as prehispanic in origin. This event, referred to by one Mestizo woman...
speaker as “one part of the true values of Mexica culture” (una porción de los verdaderos valores de la cultura mexica), can be alienated from those who are performing it, the Indians. As she said “la cultura en sí no es particular de nadie sino patrimonio del mundo civilizado” (the culture in itself is not the property of anyone but the patrimony of the civilised world). Does this mean that Indians, frequently stereotyped as outside the civilised world, are not owners of their culture? Or else does it mean that only this specific Indian cultural expression counts as “culture” because of the appropriation and refuotionalisation carried out by Mestizos?

Indian speakers also referred to an idealised identity. In their case it was expressed as a dialogic interaction between the past and the present; the present being the specific moment when the fair of huipil was performed as an isolated moment of harmony in the interethnic interaction, while the past was implicitly portrayed as neither good nor amicable. This was clearly expressed in the master of ceremonies’ free translation of the words of the elder 1:

... te decían que hace 34 años se rompió el tabú entre indios y Mestizos en Cuetzalan, hoy en día los indios y los Mestizos trabajamos juntos, te decía que los indios y los Mestizos hoy nos hemos abrazado en el esfuerzo, abrazado en el trabajo, abrazado en el progreso ... hoy se fusionan las costumbres indígenas junto con las mestizas, hoy ya no hay distinción, hoy ya no hay marginación aquí porque junto con las autoridades municipales, junto con las autoridades de las comunidades hay una estrecha relación ... hoy olvidamos querellas, hoy olvidamos ofensas ancestrales ... se han fusionado las razas también en parte. Se han fusionado las culturas y eso es algo que engrandece a Cuetzalan, que engrandece a Puebla, que engrandece a nuestra República Mexicana. Ojalá que con nuestro Cuetzalan del Progreso sea ejemplo para donde todavía existe marginación, para nuestros distinguidos visitantes. Mestizos e indígenas caminamos de la mano, estrechamos amistades, hacemos compadrazgos, compartimos nuestras costumbres, compartimos tradiciones, compartimos el pan y la sal, a veces, como el día de hoy. Hoy indígenas y mestizos juntos...

... he said to you that thirty four years ago the taboo was broken between Indians and Mestizos in Cuetzalan, on this very day Indians and Mestizos are working together. He said to you that Indians and Mestizos today have embraced each other in the effort, embraced in the work, embraced in the progress ... Today, the indigenous customs are fused with the Mestizo ones. Today there is no distinction, today there is no marginalisation here any more, because with the municipal authorities, with the authorities from the communities there is a close relationship... today we forget quarrels, today we forget ancestral offences ... the races have been
fused, partially. The cultures have been fused and that is something that makes Cuetzalan greater, makes Puebla greater, makes our Mexican republic greater. I wish our Cuetzalan del Progreso to be an example to places where there is still marginalisation, an example to our honourable visitors. Mestizos and indigenous people walk holding hands, we make a closer friendship, we arrange *compadrazgos* (traditional links between families though the ritual participation in baptisms or other rites), we share our customs, we share our traditions, we share the bread and the salt. Sometimes, like today, today indigenous people and Mestizos will be together...

This statement illuminates the contrast in the use of the past/present dialogue between Indians and Mestizos. By emphasising the word “*hoy*” (today) the speaker limits his claims of harmonic interaction to the specific situation when all are together, showing a common front to outsiders, tourists, or political representatives. By the word “*olvidamos*” (we forget) he refers unaggressively to the fact that interethnic interaction has been conflictual since ancestral times; by the words “*ya no hay*” (there are not any more) he affirms there were social differences, marginalisation. This way of constructing the interethnic interaction is different to that of Mestizos who seem to ignore the conflictual past and just remind us of prehispanic times when they, Mestizos or their ancestors were not there. It also constructs a different kind of interaction between them. While the municipal president expressed, in the political event, a vertical relationship -- their progress while holding governor’s hand -- this Indian speaker constructed a horizontal relationship: “Mestizos and indigenous people walk holding hands”.

Another important difference is the discussion of different kinds of fusion: the cultural fusion frequently expressed by Mestizos and the racial fusion that it is marked out by the qualifying phrase used by the master of ceremonies “*también en parte*” (also, partially). The word “*raza*” (race) is more frequently used to refer to Indians, as was the case in the following quotations:

*la doncella indígena que representará a nuestra raza* (the young girl who will represent our race) (Indian master of ceremonies)

*lograr el rescate cultural de nuestra raza indígena* (to achieve the cultural recovery of our indigenous race) (Mestiza speaker)

*conducida por elementos de nuestra raza náhuatl* (led by persons from our Nahuatl race) (Contest rules)

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1 It is difficult to know how closely he translated the Nahuatl; in my view the Spanish version was his own interpretation of the other’s voice, while trying to be true to the spirit of the longer speech
To me, this shows clearly the kind of ambiguity that appears also in other contexts, at the national level, to avoid talking of Mexican identity in racial terms and accepting Mexicans have ‘Indian blood’.

**Indian mediation in interethnic events.**

The participation of Indians in this event is not accidental or spontaneous. It is carefully built up as part of the political and administrative organisation of the municipality, including the recognition of Indian ways of organisation -- “respetando sus jerarquías de su propia organización” (respecting hierarchies in their own organisation) (municipal secretary). So to organise Indian collaboration in this event, the municipality uses the official structure that includes the _alcalde de costumbres_ and the president of _juntas auxiliares_ (administrative and political towns) and also recognises traditional authorities in the communities, the council of elders (_taitaxcas_ or _consejo de ancianos_) to provide part of the jury.

The role of the _alcalde de costumbres_ is particularly important because he has a key role in interactions between Indians and Mestizos. This position was part of Indian organisation before the Mestizo settlement, and was appropriated by the Mestizos to oversee the free labour from the communities (as we saw in the last chapter). But now the function of the _alcalde_ is “to preserve traditions and customs” (_preservar las tradiciones y costumbres_) (Taller 1994:126). This duty, according to the present _alcalde_ in Cuetzalan, includes:

- Coordination of the _alcaldes_ from the different _juntas auxiliares_ to make sure that all the communities have _mayordomos*_ (persons in charge of the religious _fiestas_).
- Organisation of _fiestas_ in Cuetzalan,
- Decoration of the entrance of the church and podium for the queen in the _fiestas_ in Cuetzalan.
- Welcoming guests of the municipality, such as the governor.
- Summons to communal Indian authorities to public events organised by the municipality.

From the description of activities by the _alcalde_, it is clearly a Mestizo cooption of Indians for their own purposes and the one selected by the municipal president needs to be a cooperative Indian, but also one respected by the communities. In this case the _alcalde_ has been a member of the ruling party (PRI) and has participated in different organisations and programs promoted by the government. But Indians expect him, to have a strong commitment to the communities. This is an important condition to ensure that the communities will respond to his summons. The commitment to the communities
adds other duties that are not officially recognised by Mestizos but which have been implemented in fact as a refunctionalisation of the previous role of the *alcalde*. Some examples are to demand the municipal president’s support for communal activities around the *fiesta*, such as money to buy new clothes for the dancers. The role of the *alcalde* becomes an important mediation between the communities and the municipality, and even with the other levels of the political structure, mainly at the state level. This means that the collaboration of Indians organised by the *alcalde* on this occasion does not have a single aim, nor is it just a response to Mestizos’ imposition. Apart from the possible economic advantages Indians gain from the *fiesta* (through selling handicrafts or municipal sponsorship of prizes for the contest or their support to buy clothes for the dances) it also is important in the framework of a broader interaction. By responding to these Mestizos’ needs they try to assure access to government programs available to the region through the mediation of the municipal authorities.

In the same way, the participation of the communities in sending their representative *doncellas* (maiden) involves an expectation of further access to the authorities. The Queen of *Huipil* received the symbolic authority from the *alcalde* of the municipality of Cuetzalan, and so “the queens have the opportunity to go everywhere to negotiate agreements, they have the opportunity to dialogue with the governor to reach agreements to win some support for the communities ... dressed in their costumes” (*las reinas tienen la oportunidad de poder entrar en donde sea para poder llegar a un acuerdo, tienen la oportunidad de dialogar con el gobernador para llegar a algún acuerdo para que aiga algún apoyo para las comunidades ... se ponen su traje*) (*alcalde*) According to the *alcalde* this has happened before so that this possibility, real or not, is open to future attempts.

The symbolic importance of the submission of the baton has a different meaning for Indians and Mestizos. Mestizos can interpret it as just a nice ritual performed for people who, due to the political structure of the country, have the authority anyway. But for Indians the symbol is not only that of a superficial ritual (although it can be performed in that way as in the political event). The submission of a symbolic authority implies the recognition of an important position as well as the responsibilities that are inherent in the role of authority. This was clear in the Zapatista march, when they exchanged batons of authority in ceremonies of welcome in each Indian community they visited during the trip from Chiapas to Mexico City (see chapter 2). Maybe from the government’s point of view, and that of many Mexicans, this was just a nice but meaningless ceremony. However, as an Indian traditional ceremony, it bestowed recognition on the Zapatistas as the leaders of Indian people at a national level. In the same way Subcomandante Marcos received the baton from the Indian people, and through it he became the spokesperson of the Zapatista army (EZLN).
Recibe pues el bastón de mando ... llévalo con honor y que no anden en él las palabras que no hablan los hombres y mujeres verdaderos. Ya no eres tú, ahora y desde siempre eres nosotros

(Receive the baton of authority ... carry it with honour that words may not come out of him that the true men and women do not speak. You are not you any more, now and since forever you are us) (Comandante Tacho in EZLN 1995:140).

The baton is a sign of respect but also of commitment from both sides. As a sign it shows how wrong the government was in trying to deny the Indian base of the Zapatista movement and the legitimacy of their demands as coming from the Indian base.

The giving of the baton to the Queen of Huipil is connected with the beliefs expressed by the alcalde about the queen’s potential access to the authorities. It represents an interesting case of refunctionalisation of a traditional meaning adapted to new conditions of exercise of power because of the position of Mestizos in the control of the municipality. It is also rare because it is a woman who is receiving the authority and not a man, as usually is the case inside communal organisations. In some ways this example shows the flexibility of this Indian group to transform their culture in order to access opportunities opened by the interethnic relationship. I do not know how often the queens are able to visit the governor. The only evidence I have is the word of the alcalde saying it has happened, and even he did not mention whether the queen’s representation was successful or not. What it is important to me is the fact that Indian communities engaged in a dialogue with their own expectations. The dialogue in this case is with a future constructed as an imaginary interethnic relationship. The aim is to improve the quality of interethnic interactions.

In different types of event, wherever a relationship exists between Indians and Mestizos, every kind of discourse is constructed with an actual dialogue in the specific situation (face-to-face interaction) and simultaneously as an internal dialogue between different experiences in an interethnic multi-layered history. So the participation and interaction of groups can only be understood as part of a wider experience of interactions in the past. Successful interlocutors participate by having in mind their own knowledge and aims, and also the broader ideological and political context.

From this perspective, the performance of Indians and Mestizos, locals and outsiders in the Fair of Huipil, in the Coffee Fair or in the political event can be understood only as part of a wider interethnic interaction. Through understanding how different participants construct the event we can see why it is important for Mestizos and Indians to collaborate with each other in constructing an ideal image of the relationship between them. The image shown serves different aims for each group: to sell it as a tourist product, to negotiate or define the interethnic relationship for the future, and to
build up an imaginary identity at the local level. Besides it is also relevant to the construction of national identity in the context of contemporary Mexican history and culture, where Indians and Mestizos at the local and the national levels interact and influence the continuity of Mexicanness in the present, from the past to the future.
Chapter 5
Re-negotiating religion

The main fiesta of Cuetzalan combines commercial, social, cultural and religious activities in one event. The central activity occurs on the Fourth of October — the Santo Patrón’s fiesta. This fiesta is performed to honour San Francisco, principal saint and protector of the town and people of Cuetzalan. In this fiesta participation by both Indian communities and Mestizo groups is important and both bring to it their own resources and beliefs. The different activities to celebrate the saint in the capital Cuetzalan are performed under the guidance of the church. The priest, the head of the parish, is responsible for constructing a successful religious fiesta. He is also the main Mestizo interlocutor in all activities to do with religion in the context of Indian culture. For this reason this important part of contemporary Indian culture has been in a continuous exchange with Spanish/Mestizo culture in the framework of the Catholic religion. As Catholic practices have interacted for centuries with open or hidden forms of Indian religion, cultural phenomena include a range of diverse forms of religious beliefs that influence both Mestizo and Indian social practices and beliefs. In this chapter I include some examples of interethnic exchange around religious beliefs framed in a broader context of negotiation where beliefs and behaviours interrelate with political and socio-economic aims.

Role of Catholic religion in interethnic interaction

In the context of Indian regions in Mexico, throughout history and up to the present, priests have been key in interethnic interactions. Priests in many regions were the ones who established a closer interaction with Indians and they were also mediators between Indians and other Mestizos. In this region there were few Spanish during the colonial period owing to its relatively marginalised position, with unreliable communications and, probably, seemingly unattractive resources. Indian traders who travelled along the range of mountains traded Spanish products but few Spanish people settled in the area (García Martínez 1987:145-146). It was only in the last decades of the nineteenth century that Mestizos began slowly colonising the region (see Signorini & Lupo 1989:31).

In that relative isolation the religious orders who settled in the area were not very strong in the colonial period, but still transformed the culture and reorganised the

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1 In my view the link between religion and culture is a possible source of conflict inside the communities with the advent of protestant groups. The religious change in those cases questions how the people who have left the Catholic church can participate in some cultural practices which are inherently Catholic. This is occurring in some Nahua communities of Cuetzalan but I do not have enough information to expand on the effect this change is producing, nor how they manifest as interethnic cultural alternatives.
Indian communities of the area, forming more compact towns to facilitate government and religious administration (see Carrasco 1991). The new towns concentrated the dispersed population from the area around a church, which became an active influence in religious and cultural transformations. The towns were named from local toponyms in an Indian language, which referred to former spatial organisations (altepetl) with the name of a Saint added, the protector of the town (Palacios 1977:39). In this case the town was named Quetzalan de San Francisco de Asis, taking as Santo Patrón the principal saint of the religious order which arrived in the area -- the Franciscans.

The Santo Patrón became a substitute for deities previously associated with the mountains close to the town. The Gods who lived in those mountains protected the group of people who live in the altepetl, and this group shared the essence of that God (see López Austin 1994: 161). The importance of the Patron Gods, as creator and protector of the people in the town, was transferred to the catholic Santo Patrón, who received the same respect and reverence. The selection of important saints and fiestas for the communities -- usually a large number of them -- was not a process simply imposed by the evangelisers, but the product of a dynamic interaction between Nahua and Spanish religious beliefs across centuries. Sometimes the fusion of a pagan deity and a Catholic saint consciously created double meanings -- for example the image that represented the Indian God was hidden under the Catholic saint or cross, or Indians switched from Catholic to Indian songs when the priest was not present (see Carrasco 1991:27). The selection of saints and fiestas was also based on coincidences in dates derived from the agricultural base of both calendars and also as a process of substitution of meanings attributed to the Gods and the saints (see Gruzinski 1994:184). This crossing of the meanings of Gods in the Indian worldview attributed to Catholic saints can explain the present relevance of the Santo Patrón to each town in Mexico, primarily in Indian areas.

Religious fiestas in Indian regions externalise a continuum that comes from the prehispanic religious ceremonies of the past to fairs in the present, through a dialectical exchange of different meanings from both cultures. But what we can see in the contemporary cultural representation in the fiesta is not a simple mixing of two different cultures in a hybridisation, but an ongoing, endless, process where externalisations depend on prior interpretations, which depend on previous externalisations. The externalisations occurring now will bring about interpretations which, in their turn, will lead to further externalisations in the future (see Hannerz 1992:4). This complex view of culture is useful to better understand the complexities of the interrelation between the two processes that have interacted in a reciprocal exchange for five centuries to create the contemporary Indian and Mestizo subcultures. The acceptance of this bi-directional ongoing transformation allows us to look for new ways of thinking about what used to be interpreted in a linear way as just the result of a dominating-Spanish-national imposition on dominated-Indian-popular culture. This dynamic view of cultural dialogue coincides with the position expressed
by an Indian in Cuetzalan, who explained his dislike of some academic interpretations of Indian cultural practices that ignored Indian meanings in the present, prioritising the value of the vanished past:

\[ a \text{ fuerzas tienen que encontrar lo prehispánico en todo, como si lo de la cultura actual no valiera si no tiene conexión con lo anterior. } \]

it is as if they have the compulsion to find the prehispanic everywhere, as if the culture in the present were not good enough if it is not connected with the former one.

This comment does not mean that he denies the influence of the former prehispanic culture, but rather the over-reading of this influence onto present actions. It is as if the academic interpretation were just reproducing the same stereotype that constructs Indians as simply the result of mixing a fixed prehispanic Mesoamerican culture with Spanish culture in the past and the present. But this conception ignores everything that lies in between.

Aware of the risk of repeating the same mistake, I want to scrutinise some aspects of the evolution of Indian and Mestizo cultures. I will be looking not to the old way of interpreting signs -- Mesoamerican versus Western -- but at how those signs are used and reflected in what can be seen as the modern indigenous religion. This religion has a long history. I do not deny its Mesoamerican origin, but I want to emphasise its continuous transformation from the one formed in the interethnic encounter centuries ago.

**Interethnic mediator: the priest**

The role of priests as mediators acquired high importance because they occupied the same role the Indian custodians of prehispanic Gods used to have, so the priest was considered by Indians to be the person in charge of the Santo Patrón, a new one to take care of God. The same word, Teopixca, was used to name the Nahuat priest in Mesoamerican religion and the Catholic priest. His importance in general terms was reproduced and in this region the same word is still the common word for a priest. However, the role of priest/teopixca in Indian regions has not always being the same because of the different ways the mediation has occurred within the interethnic relationship. Sometimes the priest played the role of protector of Indians, at other times he was the agent who persuaded Indians to fulfil the needs of Mestizos. Sometimes Indians gave them the highest respect, at other times they rejected their intervention in what they believed were their own affairs. At all times the priest’s role has been a conflictual but important one for both groups, making the role of mediator a difficult task.

In the case of Cuetzalan, the parish centre, successive parish priests gave preference to either Mestizos or Indians in the region. These individual orientations have provoked rejection or acceptance of their directives, but not without some ambiguities due to the deep respect people feel towards religious authority. One
example mentioned to me by some Indians was the conflict that emerged in the late 1970s when a priest asked Indians to leave the organisation, which became the cooperative Tosepán Titataniske. The reason was that this Indian organisation represented a problem for rich Mestizos who controlled the selling and pricing of goods such as sugar. According to a member of the cooperative the priest at that time was allied with rich Mestizos and he accused the Indians and their advisers saying: “esos son comunistas ... y se van a ir al infierno” (those ones are communists ... and they are going to go to hell). The attitude of the priest created a dilemma for the Indians who respected the authority of the priest but also suffered from the high costs imposed by the Mestizos’ economic control. They decided to reject the priest’s threats and fight to get cheap sugar: “entre querer a Dios o querer el azúcar barata, la gente prefirió el azúcar barata” (between the love for God and the wish for cheap sugar, people preferred cheap sugar) (member of cooperative).

Not so frequent were the alliances between priests and Indians. But the priest who currently works in the Cuetzalan parish chose a new kind of mediation, reaching out to Indian people by using a pastoral plan centred on the use of the Nahuat language. His work has not been easy. The Indians are not used to being important for the priest. As the priest said “there was long period of aggression, scorn and rejection ... it is not so easy to overcome that in a moment’ (fue mucho tiempo de agresión, de desprecio, de rechazo ... no es tan fácil que de un momento ya pueda superarse). The Mestizos, for their part, felt displaced from their privileged position, which was threatened by the priest’s support for the Indians. In an interview the priest told me what some people said to him about the use of Nahuat in the mass: “cómo se les va a dar un lugar de importancia a los indios, como van a valer más que nosotros” (how is it possible to give the Indians a place of importance, how is it possible that they are valued more than us?). Although the priest claimed that Mestizos have accepted the change, they do not all respect his position, and frequently Mestizos express negative views about his activities: “las gentes pudientes de Cuetzalan no quieren al Padre” (the wealthy people of Cuetzalan do not like the priest) (Mestizo woman).

The importance of the role of the priest, Padre Herminio, as a mediator was evident in the fiesta of San Francisco, when Indians and Mestizos performed their own activities, expressing their own beliefs through the same event. They were together, but at the same time, according to the priest, “cada quien hace su fiesta aparte” (each group performs their own fiesta). In managing the religious fiesta, the task of central coordination of all activities fell to the priest and the group of clergy who work with him in the parish. They organised all the customary processions, the decoration of the church with flowers and ceras* (ceremonial candles) the activities of the mayordomos (responsible for the dancers, the music and the feasts). He also coordinated with the alcalde the decoration of the atrio and entrance of the church for the Fair of Huipil.
San Francisco fiesta.

Activities for the religious fiesta began nine days before the main event. Each day a small image of San Francisco was placed at one of the streets of Cuetzalan to be venerated by the people from each neighbourhood, who offer him flowers and music (Illustration 25). In the afternoon the image is taken back to the church in a procession along certain streets in the town, led by a boy dressed in a Franciscan robe, ringing a bell. The image is received at the church by the priest, who performs the mass while rockets are fired outside the church. Other processions are also performed in the morning by Indians who bring their saints (the little images) to visit San Francisco with flowers and candles.

These visits to the different neighbourhoods of Cuetzalan, the processions to take the image back to the church, and the afternoon mass were the responsibility of the Mestizo mayordomo, while the Indian mayordomo took charge of the traditional visits of little saints from the communities to the parish and for the morning masses. Both groups had to ensure that the images have the offering of flowers, music and firing rockets. This year (1997) there was a change because no Mestizo wanted to be mayordomo, so the priest organised different people from the town to participate in order to continue the religious tradition. The justification was that no one accepted the cargo (duty), because of the high expenses involved. This is undeniably a problem. It is an even bigger problem for Indians. However, Indians continue to accept the cargo because: “ya estamos acostumbrados ... en ningún momento podría dejar esa tradición porque nuestros abuelitos nos lo han heredado” (we are used to it ... there is never a time this tradition could be stopped because our dear elders passed it down to us) (Indian alcalde). The mayordomos have a different meaning for Indians and for Mestizos. To be a mayordomo in an Indian community is to be part of a wider social organisation. The religious duties are as important as the political ones and there is a communal network, of reciprocal exchange, that supports the one having the cargo for that year. The lack of a similar social organisation in Mestizo towns leaves the mayordomo alone with all responsibilities and very little recognition and support.

In 1997 the priest made arrangements to solve the problem by distributing the responsibilities to the different guilds of the town. So instead of a Mestizo mayordomo, there were many people participating in a way that created a social network not previously existing. The acceptance of such duties was not based on religious commitment alone, or not in all cases, because the activities also attracted attention to those involved in using the Indian image for other goals. The priest encouraged the participation of all sectors of the town. In this way, the priest’s role as mediator not only ensured the continuity of the religious event but also created a

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1 bakers and tortilleros (tortilla makers), carpenters, masons and retailers of building materials, mechanics and blacksmiths, craftsmen/women, barbers and tailors, owners of hotels and restaurants, merchants, the coffee cooperative and coffee buyers, professionals (lawyers, doctors, teachers, musicians and government workers) and charros (Mexican traditional horsemen).
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cultural and economic imperative that was appreciated by the municipal authorities. "He saved us from the arduous work of organising the dances" (nos ahorro al ayuntamiento el penoso quehacer de organizar a las danzas) (Municipal agent).

The various events organised by different groups during the fiesta were interethnic but not mutual because the activities were organised by each group separately and performed at different times and places. The only shared aspect was that all were celebrating the same saint, during the same days, going to the same church, with the same priest. But the separation of the organising groups highlighted the separation between Indians and Mestizos. According to the priest "cada quien tiene una parte ... los de aquí de Cuetzalan no pueden hacer lo que hacen los que vienen de los pueblos, que son las dansas, que son los que hacen el arreglo" (each one has a part ... the ones who come from Cuetzalan cannot do the same things as those who come from the communities, who are the dancers, who make the ornaments). This separation was more marked in previous fiestas. For example, in 1996 the priest performed one mass in Nahuat for the Indian mayordomo in the morning and another in Spanish for the Mestizos in the afternoon. The separation did not mean that people were not able to participate in all the activities; it only emphasised how the organisation by different groups kept them apart. This year the main mass for the whole town were performed in Nahuat. I interpreted this as the priest's attempt to join the groups that have been so separated in the past.

The priest's method of covering for the lack of a Mestizo mayordomo on this occasion produced new forms of interethnic interaction. Part of the responsibilities given by the priest to the different guilds included the offering of food to the dancers, and hence the Indians shared an important social event with the Mestizos. I could not tell if it went as far as Indians and Mestizos eating and drinking together, or whether it was only sharing food served by Indian servants who work in Mestizo houses and businesses.

The priest also organised and celebrated a First Communion mass for Indians and Mestizos as a shared event. Although the mass was a common ceremony there was still a clear division between the groups which expressed different forms of religious beliefs. When the participants in that ceremony left the church they spontaneously formed different groups by coming together in different family clusters. The distinction was clear at the atrio, and strongly marked in the clothes worn by the children and their relatives -- Indian or humble clothes versus. elegant Mestizo clothes. This showed a class division linked to the ethnic difference. Another difference was the line of Indian families waiting to take photographs of the children and their relatives by the altar, with the saint, flowers and ceras as backdrop (Illustration 26). The photos of Mestizos were taken mainly in the atrio or during the mass.

On the main fiesta day -- the 4th of October 1997 -- the town of Cuetzalan and San Francisco awoke at dawn with the sound of the bells and the music offered by Indians in his honour. Later, all kinds of people came together at the atrio of the
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church; some expressed their faith through music and dancing, others sold their foods or enjoyed the sight of the dancers. Some worked to construct this scene. Simultaneously, different groups, Indians as well as Mestizos, locals and outsiders, filled the same place with different social and cultural events where images, music, voices were mixed in one unique moment.

The voices of people, a loudspeaker system used for the crowning of the Queen of Huipil, and the music of dances were all displaced by the sound of words coming from the church. As the Nahuat words of the sacred songs began to reach my ears, I realised the Indian mass was beginning. The church was beautifully decorated with the flor de cucharilla and ceras at the front of the altar. A group of Indians (some dressed in traditional clothes) played and sung in Nahuat while the priest was led to the altar down the central aisle of the church by a group of Indians, one holding a large cross decorated with corn seeds of different colours. This procession also included one older woman carrying the traditional clay censer (popoxkaxitl), and the assistants to the priest, both wearing ceremonial Indian clothes. The priest and his assistant priest wore elegant white clothes embroidered with traditional Nahuat designs and necklaces made of little yellow flowers. Before the priest took his place at the altar to begin the mass the older woman blessed the altar with the censer, pointing the cross in the direction of the four cardinal points.

Intercultural meanings in religious practices

The priest read the mass in Nahuat, his words interplaying with songs that were also performed in Nahuat by the Indian choir. The only part of the mass in Spanish was the sermon. This change of language marked the sermon as a different event inside the wider event that took place in Nahuat.

The content of the sermon was centred on the story of San Francisco’s life, emphasising his struggle against envy, hatred and malice as an example to follow. The reference to his life was expected but the priest also emphasised the importance of traditional Indian practices. This contrasted with the rest of the mass that used Catholic meanings translated into the Indian language. The part in Spanish took meanings from the Nahuatl culture, while the songs mixed Indian meanings with western Catholic meanings. Some of the songs had been translated from Spanish hymns, while others were original creations of the Nahuat participants.

Nahuat meanings were expressed in different ways during the sermon. At one point the priest referred to the importance of approaching God through one’s own culture:

*No todas estas cosas externas son nuestra fe, son una señal de nuestra fe, pero debe corresponder a lo que hay en nuestro corazón. Siempre preparando todos esos elementos que son nuestra cultura, nuestra tradición ... queremos un corazón nuestro, no ajeno ... como nosotros aprendimos de nuestros mayores es como debemos corresponderle a Dios.*
Not all these external things are our faith, they are one sign of our faith, but they must correspond to what is inside our heart, always preparing all the elements which are our culture, our tradition ... we want our own heart, not an alien one ... the way we learn from our elders is the way we must respond to God (sermon 4/10/97).

He clearly refers here to the acceptance of Indian ways as legitimate forms of religious beliefs, rejecting the imposition of other cultures, ie. Spanish. It also enables the priest to justify his use of Nahuat with those who do not speak Spanish well. This was one of the things that Mestizos criticised him for, so he had to insist on the importance of this practice in a parish with an Indian majority, regardless of the fact that the principal church, the centre of the parish, is in the Mestizo town.

In emphasising the importance of Nahuat culture he especially referred to prehispanic culture, in the same way as other Mestizos regard the prehispanic as the ‘legitimate’ Indian culture. In this case, the priest took a poem from “that wise Mexican, Netzahualcoyotl” (aquel sabio mexicano, Netzahualcoyotl.) (ibid): “No se acabarán nunca las flores. No se acabarán nunca los cantos” (Never will the flowers end. Never will the songs end). It is interesting to point out here that for the ones who do not know this classic nahuat poet the only explicit indication that the author is Nahuat is his name, and even this is ambiguous. Mestizos take Nahuat names more often than Indians, as was the case with one of the Queens in the coffee Fair named Citlali (star). Furthermore, the priest’s use of “mexicano” (Mexican) was ambiguous, since it can refer to Mexicans in general or to the Aztec group that gave this name to Mexicans. This ambiguity is even stronger in this region because the Nahuat language is also named “mexicano”. However, the reference to flowers and songs as Indian offerings was transparent in the context of the fiesta. So through the use of this poem and one reference to a prehispanic codex the priest underscored the relevance of the cultural practices behind the Indian offerings in the fiesta, distinguishing the deep religious meanings underlying their actions from the superficial interpretations of them made by Mestizos:

*Hay muchas flores, pero no son adornos, son la presencia de la verdad de Dios que debe estar en nuestro corazón y que queremos que se manifieste y ponemos flores, y las velas, los cérilos en los altares, en los vestidos de los danzantes, en los vestidos de las mujeres, ponemos flores en todas partes, porque queremos esa verdad en nuestra vida [unidad en nuestra cultura, unidad en Dios] y cuando alguien se aproxima mucho a Dios le ponemos un collar y una corona de flores.*

There are many flowers, but they are not ornaments, they are the presence of the truth of God which must be in our heart and which we want to be manifested and we put flowers and candles, the special candles on the altars, in the clothes of the dancers, in the dresses of the women, we put flowers everywhere, because we want that truth in our life [unity in our culture, unity in God] and when someone is very close to God we put on him/her a necklace and a crown of flowers.
Through these statements the priest recognised and legitimised the importance Indians give to flowers. I was impressed by the quantity of flowers sold in the market during this {}_fiesta_, as they are in every Sunday market (Illustration 27). In the market it is common to see Indians exchanging flowers for some fruit like bananas or spending a significant amount of money from their meagre incomes to buy flowers for the saints in the church or for the {}_altar familiar_* (family altar, which is a normal part of every Indian house). The priest also referred to the meaning of the necklace he wore in recognition of the important role he plays as a religious authority for Indian communities.

He made another indirect reference to the Nahuat worldview by mentioning San Francisco’s poem to the sun. This saint is associated with the cult of the sun in his function as a replacement for the Mesoamerican God of the sun (Merlo 1995:92). In this case the priest only mentioned the beauty of the poem (which is written on a side wall of the church and translated into Nahuat as a song). Another related reference in his speech was to the luminous and bright quality of San Francisco’s testimony -- “{}_su testamento siempre es luminoso, siempre es brillante_*” (his testimony is always luminous, it is always bright) -- which evokes the representation of the sun associated with the halo painted in some religious images.

If the association between sun saint and sun God was relevant for the substitution of San Francisco for the prehispanic God it is not so important now. What is important is the meaning this natural element has for contemporary Indians, who are still closely related with nature through their agricultural activities. This is also the case for other saints such as San Miguel, _Santo Patrón_ of Tzinacapan, who is associated with rain/water (as we will see in the next chapter).

After the sermon, a group of child dancers -- “{}_Negritos_*” (black people) -- offered their first dance performance to honour the _Santo Patrón_. They danced at the front of the church, just below the altar. It is important to note that dancing inside church has been criticised for centuries by Spanish and Mexican Mestizos. It was even forbidden under some Catholic rules made to control Indian religious behaviour (Palacios 1977:73). I do not know when Indians of Cuetzalan began dancing in church. I have not seen any reference by Mestizos of Cuetzalan to a ban on dancing. It seems to be taken-for-granted that it is a normal Indian custom. Maybe it was a common practice in the town when few Mestizos arrived to the region in the nineteenth century, and they were too few to stop it. In the priest’s view Indians dance in order to express their love of God, and he sees the dances as sacred, as legitimate as other sacred acts inside the church.

When the children finished their dance, the older woman repeated the same ritual with the censer and then the priest continued the mass. The mass ended with

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3The only reference to a ban was made by the priest himself, mentioning someone from outside, -- a researcher -- who demanded that he stop this disrespectful action. The priest’s experience with that particular researcher made him very apprehensive during an interview I had with him.
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another procession led by the Indians carrying the cross and the censer, and with the blessing of some religious images presented by a group of Indians at the rear entrance of the church.

I was deeply impressed with the respect the priest showed toward Indian culture in this mass, and even more surprised when he said similar things to Mestizos in his mass delivered in Spanish. In doing so, the priest produced an interethnic exchange, bringing Indian meanings to the Mestizo event, legitimating the values of Indian culture through the authority of his religious position. Talking later with the priest and some other people in the town I realised this was not staged specially for the fiesta, but part of a wider work carried out by this priest and a group of Nahuas from the Indian communities.

**Interethnic process to transform dominant ideology**

The presence of Padre Herminio in this region produced a change in the way things are done in the parish of Cuetzalan. His work, immersed in the philosophy of what has been named the Plan Pastoral en lenguas indígenas (Pastoral plan in indigenous languages), has patiently incorporated Nahuat believers into the active Catholic community in the parish. He hopes to achieve this by acknowledging the culture and language of the Indians:

*No es tanto que se busque con eso tener más ganancia con la gente, que se acerque más, sino que es un derecho que desde mucho tiempo atrás está expresado ... que desde el principio y aún últimamente se ha insistido en los documentos de la iglesia, que el evangelio se tiene que encarnar en la cultura.*

It is not that we are looking to winning more people, but it is a right that has been expressed for a long time ... since the beginning and even recently it has been insisted in the documents of the church, that the gospel has to be incarnated into the culture.

The central element of his evangelisation strategy is the use of Nahuat in the mass, but he also includes other activities that refashion Indian cultural meanings, through images, ceremonies and discourses. Some of these are central to his work, while others complement it by reinforcing and repeating the importance of Indian culture. Among the complementary messages I can mention the use of images from codexes as logos for parish documents⁴. For similar reasons, in the entrance of the church the priest has on display a bilingual Nahuat-Spanish newspaper "Macehual Tonali. El sol indígena" (The Indigenous Sun), which comes out as a weekly supplement in a state newspaper.

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⁴ In the marriage advertisements for example, there is an image taken from a codex, which represents marriage, two Indians, woman and man, seated in front of each other with their clothes tied by a knot. Other images from codexes illustrate the Nahuat song book used by the choir.
His attempt to introduce Indian language into church activities began ten years earlier in the town of SantiagoYanhuilulpan, in the same municipality. There he tried to convince a group of young people who sang in a choir of the importance of singing in their own language, so that people might better understand their meanings. This was not easy as Indians were used to thinking of Spanish as the language of Catholicism. Besides, Indian languages were strongly disparaged, and some young people were not even interested in using Nahuat in their own linguistic practices. The introduction of Nahuat in the mass was seen as a backward step. A member of the choir commented that some people at the beginning said:

*El padre está haciendo algo mal que no está permitiendo que progrese nuestra juventud, que progrese nuestra gente ... está cerrando las puertas para pasarse a conocer otras cosas que tienen los mestizos, el padre quiere que nos quedemos donde estamos nada más.*

The priest is doing something wrong, which is not letting our young people progress, our people progress ... he is closing the doors for us to move on, to know other things the Mestizos have, the priest wants us to stay where we are, and nothing else.

This negative thinking about the Indian language as an obstacle to progress comes from the mainstream ideology that emphasises the dominant position of the Spanish language. It has been internalised by some Indians. However, many people resist this way of thinking and the priest was able to continue working towards his goal. After working with one group for some time he succeeded in forming a Nahuat choir, which was able to perform a few songs translated into Nahuat. The Nahuat group had to fight against their own feelings of shame, which were strongly internalised because of the devaluation of their language: *para cantar nos costó, yo [un miembro del coro] pensaba que la gente se rie de nosotros, nuestra manera de como vamos a cantar en nahuat.* (to sing in Nahuat was difficult, I [a member from the choir] thought that people would laugh at us, at the way we were going to sing in Nahuat)

Some time later the priest won the people’s confidence, working with them, wearing their clothes and learning their language. They began to trust him and recognised the possibility of their culture becoming more important in the public religious space. The words of the priest express this process:

*Ya los símbolos como el incienso, las flores, las velas, las ceras, además de los cantos y el idioma, son parte que ya -- junto con las danzas -- van ocupando el lugar que les corresponde.*

Already the symbols such as the incense, the flowers, the candles, the *ceras*, as well as the songs and the idiom, are already one part which -- along with the dances -- are now getting the place that they deserve.
The priest's work with the choir shows traces of what I think is the main transformation produced by the interethnic interaction between the priest and the Nahua people. It helps to understand the complex ways that the culture of any group can develop new representations while at the same time retaining links with previous cultural practices.

The Nahua choir, before the arrival of this priest, was just a group of young people singing in the mass Spanish songs learnt from a cassette. Padre Herminio arrived in the town and affirmed the value of Nahua culture by showing, as priest, a different attitude toward their religious beliefs, encouraging them to look for new ways of expressing themselves. The priest did not prescribe how they should do it, but opened up possibilities. They, as a group, struggling against their own interethnic experiences which have reinforced an asymmetrical relationship between languages and cultures, began a process that was not the recovery of old traditions but the creation of new Indian ways to express the transformation of their religious beliefs. These beliefs include meanings taken from different cultures -- Nahua and Spanish -- at different moments of transformation and exchange.

What I want to emphasise is the fact that the culture being transformed through this interethnic interaction (priest/Nahua group) included meanings from old Indian knowledge transmitted by the elders, meanings from the popular religion externalised by Mestizos, meanings expressed by the different priests who have worked in the region, and also national meanings expressing dominant as well as subordinated ideologies. From this complex construction of their religious beliefs they were step-by-step producing a new discourse, introduced into the Catholic practices of Indian people, but also transforming Mestizo beliefs through the acceptance of Indian culture. They are making the Catholic Church more truly catholic, that is, universal:

*para que los valores propios también participen en la transformación de la Iglesia, para que sea realmente católica, entonces quiere decir universal ... nosotros tenemos mucho que ofrecer a la catolicidad de la Iglesia para que sea realmente católica*

for their own values to also participate in the transformation of the church, so that it may be truly catholic, which means universal ... we have much to offer to the catolicity of church in order for it to be truly catholic (priest).

The mass and the songs now include translations of Spanish songs, transcriptions of prayers in Nahua by elders in the town and new songs written by them: expressing their own ways of interacting with the saints, the Virgin and Christ. A member of the choir said:

*Llegamos a poder componer con nuestras palabras, con nuestra propia mentalidad, apoyándonos con todo lo que hay a nuestro alrededor, es decir la naturaleza, los animales, el cielo, las estrellas, las frutas, las personas, la vestimenta, los cerros, el canto de los pájaros ... la mayoría de estos cantos los hicimos pensando, viendo la situación de nuestra gente*
We became able to create with our words, with our own mentality, taking support from everything around us, I mean, nature, the animals, the sky, the stars, the fruit, the people, the traditional clothes, the mountains, the singing of birds ... we make most of the songs; thinking, seeing the situation of our people.

Contrasting with the discourses created by the Indian group around their present view of life and society, the priest followed another approach. Although his work can be seen as having a different conception than the Indian choir’s about Indian culture and religious beliefs, in my view the two approaches are linked but differentiated because of the different perspective. He is not an Indian, he is a priest, with religious authority inside the region, but also subordinated within the Catholic hierarchy. Consequently, his work needs to be seen and interpreted as the result of many different exchanges at different levels, at different times, immersed in the intersection of different cultures.

*Recalling Nahuat meanings.*

The priest’s project, as expressed in some things he wrote or said, (a booklet, sermons, interview) can be linked with some of the practices of evangelists in the colonial period. However, there are also important contrasts. The evangelisers produced a religion which tried to replace Indian beliefs with Christian ways of thinking. This interethnic exchange is interpreted by some scholars such as Gruzinsky (1994) as a battle of images, carried out by means of a “simple and precise plan which was constantly repeated, a plan in two parts which joined annihilation and substitution: in the beginning the idols were destroyed ... and then the conquerors replaced them with Christian images” (page 41).

The success of the substitution had complex reasons, some related to specific strategies of negotiation used by the two groups at different moments of the interaction. Sometimes the conquerors deliberately ignored Indian practices, or Indians pretended to accept the substitution, while at other times there were sufficient similarities between beliefs for them to be mixed. The use of Indian words to refer to Christian beliefs was widespread, and Indians continued to give prehispanic meanings to Christian concepts. These “confusions-substitutions” (ibid:107) produced new and unique religious meanings. This practice was especially successful in the case of the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose apparition to an Indian in the sixteenth century has been successfully used at different times by the Church to appeal to Indians as well as Spanish, Mestizos; all groups that make up Mexican society. Even today this virgin is called *Tonantzin* Guadalupe, combining the Mesoamerican name of the Goddess and the Catholic name given to the Virgin in her Mexican incarnation.

The work of Padre Herminio did not begin at the moment of the first contact between two different religions but worked with the results of that clash after a process of transformation that had continued for more than 500 years. He began to work with a form of religion that has hidden, excluded and devalued the beliefs and
cultural expressions of Indians. His goal is to convince Indians and Mestizos of the relevance and deep religious beliefs involved in the Indian worldview. He is not trying to convert pagans into Christians, as was the aim during the conquest. What he is doing is to show how respectfully the Indians offer their culture to God, not needing to deny or hide it. He clearly expressed this in an introduction to the booklet of the songs by the choir that he edited:

Los pueblos indígenas de hoy cultivan valores humanos de gran significación.... Estos valores son fruto de la "Semillas del Verbo" que estaban ya presentes y obraban en sus antepasados para que fueran descubriendo la presencia del creador en todas sus criaturas: el sol, la luna, la madre tierra, etc.

The indigenous people today cultivate human values of great meaning.... These values are the result of the "Seeds of the Word" which were already present and worked by their ancestors so that they discovered the presence of the creator in all his creatures: the sun, the moon, mother earth, etc.

He is not free from the mainstream ideology that sees the value of Indian culture in its ‘glorious’ prehispanic past. He uses those images in his work extensively. His use of the same stereotypes can be interpreted as his way to win acceptance for Indian culture, but it could be also (and I am convinced of this from his fascination for Mesoamerican knowledge) his own difficulties in expressing the value of contemporary Indian culture without that ideological tool. By continuously referring to prehispanic images and knowledge, he opens new possibilities which Indians can take up to produce their own changes, giving a positive value to their present practices. His use of prehispanic references with Catholic meanings is different than the missionaries. Missionaries and Indians during the colonial period hid Indian beliefs and replaced them with Christian forms. Padre Herminio recovered Mesoamerican meanings to show they are compatible with Catholic meanings, and hence Indian practices can be interpreted as deeply Christian. This aim is expressed in the same document:

Nosotros los agentes de Pastoral de la parroquia de San Francisco de Asís, Cuetzalan, Pue. ofrecemos el presente folleto para la Misa en náhuatl, procurando promover la incluturación de la liturgia, que asuma con aprecio los símbolos, ritos y expresiones religiosas compatibles con el claro sentido de la fe, manteniendo el valor de los símbolos universales y en armonía general de la iglesia.

We, ministers of the people of the parish of San Francisco of Assisi, Cuetzalan, Pue. offer this booklet for the mass in Nahuat, trying to promote the liturgy in another culture, which must assume with respect symbols, rituals and religious expressions compatible with the clear sense of faith, maintaining the value of its universal symbols and in the general harmony of the church.
Reinterpreting symbols

The priest’s interpretation of the pastoral plan can be seen in his sermons. In them he always includes some reference to Indian culture as “nuestra cultura” (our culture), using the same possessive independently of whether the main interlocutor is Indian or Mestizo. In general he employs two different strategies to reinforce Indian values. One is the use of prehispanic meanings to re-signify Catholic practices, the other his explicit legitimation of Indian practices by seeing their universal religious meanings. I will use some of his discourse to show how he is transforming religious manifestations in Cuetzalan, and also more widely, in this case, by looking at the pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe, in Mexico City.

He used re-signification, the first strategy, in a sermon on the meaning of the fiesta of the nativity. To prepare people to understand the significance of Christ’s nativity he explained the meaning of the structure of the cross referring to the colours used in a cross made of corn seeds and in a crown of flowers he constructed as a didactic symbol. He related these meanings to the ritual performed by the censer at the beginning of the mass (drawing two circles and blessing the four cardinal points). In both cases the Indian symbols, of colours and directions, were used to bring out the importance of the cross in Catholic as in Indian beliefs. In this way he emphasised the absence of conflict between them: “todo esto tiene un gran simbolismo, es parte de nuestra cultura ... no hay ningún choque, sino hay una relación amorosa perfecta” (all this has great symbolism, it is part of our culture ... there is no conflict but a perfect loving relationship).

The priest linked the meanings of Indian and Catholic symbols through some well known Mesoamerican allusions, such as the corners of universe, the directions marked by the cardinal points, the reference to bones and the meaning of colours in codexes (see López Austin 1994). There is the same kind of association in the Nahuatl choir songbook, illustrated with drawings from codexes referring to the Mesoamerican cosmology. A rich example is the back cover of this book which has a prehispanic image titled in Nahuat “Tatioschihuitl Nochipa Totahitzin”, and in Spanish: “Los rumbos del universo y sus divinidades” (The directions of the universe and their divinities) (Codex Fejervary Mayer). The drawing complemented with the poem by Netzahualcoyotl, mentioned above, translated into Spanish by a specialist in classic Nahuatl, Angel Maria Garibay (Illustration 28).

He combines these sets of meanings in one sermon in both Nahuatl and Spanish masses:

Esta cruz que está hecha con los colores del maíz está ya representando estos colores. Hacia el oriente, [en la corona de adviento] la parte de arriba con esta vela ponemos el inicio del camino de Dios que para nuestros antiguos es representado por el color rojo que aparece en las danzas, y en otros momentos, es el color del sol también, el camino del sol, octi totatzin cuautonatzi, el camino de Dios. Ese camino de Dios que se inicia en el oriente concluye en el poniente donde aparece el color morado que también está señalado con las flores en cada una de las bases de las
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velas ... entonces hacia el poniente está el morado oyahui, es elegir el camino de Dios, pero también tiene el color de la noche donde Dios descansa pero también donde Dios lucha contra las tienieblas para seguir dando vida a sus hijos. Podría también llamarse Yohualichan. Es otro símbolo importante que completa el camino divino, el camino de Dios, octi Totatzin, es el primer camino que está formando también ya dos rincones del universo. Después el camino de la humanidad, el camino de las personas, octi tatayot, el camino de todos nosotros que va desde el sur, con el color amarillo, donde inicia con el fuego, con la vida, con la energía, la vida humana ... está también ya con el color del maíz que está hacia el sur [en la cruz], ese camino va a terminar en el norte, donde hay ... el hielo, y el color es blanco, el color de los huesos, el color de las cenizas, a lo que se reduce la vida humana. Ahí termina entonces nuestra vida, entonces ese es nuestro camino señalado así pero están puestos en los cuatro rincones del universo donde se forma esa cruz precisamente, forman esa cruz que está también formada con ese símbolo. El camino de Dios y el camino de la humanidad se cruzan y forman una cruz.

This cross made with the colours of corn already represents those colours, [in the Christmas crown] toward the east, with this candle at the top, we begin the road\textsuperscript{5} to God, which for our ancestors is represented by the red colour, which is in the dances, and at other times it is also the colour of the sun, octi totatzi cuautonatzi, the road of God. That road of God begins in the east and finishes in the west, where the purple colour appears, which is also symbolised through the flowers in each of the candles. Then, towards the west is the purple, oyahui.... This is to choose the way of God but it also has the colour of night, where God rests, but it also where God fights against darkness to continue to give life to his children. It could also be named Yohualichan. There is another important symbol to complete the divine way, the way of God, octi Totatzin. It is the first road that also forms the two corners of the universe. Afterwards it becomes the road of humanity, the road of people, octi tatayot, the road of us all, which goes from the south, with the colour yellow, where the fire began, with life, with energy, human life ... it is also already with the colour of the corn which is to the south. That road finished in the north, where there is ice and the colour is white, the colour of bones, the colour of the ashes to which human life is reduced. Our life finishes there, so that is our road signified in that way but they are placed in the four corners of the universe where that cross is precisely formed, where this cross is also formed with that symbol. The way of God and the way of humanity intersect and they form one cross (sermon 30/11/97).

The same sermon, and others, legitimates Indian values by referring to contemporary Indian practices. The priest did not give them a standard interpretation from a Christian point of view, but connected Indian symbolism to Catholic religious beliefs. He referred to symbols in common use in Indian ceremonies related with

\textsuperscript{5} It is difficult to give a close translation of the verbal game the priest plays giving a double sense to the word \textit{camino}. He uses this word in the spiritual sense and in the spatial sense as a way of juxtaposing the Nahuat and Catholic meanings.
community life (rituals for different occasions like blessing a house, important ritual ceremonies related to birth, marriage, death, and also traditional agricultural rituals):

*por eso es que en muchas celebraciones desde el principio de la vida aparece el incienso, marcando la cruz y los dos círculos o también las velas, las flores, siempre acompañan estos símbolos nuestras celebraciones*

that is why in many celebrations from the day of birth on we see the incense, the pointing the cross to the cardinal points, the two circles, also the candles, the flowers, these symbols are always present in our celebrations (ibid.).

The use of Catholic interpretations to justify the value of contemporary Indian cultural practices is clearly shown in the next passage:

*aí tambien lo enseñaban los antiguos. El que quiera ser el más grande, Dios los ayudó a entender, tiene que ser el servidor, por eso crearon muchos servicios, servicios tales como las danzas, manovuelta ... para hacer efectivo ese servicio y solamente así se puede permanecer en ese lugar sagrado*

The ancestors also taught thus. The one who wanted to be the greatest, God helped them to understand, must be the one who serves, that is why they create many forms of service, services such as the dances, manovuelta* [reciprocal exchange of work] ... to make that service effective, and only in that way is it possible to remain in that sacred place (ibid).

In the case of this sermon -- given by the priest in a Sunday mass -- the audience might be Indian or Mestizos, both groups with more or less knowledge of Indian customs, maybe even sharing some of them. However, they will interpret the priest’s words differently depending on their position on the value, or lack of value, of Indian beliefs. Indians may interpret the priest as respecting their devalued beliefs as they did with his use of Nahuat in the mass, or perhaps see this as a way of transforming Indian ideology by refuctionalising older practices. Mestizos might see his statements as a threat to the taken-for-granted view of their prominence as one said when rejecting his closeness to Indians. But if the priest succeeds in his aim, this could transform Mestizo culture to adopt Indian cultural beliefs.

Besides the importance of transforming cultural conceptions, the participation of Indians involved in the interaction is also active and important. The wishes of both, Indian groups and the priest, intertwined to shape the way a pastoral plan propounded at the national level was developed in the region. I will illustrate this process through looking at one particular event, a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

**Indian gifts to the Virgin and the nation**

Many Indian groups throughout Mexico attach great importance to making a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Guadalupe at the main sanctuary erected on the site where
the apparition took place near the centre of Mexico City. Every day, and especially on December 12, thousands of people from different parts of Mexico travel to venerate the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This image is said to be the original one which appeared miraculously on the tilma* (cotton cloth) of an Indian as proof the Virgin appeared to him.

Padre Herminio conceived the pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe by the Indians of Cuetzalan as an important climax in his pastoral plan for Cuetzalan and hence his actions and speeches in this ceremony are full of the themes and images I have already discussed. The differences from other ceremonies were just minor elaborations of the image: full traditional clothes, new guaraches for everybody, the maxtahuat headdress used now by young women singers and not only by the old women, and no plastic sandals which they frequently use instead of the traditional bare feet. The priest was also dressed differently, using manta (white cotton fabric) trousers and shirt and guaraches -- different from those of the Nahua but clearly associated with Indian dress.

The use of elegant Indian clothes by everybody, the usual traditional symbols (cross with corn seeds, censer, ceras), the dances that are considered prehispanic (Voladores and Quetzales) and the special liturgical clothes embroidered in Indian style made the event spectacular. However, the success of this event was not only due to the priest's effort. This event was proposed by Indians to satisfy their own wishes, beliefs and meanings. What I want to emphasise here is the active participation of Indians in performing an event to connect Indian interethnic behaviour with national interethnic constructions of ideology. The Guadalupe Virgin has been, and is, an important symbol in the construction of Mexican identity.

The cult of the Guadalupe Virgin is a major element in Mexican religious beliefs, and even more strongly in Indian religious beliefs. For Indians the Virgin, Tonantzín Guadalupe, is the most important sacred image for all communities. They regard this as a belief shared by all Mexicans:

La fiesta más importante de todas las comunidades es el 12 de diciembre, la conmemoración de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe ... yo lo estoy pensando así porque lo que es la fiesta de Guadalupe es a nivel nacional.

The most important fiesta for all the communities is the 12th of December, the commemoration of Our Lady of Guadalupe ... I think this because the fiesta of Guadalupe is at the national level (alcalde de costumbres)

Some scholars have studied the importance of the Guadalupe Virgin. They tried to understand the facts behind the great success of her miracle in the construction of national identity at many different times, and why her importance has lasted till now: "The myth and the cult have been transformed and they continue to be transformed, as are their social and political significance" (Zires 1992:57). Historians have tried to understand the Guadalupe phenomenon, attempting a meticulous reconstruction of the process which created the Guadalupe myth mainly in order to prove it was not a miracle -- as popular stories claimed -- but the creation of a new
cult in the context of policies of evangelisation (see Lafaye, 1995). Writings from this standpoint see the Guadalupe phenomenon as a typical act to replace Indian idols with Christian images. According to Gruzinski -- interested in the meaning and function of images in the history of Mexico -- the friars created this cult through their typical strategy of masking Indian beliefs with Christian forms. This effect was achieved through the "superimposition of places and the closeness of names, it exploited roots in the land and in their memories, it is based on a progressive confusion-substitution in their minds" (1994:107).

The apparition of the Guadalupe Virgin, officially dated in 1531, happened near the centre of Mexico City at the hill of Tepeyac, where there was an ancient sanctuary devoted to the Goddess of Earth Cihuacoati Tonantzin (Lady of the snake, Goddess Mother) (Bartra 1987:173). Indians used to come from afar to offer sacrifices to this Goddess. Gruzinski argues that this substitution was directed not only to Indians, but also to the Spanish, and to make them appreciate the symbol, the Virgin was named Guadalupe as one of the most important Spanish virgins: "more loved by the conquerors than any other" (Gruzinski 1994: 43).

Regardless of its truth or otherwise the story of the miracle spread, and the place where the Virgin appeared became an important shrine for both Indians and Spanish. One version of the story of the miracle was recorded in Nahuat by an Indian, Antonio Valeriano, between 1540 and 1550. Another similar version is attributed to the chaplain of the sanctuary Luis Laso de la Vega in 1669, whose aim was to recover the story, which was losing vitality (Zires 1992:60, Gruzinski 1994:123). The first version, also in Nahuat, the Nican Mopohua (which has been copied successively since the sixteenth century), tells the story of the apparition of Tonantzin Guadalupe and the miraculous image which proved its truth. Being in Nahuat it gained credibility as the true story and even now is considered an important source of knowledge about the event even for Catholic authorities.

The version used by the priest of Cuetzalan came from the Nican Mopohua. Padre Herminio took some fragments from it and included them in a new booklet of songs and the mass in Nahuat, which he reproduced for the pilgrimage to the Mexico City Basilica. He also mentioned the Nican Mopohua in his sermon during the mass in the Basilica. For this priest, for the Indians and many other Mexicans the miracle is not in doubt. The Virgin appeared to an Indian and the image is the proof of the miracle.

One version of the story was told to me by my family and in the Catholic school I attended when I was a child. I have no idea if this story comes from the Nican Mopohua or not, but I am sure it is well known by many Mexicans, Catholic or not. There are, of course, different versions, with other details and other stories associated with the miracle (other versions are analysed by Zires 1992 and Galera

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6 There are different opinions about the author of this work. Some scholars consider it a collective work, which includes Valeriano as one of the authors (Galera 1991).
1991). Probably many of them do not include the Nahuat name of the Virgin. I do not remember if I have known the name since childhood but when I read it as a scholar it was very familiar. This is the story as I remember it:

An Indian named Juan Diego was walking along a path coming from his house on the other side of a hill. It was very early in the morning and still dark. He heard beautiful music, which seemed to be from the song of birds coming from the forest. He followed the music and saw a bright light illuminating the darkness. He approached the place and was blinded by a very bright light. When he was able to open his eyes he saw a beautiful young woman who addressed him in his language. She introduced herself saying that she was his Mother, Guadalupe, and asked him to go to see the Bishop and tell him what he had seen, and ask the religious authorities to build a shrine for her.

As he was an Indian he doubted someone as important as the Bishop, would receive him, but he obeyed and went to see the Bishop. After many attempts, tired at the Indian’s insistence, the Bishop received him and heard his story. Of course he did not believe it but asked Juan Diego to bring some proof. He was very sad not knowing what to do, so he went to pray at the place the Virgin appeared before. While he was praying he saw the light again, coming from behind him. He told her the Bishop’s demand that he prove he was not inventing the story. The Virgin asked him not to worry, just to get back to the Bishop, and on the way back he should collect some roses to take them to the priest. Juan Diego protested because he knew well there were no roses at that hill but the Virgin insisted, telling him to trust her.

Juan Diego set off back to the church, and on the way he found a garden of roses he had never seen before. He put the flowers in his ayate* (cloth made of fibre used to carry heavy objects) and continued on his way to see the Bishop. When the Bishop received him he reported what the Virgin had asked him to do, and then dropped the roses on the floor. The Bishop was astonished. There was an extraordinary image of a virgin painted on the ayate by the roses! The image was the picture of a beautiful young Indian woman with a halo radiating around her, standing on the moon and covered by a robe of stars. The image painted by the roses is the same, which is still in the Basilica of Guadalupe, and it is highly venerated by the faithful. It is truly a beautiful image and thousands of people go there every year to see with their own eyes the miraculous image. (Illustration 29)

The Basilica, which holds the image is still the most important sanctuary in the country, the religious heart of Mexico. This was where the Indians of Cuetzalan decided to go to offer their songs.

The idea of this pilgrimage was an Indian initiative proposed some time ago to Padre Herminio. One of the members of the choir said:

*Yo pensaba ... sería bueno ir a peregrinar a México a cantarle nuestros cantos a la Virgen. Creo yo que la Virgen se expresó en Náhuatl ... siempre mi intención era que fueramos a alabarle a la Virgen, ir a cantarle. Siento que la Virgen se pondría muy contenta así como habló, como se expresó con Juan Diego.
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I thought ... it would be good to go on a pilgrimage to Mexico City to sing our songs to the Virgin. I believe that the Virgin spoke in Nahuat ... my intention always was for us to go to praise the Virgin, to go to sing to her. I feel that the Virgin would be very happy, just as when she spoke, she talked with Juan Diego.

From this moment until the day they succeeded in going to the Basilica, this group of Indians pressed the priest to do whatever was needed to present their offerings to the Virgin. Some actions had to be performed by the priest, for example getting permission to perform a mass in Nahuat in that place. Other activities, such as getting money for the trip, new clothes and guaraches, and the ornaments, became duties the group took on happily. But the most important part in their view was the preparations they had to make:

_Tuvimos algunas preparaciones ... para ir meditando un poco sobre la significación de los signos, de los signos que tiene la misa, los cantos, pensando, ensayando, como que nos llevó tiempo y yo decía, esto es parte de nuestra peregrinación. Nuestra peregrinación ha iniciado desde que lo pensamos ... desde ese momento empezamos a peregrinar hacia la Virgen._

We made some preparations ... to meditate a little about the meaning of the signs, of the signs, which the mass has, the songs, thinking, practising, it took a long time and I said, this is part of our pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage began from the moment we thought of it ... since that moment we began to our pilgrimage toward the Virgin.

This statement shows clearly the deep and active exchanges between the Indian group and the priest needed to construct an event which displayed a new form of religious beliefs arising from interethnic exchanges in a dialogue that moved from the past to the present, from the national ideology to the local ideology, from Catholic religious beliefs to the Indian worldview. They offer the product of this dialogue as an alternative to the mainstream religion, which denies or despises the Indian ways. In my view, this dialogue restored some of the elements from which the strength of this symbol derives, as a major representation of national identity that combines in a single icon the diversity of cultures that have formed Mexico. In performing this event this group of Indians and Mestizos reinforced the Indian sources of this unifying symbol for the country. They emphasised, or reinterpreted, the narrative of the miracle through Indian meanings and through their use of Nahuat as the language of signification.

The priest assisted in the re-signification of the narrative in his sermon where he reinterpreted the story by reference to the meanings of the symbols they were performing:

_Cuando Juan Diego va a buscar las cosas divinas en Tlatelolco, él es originario de Cuautitlan señala ahí un camino que va de sur al norte, es el camino de la humanidad, es el camino de Juan Diego ... y él en ese camino que sigue se encuentra_
que lo llama la Virgen desde el camino de Dios, del oriente al poniente; el relato nos habla de un ambiente muy precioso en el que Juan Diego, cuyo nombre es Cuauhtlatehuatzin, originario del lugar de las águilas, es decir en la tierra de los ángeles. va a empezar con el evento para un encuentro maravilloso de amor, de Dios con nosotros, a través de Tonantzín Guadalupe. El ambiente en el que ella se va a presentar está cubierto de las cosas más bellas que hay en nuestra patria, primero ella se hace presente desde donde sale el sol... eso ya es un signo muy especial de que se trata de un acontecimiento divino. Ella al hacer presente este mensaje va envuelta en flores y cantos... Juan Diego se encamina a la madrugada... y cuando la Virgen le empieza a dar ese precioso mensaje... empiezan a aparecer los primeros rayos del sol y ella aparece envuelta del sol. Ella se va a presentar a Juan Diego y le va a dar el nombre que la reconoce en cinco términos conocidos por nuestros antiguos mexicanos... estos términos reconocidos por nuestros pueblos muchos años atrás denotan una profunda religiosidad... lo que ellos anhelan encontrar allí está descubriéndose en esas flores y cantos y la Virgen María lleva en su seno esa preciosa verdad, señalada por una flor muy especial... una flor pequeña de cuatro pétalos que para nosotros tiene un significado muy importante. Hoy con el popoxkaxi hemos hecho esta señal porque siempre que se trata de una cosa sagrada nosotros la ponemos junto a Dios... peregrinando para ponernos en el corazón de Tonantzín Guadalupe, en el centro de la cruz que simbolizamos con la cruz de incienso, con la cruz de las flores... venimos a ofrecer una ofrenda especial con nuestros cantos... sesenta cantos propios en náhuatl, nuestra celebración en náhuatl con algunas características propias... así hemos peregrinado a este lugar santísimo.

When Juan Diego went to look for divine things in Tlatelolco, he came from Cuauhtitlan, he indicated a way which goes from north to south, it is the way of humankind, it is the way of Juan Diego, and on the way he followed he found that the Virgin called him from the way of God, from east to west, the story tell us of a beautiful ambience where Juan Diego, whose name is Cuauhtlatehuatzin, from the place of eagles, meaning “in the land of angels”... he was going to begin with the event that would lead to a wonderful encounter with love, with our God, through Tonantzín Guadalupe. The ambience where she would appear was covered with the most beautiful things there are in our native land First she appeared from where the sun rises... that is already a very special sign which shows it was a divine event. While giving this message she was covered with flowers and songs... Juan Diego began walking at sunrise... and when the Virgin began giving him that precious message... the first rays of sun could be seen and she appeared encircled by the sun. She encountered Juan Diego and she gave him the name which identifies her, by the five names known to our ancient Mexicans... these terms, well known by our people many years ago, signify deep religious beliefs... what they wanted to find there was to find in those flowers and songs what the Virgin Mary has in her breast, that precious truth, signalled by a very special flower... a little flower with four petals which for us has a very important meaning. Today, with the censer we have this sign because when something is sacred we put it close to God... going on a pilgrimage to put ourselves in the heart of Tonantzín Guadalupe, in the centre of the cross, which we symbolise with the cross of incense, with the cross of flowers... we come to offer a very special offering with our songs... sixty songs in Nahuat of our own, our
celebration in Nahuat with some specific characteristics of our own.... In this way we have come on a pilgrimage to this very holy place (sermon 17/11/97 at Mexico City).

In this fragment of his sermon there is a clear mixing of Catholic and Mesoamerican signs. I will point out three instances I consider very illustrative:

1) The cross as a Catholic symbol is represented in the image of the Virgin, Christ is interpreted in terms of the Mesoamerican worldview through the metaphor of the paths that connect the four directions of the universe. This is symbolised in the ritual of the incense and the direction followed by Juan Diego (North-South), which crossed the way of God, which follows the movement of the sun (East-West).

2) The interpretation of the name of Juan Diego, fusing eagles with angels.

3. The interpretation of the bright halo that encircles Catholic images of saints and virgins as the light of the sun, which connects with prehispanic solar deities.

The priest’s re-semantisation was redundantly conveyed in the performance of the Indians, dancing inside the Church as a legitimate form of prayer, repeating the blessing with the censer making the two circles and pointing the cross to the four cardinal points. It was also expressed in a poem recited at the end of the mass by an Indian. The poem was attributed to Pala Agustín -- the Indian leader of Cuetzalan in the last century (chapter 3). It was performed first in Nahuat and then translated into Spanish for the audience who did not understand Nahuat:

* * *

Niña de Cuetzalan.
Oh Niña que todo el universo te manifiesta,
tú eres nuestra niña que tanto alumbras.
Tú eres Blanca como la Virgen, como la Diosa luna,
Goddess,
la luna que alumbró el cielo maravilloso.
Niña del Talokan Nana, del Talokan Tata,
ellos te cuidan.
A nadie eres igual Niña de Cuetzalan
¡Niña de México!

Daughter of Cuetzalan.
Oh, Girl, the whole universe manifests you,
you are our daughter who illuminates so much,
You are white as the Virgin, as the Moon.
the moon which illuminates the wonderful sky.
Daughter of Talokan Nana, of Talocan Tata,
they care for you.
No-one is your equal, daughter of Cuetzalan.
Daughter of Mexico!

In this performance the meaning of the Virgin Mary (*Tonantzin*, in the Nahuat version) is permeated with the Indian worldview. This is clearly shown by the reference to the moon Goddess and more importantly by including the *Talokan Nana, Talokan Tata* as her parents and protectors. The *Talokan* * --* according to the Mesoamerican worldview and still in contemporary Nahuat beliefs -- is the sacred heart of the earth, the sacred mountain where all nature’s elements (water, wind, thunder) and living beings come from. It is also the place where the ancestors and Gods live, where all the richness of seeds is guarded and also where the animistic force (*tonal*) of a sick person can be lost and found by Indian healers (see Aramoni 1990, López Austin 1994).

Apart from the Indians and Mestizos from Cuetzalan, the audience for that mass were people who happened to be there to visit the Virgin. Some were attracted
by the magnificence of the Indian image, and deeply impressed and emotional (as I 
was myself) by the strong feeling of devotion they were expressing. There were also 
people from the Basilica who were seeing a Nahuat mass for the first time in the 
history of this sanctuary, or so it seemed, the first time the Virgin heard the songs in 
the language she spoke to Juan Diego, after more than five centuries.

I considered this event an important manifestation of Indian creativity, one 
among others. The Indians of Cuetzalan came to Mexico City in 1997, the same year 
as the Indians of Chiapas. The Nahuas of Cuetzalan, in performing this pilgrimage, 
symbolically took over the ‘soul’ of Mexican religious beliefs, the Basilica of 
Guadalupe, proposing a new view of the relationship between Indians and Mexicans 
by recalling old meanings that have been forgotten in the significant images of our 
common culture. The Indians of Chiapas, marching to the Zócalo of Mexico took the 
‘heart’ of the city, the Zócalo, and gave new meanings to the flag and our heroes, 
using them as symbols of the Zapatista movement, creating a new relationship that 
had never been constructed before between Indians and Mestizos from the capital 
city, as brothers (see chapter 2). That year people remembered again that the symbols 
of Mexican identity still represent the Indian Peoples.

Mexican culture transformed by the Indian presence.

The effect produced on the culture of Mexico by the presence of Indians, 
rendered visible and integral to Mexican society, also began to influence Mestizo 
imagery at the national level. One example relevant to the topic of this chapter is a 
poster on sale after the visit of one Zapatista woman to Mexico City, the first public 
visit by the Zapatistas. (Illustration 30). The poster proposes, in my view, a new 
meaning for this icon of the national identity, the Guadalupe Virgin, a new image of 
Mexican woman to substitute for the image of the Virgin. The woman symbolises the 
Mother/Goddess, drawing on the Guadalupe iconography and its social meanings. But 
the woman is now a female Zapatista, Ramona. She is clearly wearing guerrilla 
clothes, with the characteristic black wool helmet of the Zapatistas. But instead of a 
gun she carries a flute. In this way the poster is proposing a new image of our identity 
which retains some signs associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe but gives her a 
contemporary meaning.

In this case the new icon of the Virgin keeps some Indian features: she is still 
Indian and like them she speaks an Indian language (though not Nahuat), the sun and 
the moon surrounded her. Music is included in the narrative to signify visually the 
desire to replace guns or war with the songs of peace. But struggle as an ever-present 
meaning in Indian life is still signalled by her clothes and the text written below 
("ojos de lucha" eyes of struggle). The topic of struggle is omnipresent in the Indian 
view of life (as we saw in the Indian history of Cuetzalan), and it is emphasised here 
as deeply embedded in our culture and history, not resolved by the systematic denial 
of its existence. Indians have had to endure conflict throughout their history, and the
Image unavailable due to copyright restrictions.

Please refer to print copy
culture that emanates from them as part of Mexican society has been hidden (see chapter 1), but now it is brought into the light, in this famous icon and its transformations by Mestizos and Indians in a new stage of interethnic dialogue.

In the traps of the Holy Devil.

In the context of the changes produced by the Zapatista movement, the interethnic dialogue in Cuetzalan has also reached Mexican ideology in other levels of society. To show how the image of Indianess has been transformed I will analyse the film *Santo Luzbel* (Miguel Sabido, 1996. México) produced by a national film company (INMECINE) having Cuetzalan as its setting (Illustration 31). This is a complex cultural text made to be shown in commercial cinemas in Mexico, its theme interethnic conflict in an Indian town. It is one of the few commercial films in an Indian language with subtitles in Spanish, a fact that in itself marks a change in values around Indianness. This is so strong an indication of change because previously Indian languages have been so thoroughly excluded from the mass media, where Spanish is the dominant code throughout the country. The fact that in this case the film is in Nahuat with Spanish subtitles puts the Indian language in the same 'box' as foreign language films. Some Mexican sectors could interpret this as a negative view to treat a language, which has been spoken in the territory for centuries as foreign. But by doing it, it gives the Indian language the same recognition as the prestigious languages of the first world, giving Indian speakers the right to express themselves in their own words at the national level, to speakers of another language.

The film focuses on the different religious views of Indians and Mestizos, but it also shows social problems arising from the conflictual interaction between the groups. In this case I am interested in the image of Indianness which was projected to the national audience and the problems that emerged when someone decided to show the 'Indian reality' in an interethnic text, produced with the assistance of some people from an interethnic place; in this case Cuetzalan. According to one Mestizo woman who collaborated with the director, he wanted “to produce an image which was not an idealisation of indigenous people, but nor a reverse image which only shows the problems commonly attributed to them” From this comment, he tried to build up (to show to uninformed audiences) what he believed was a fairer image of Indianess.

The film was entered for national and international competitions and it won a prize in the *fiesta de Mar del Plata*, 1997. The abstract of the film for this contest is as follows:

*La historia de el Santo Luzbel transcurre en la realidad mexicana, y retrata la vida de un pueblo indígena que conserva su fervor religioso a través de la tradición mesoamericana de los coloquios (conceito teatral de los frailes franciscanos evangelizadores para las ceremonias religiosas en sus diferentes expresiones: pastorales, epifanías y pascuas). Por medio de estos coloquios los indígenas se acercan a los dioses para que sobrevivan y vivan con ellos, en armonía y felicidad.*
Illustration 31: Advertisements for the film Santo Luizbel

(1a Jornada April 24, 1997:15) (La Jornada 1997 May 3:15)
En el Santo Luzbel se refleja como se lleva a cabo uno de estos coloquios, a través de un relato en el que un grupo se compromete a realizar dicha fiesta movido por la tradición y la fe religiosas. Para ello, deberán superar graves obstáculos debido a la incomprensión y a los malentendidos que implica el diálogo transcultural. La película fue filmada en poblaciones de una de las más bellas regiones de México, rica en su diversidad cultural: La Sierra de Puebla

The story of Santo Luzbel unfolds in the Mexican reality. It depicts the life of an indigenous group who maintain their religious ardour through the Mesoamerican tradition of colloquies (a theatrical concept derived from the Franciscan evangelists towards religious ceremonies in different modalities: pastorals, epiphanies, and passion plays). Through these colloquies the indigenous people approach the Gods, so that they may survive and live with them in harmony and happiness. Santo Luzbel shows how they create one of these colloquies through a story about a group, which undertakes to create a fiesta, moved by religious tradition and faith. On the way they must overcome great obstacles arising from incomprehension and misunderstanding implicated in transcultural dialogue. The film was shot in towns in one of the most beautiful regions of Mexico, rich in cultural diversity: the range of Puebla. (www.incaa.com/fiesta/incaa/espanol/luzbe-es.htm).

From this description we could suppose the film shows a more or less common story of Indian life in one among many places in Mexico. However, we also understand that the director is making his construction of Indianness through a theatrical genre from the colonial period, the coloquio 7. What he says sounds contradictory. He says a coloquio comes from “Mesoamerican traditions” yet it is a concept invented by the friars. The apparent contradiction shows the kind of dilemma that frequently appears when Mexicans think about Indianness. We are not clear what is Mesoamerican and what is Spanish but we need to move between the two to produce a ‘coherent’ description of Indianness. The reason is probably that we are trained carefully to think of our culture as a static mixture of two civilisations from the past, not allowed in our subjectivity to think positively about contemporary constructions of Indian or popular culture, without referring back to the ‘glorious’ prehispanic past or the Spanish ‘high’ civilisation.

The rest of the passage retells the story and the surrounding conditions of Indian life. From my wider knowledge of the place where the action is set, I know it is a fiction which draws on actual characters and events from Cuetzalan combined with ideological constructions (positive and negative) of Indianness, depicting social agents who are common in interethnic interaction in Mexico like priests and Mestizo municipal authorities.

To anchor my interpretation of the film I begin with a brief description of the story:

7 Coloquio: “composición literaria dialogada. En México forma escénica popular en que suele haber cantos y danzas” (dialogic literary work. In Mexico it is a popular theatrical form in which it is common to have songs and dances) (Diccionario Porrúa de la Lengua Española 1998:186).
The story is centred on the problems facing a group of Nahuat Indians from a town named Yohualichan (an actual town with a prehispanic ruin). The story is driven by the importance of religious beliefs in Indian traditions. In this instance, their first problem is the fact that they as young Indians do not know how to perform a traditional dance, because they did not learn from their parents, having been negligent as youths. Moreover, the notebook, which explains their chosen dance, is written in ceremonial Nahuat and they do not know how to read it. They feel pressure to do it now because they believe the Saint, San Miguel, is angry because they did not fulfil the vow of the elders transmitted to them to perform the dance on the day of his fiesta. As a consequence the Saint has produced calamities in their life such as sickness, death, the stealing of their land, and insanity. Another problem they have to deal with is their relationship with the parish priest, an old man with negative stereotypical views about Indians and their religious beliefs. To be able to perform the coloquio, in this case a dance, they need authorisation from the priest who is the ‘owner’ of the church in their town. The difficulties they face in getting that authorisation arise from differences in cultural beliefs (Catholic versus Nahuat), especially triggered by the fact that the name written in the notebook for the dance makes the Devil a saint: Santo Luzbel.

A young priest who is fond of the Indians and their culture mediates the conflict between the Indians and the old priest. He is trying to learn the Indian language to communicate with the Nahuat people in their own language. His intervention is decisive in solving a conflict, which became an open confrontation. The Indians took over the church to perform the dance, defying the priest’s prohibition. In the conflict one local authority, a Mestizo, tried to gain advantage from the situation by portraying it as political. As a result of his intervention the conflict became an armed confrontation between him and the Indians. He and his armed offisers were backed by the old priest, while the Indians were alone in the locked church, armed only with machetes, which played a part in the dance. The young priest solved the problem by persuading the Indians to take the image of San Miguel and perform the dance in another sacred place -- the prehispanic ruins -- which they have the right to use because they are the owners. The Indian women played a decisive role in avoiding a massacre, forming a human shield when the Indians left the Church carrying the image of the saint. The film finished with the dance performed on the prehispanic pyramid, followed by the words: "No es el fin. Es el principio" (It is not the end. It is the beginning).

From my fieldwork in Cuetzalan it was easy to identify one of the author’s local sources for his story about religious conflict. The young priest is clearly based on Padre Herminio (included in the credits as the one to whom the film is dedicated). The actor even wore Herminio’s liturgical robe with the Indian designs. In this fiction the author explores some of the possible conflicts that such a priest, a pro-Indian interethnic mediator, might have with religious and civil authorities that do not share his views. I suspect the film gave the fictional priest a voice to express what the real
priest is not allowed to say publicly about conflicts in Cuetzalan and with higher religious authorities.

The author constructs a story around this character to portray a dialogue performed in Mexico throughout its history of religion and social conflicts. In this story positive and negative views of Indianness construct a complex narrative. This narrative shows a dialogue between hegemonic and subordinated narratives with their contradictions and ideals, as a mirror to the multiple layers of the Mexican interethnic self. The film is able to show this dialogue between past and present more clearly with the topic of religion than with other social themes. With these other issues the film’s argument is not so clear, although overall it is located in a contemporary political scene that has surely been influenced by the presence of the Indian conflict at the national level.

The author’s position is clear in the film through the strong value-judgements made and the characters (as social agents) that make them. This gives a picture that sees the traditional church and the traditional political domination of Mestizos as anti-Indian, and the modern church (indirectly linked to Liberation Theology) as pro-Indian. The anti-Indian views are directly expressed by the Mestizo authority when he and his gunmen interact with Indians, always confrontationally, using common offensive stereotypes and prejudices:

- *pinche indio patarrajada ni siquiera puedes hablar como la gente de razón* (fucking Indian who walks cracked-barefoot, you can’t speak like the thinking people)
- *indio pendíje* (stupid Indian)
- *háblame en cristiano* (speak to me in a Christian way = Spanish)
- *los indios son como animales* (the Indians are like animals)
- *ellos tienen que aprender quien manda, gente como usted [el padre] o como yo* (They have to learn who gives orders, people like you [the priest] or like me).

An interesting point to emphasise here is that such offensive expressions are familiar to everyone to stereotype Indians but nowadays they are not heard from Mestizo authorities in public, even though their use still seems a realistic characterisation of some kinds of conflictual interethnic relationship. In this way, as in the case of the priest, the film, constructed as a fiction, permits the public exploration of a possible form of Indian-Mestizo interaction in specific situations, while no longer officially acceptable in public life.

The negative attitude of the old priest towards Indian religious beliefs is more fully elaborated in the film. It appears in dialogues between the two priests. The young one gives recognition to the deep religious beliefs of Indians, for example, when he justifies the name of the dance (which gave the film its title):

- *para ellos, en tanto San Miguel y Luzbel pertenecen a la metafísica ambos son sagrados ... su forma de ver la religión es diferente pero lleva respeto*
for them since San Miguel and Luzbel are part of their metaphysics both are sacred ... their view of religion is different but is full of respect.

In contrast the old priest uses negative adjectives applied to Indian culture and beliefs:

- son idólatras padre, son paganos (they are idolatory, priest, they are pagans)
- que sientosido es ese, la porquería esa, la danza de los indios de Yohualichan (which nonsense is that, that rubbish, the dance of the Indians of Yohualichan)
- para ustedes San Miguel no es San Miguel sino un Dios desconocido, repugnante y lo mismo Luzbel, como va a ser un señor santo y sagrado cuando todos sabemos que es un ser diabólico (for you San Miguel is not a saint but an unknown, repulsive god, and the same with Luzbel, how he could be an honoured and sacred saint when everybody knows he is a diabolic being?)

The story of interethnic conflicts in this fiction brings out some of the problems Indians have had to confront in every Indian region in Mexico. Some of these conflicts are presented critically by the director. One example is the struggle between one Indian and the Mestizo boss over land, where the Indian accused him of stealing their land by moving the boundaries. The Mestizo’s armed gang brutally beat up the Indian, who responded later by killing one of the gunmen. As a result the Indian is put in jail where he is later killed. One of his Indian friends comments “yo creo que Olegario ya se murió en la cárcel, siempre que se llevan a un indio a la cárcel se muere” (I believe Olegario is already dead, always when they put an Indian in jail he dies).

On the topic of interethnic conflict the author also includes a critique of a common strategy used to denigrate Indians as a way to justify the use of violence against them. The similarities with some contemporary conflicts I presume are no accident. The film ridicules these practices by exposing the ignorance of those who make them. Gossiping together some public servants exaggerate the violence of the Indian actions: “it is said that they have rifles and machine guns” (se dice que tienen fusiles y metralletas) and they accuse Indians of being easy to manipulate. In this way they displace any recognition of injustice suffered by Indians, “Liberation Theology? Antorchia Campesina? [Peasant Union] The Protestants? which political party is manipulating them?” (¿La Teología de la liberación? ¿la Antorchia Campesina? ¿los protestantes? ¿qué partido político los está manipulando?).

Another critique included in the film through making the Mestizo authorities seem ridiculous is their manipulation of religious conflicts as a cover for political motives. In the film a religious-cultural conflict was masked as a political struggle to justify the violence of the Mestizo — “instigados por un cura católico como siempre” (incited by a Catholic priest as always). The narrative parallels what actually happened outside the fiction, in the Actuel massacre in Chiajas in December 22, 1997, (La Jornada 23 December, 1997) where the authorities tried to evade their
involvement by claiming that religious conflicts between Indians inside the community were the cause of the massacre.

The Indian view is constructed in the film as a set of narratives, which includes dominant and subordinated ideologies, positive and negative values in the view of the filmmaker. The positive values in this case are more elaborated than in other Mestizo constructions of Indianess. Sabido makes the usual references to prehispanic origins, but not so insistently. He also includes the religious syncretism of Spanish and Indian beliefs from the colonial period along with reference to contemporary practices. The prehispanic reference was mainly visual, with the image of the ruins seen as part of the everyday life of Indians in the community, as a sacred place for contemporary Nahuas. Another reference to Indians in the past is the substitution of Gods by saints, as in a dialogue between the young priest and an Indian: "Los santos no son dioses. -- Entonces que son- Santos, Dios hay sólo uno. -- Para que discutimos padre, eso ni usted se lo cree " (The saints are not gods, -- Then what are they? -- Saints. There is only one God. -- Why argue about it, even you don’t believe it). Also the fact the notebook was written in ceremonial Nahuat from the last century, which is not so old, implied a view of Indian language as more 'pure' in the past. The high value given to the references from the past is expressed by the young priest:

*también pueden bailar el coloquio de San Miguel en otro lugar sagrado[las pirámides] que sí es de ustedes y no se los puede quitar nadie
You can also dance the coloquio of San Miguel in another sacred place [the pyramids], which is your own and nobody can take it away from you.

*Es un cuaderno de finales del siglo pasado en náhuatl y castellano?que bello! ... es nahuatl ceremonial ¡que bello!
It is a notebook from the last of the last century in Nahuat and Spanish, how beautiful! ... it is ceremonial Nahuat, how beautiful!)

The respect he gives to the word coloquio and to written ceremonial Nahuat in my view misrepresents the views of contemporary Nahuas in this region. In Cuetzalan dances are named dances and most notebooks for the dances are written in Spanish, but that does not mean they are less significant. This way of legitimating the culture gives too much weight to a western point of view, which over-values written forms and the Catholic authorised word. This does not understand or accept the value system of Indians where:

- the dances are 'dances' and still have sacred meaning,
- saints are worshipped as saints without needing to be masked prehispanic Gods, and
- the oral word, not the written one, has been their means for running their society, keeping their historic values alive through oral traditions and ceremonial discourse in the Indian language for many centuries

As well as invoking the past to revalue Indian ways the film includes other positive characterisations of contemporary Indians, in terms which seem strongly
influenced by Padre Herminio, seeing deep religious beliefs underlying their practices, in contrast with the mainstream view of them as mere superstitions. The importance of religion in Indian culture is expressed in a text that opens the film:

*Para un indígena mexicano, el cumplir la manda prometida a un santo es una cuestión de vida o muerte. Los coloquios-danzas son una manifestación teológica que sirve de lazo entre los dioses y los hombres, por eso son sagrados, TLYECTILY.*

For an indigenous Mexican, fulfilling a promise to the saint is a matter of life and death. The *coloquios*-dances are a theological manifestation which serve to link gods and men, that is why they are sacred, TLYECTILY.

This is also shown in some sequences that depict the inner turmoil of an Indian, who feels guilty for not fulfilling his traditional duty as *mayordomo* to organise the dance: “*se me aparece en sueños y si voltee rápido casi lo alcanzo a ver*” (it appears to me in dreams and if I turn around quickly I can almost see him). This is dramatised by using film techniques such as sudden close-ups to the image of the saint to make him look bigger and closer, and changing from colour to black and white. The devices recreate the nightmare the Indian suffers, persecuted night and day by the saint because he has not prepared the dance.

Another positive view of Indianness is represented by a wise old woman. This character plays an important role, teaching the young Indians the deep knowledge contained in the dance. She teaches them the steps of dance used by the different characters and the meanings of the symbols used in the dance:

*las vírgenes son como las estrellas, San Miguel como el sol, Luzbel como la luna ... Luzbel de negro pero con capa roja, como el jaguar, como la noche ... Todo el universo se entrelaza.*

The virgins are like the stars, San Miguel like the sun, Luzbel like the moon ... Luzbel is dressed in black but with a red cloak, like the jaguar, like the night. The whole universe is woven.

One allusion to contemporary valuation of Indians is the skill this woman has to ‘see’ what is happening in other places. This is different from the ‘magic’ of Cuetzalan as a place, but it is clearly part of Indian culture, which has permeated Mexican culture. In this case, the Indian magic is shown as a good magic, although there is one ambiguous image, a raven, which is used to emphasise the fact that she is using magical powers. The raven is usually associated with witchcraft in a negative sense, owing to the influence of European fairy tales, popularised in Mexico by Walt Disney films. In this case this symbol might work in different ways for a non-Indian Mexican audience, by transforming a common negative judgement into a positive view (due to the clear association in the film between magic and good actions) or on the contrary implying a subtle negative judgment (a link with black witchcraft) on what is explicitly expressed as positive (a highly valorised power). My first reaction was to interpret it in the second way. I considered it a minor unconscious slip of the director.
To use an old woman as representative of cultural knowledge and wisdom in a story which starts from a young Indian who has not learned how to reproduce his traditions raises an important dilemma for Indians and non-Indians, for which there is no clear solution. The taken-for-granted association of elders with the transmission of tradition confronts the modernity of young people and the possible loss of culture in the future, when the elders have died. The filmmaker, through his film, proposes the continuity of tradition. But what is not clear in the film is what are the consequences of that choice and in what new ways the tradition can be refunctionalised in the modern Indian way of life. Probably, performing the dance in the pyramids to evade the ban on dancing inside the church synthesises his proposal: to bring back some ancient meanings in the same way Padre Herminio recalls the Mesoamerican worldview to re-signify Catholic symbols.

The explicit effort of this film to give a ‘real’ view of Indians leads to the inclusion of some negative behaviours that are part of the Indian stereotype. The film shows these behaviours as something taken-for-granted. The most relevant to me is the problem of alcoholism and the violence and machismo of Indian drunks. Although those problems exist (not only as an Indian problem) and they are explicitly pointed out as serious problems by some Indians (see chapter 7), the way of treating them in the film is very simplistic, shown (through images and comments) as ‘normal’ behaviours, without suggesting any underlying social causes. This uncritical representation makes the images work just as negative ideological stereotypes, hiding the fact that as social problems they grow out of the conflictual interethnic relationship.

There are other aspects where I consider the filmmaker is ‘stumbling’ into the traps of mainstream ideology. One of them is one scene, not well linked with the rest of the story, where he depicted an interaction between Indian women and some tourists. Two Indian women, dressed in traditional ceremonial clothes, are at the pyramids selling handicrafts to tourists. An American couple are fascinated by the beauty of their Indian image and want to take pictures of them. The Indians refuse permission, and the woman tourist remembers that Indians think the soul is stolen by a camera and tries to explain to them it is not true. One of the Indians agrees to be photographed if they pay her. The tourists are surprised but the man agrees to pay. In the film the two Indians discuss this belief in the loss of their soul, which they actually believe:

*a ver si no se te sale la tona por dejarte tomar fotos -- claro que no, fui con Doña Eulalia [la curandera] por una protección y una buena limpia, a poco crees que soy tan tonta.*

I hope you will not lose your soul by letting them take photos of you -- of course not. I went to Mrs. Eulalia [the curandera*] for something to protect me and a good limpia [a cleansing, way of healing], don’t think I am so foolish.
The whole scene made both Indians and tourists look ridiculous, taking a risk because it ridiculed beliefs Indians once had that taking photos would take their soul. This is a well-known fact in the past but experience has changed it. Today Indians photograph each other, tourist books are full of pictures of Indians and of course the film maker captured their images. So this incident, instead of satirising simplistic views about Indians, became an ambiguous statement that was clearly rejected by one Indian who was in the audience when it was shown in Cuetzalan:

A mi lo que no me gustó, porque ahí critican mucho a la gente indígena, eso de que no se dejaban sacar fotos que porque si no se le va el alma, ya convence la muchacha que si le das dinero sí, como que es por el dinero que el indígena ... y luego otra imagen en que ridiculizan ... para mi fue como que ridiculizan, nos apoyan, nos critican.

What I didn’t like, because they were very critical of indigenous people, such as that bit about the young woman who was not letting them take pictures, because it makes the soul go out, and he (the tourist) convinced her by giving her money, as if it was just for money that the indigenous people ... and later, there were other images in which they ridiculed us ... to me it was as if they pour scorn, they support us, they criticise us.

This reaction shows clearly the risks in representing ideological complexities. In the case of the foolish behaviour of Mestizo authorities, the strategy works because it was not ridiculing something recognised as typical behaviour in mainstream ideology. Mestizos can think that way but they are not ridiculed; they do it in a serious and ‘correct’ way. The film functions to clearly express the director’s critical position. But in the case of the Indians, there was a different effect in representing this ridiculous behaviour because it reproduced stereotypes of Indianness and thus became ideologically ambiguous, able to be read as if it was the truth, as if he shared the dominant anti-Indian ideology, assuming that Indian beliefs are foolish and ridiculous.

I want to believe this was just a lapse by Miguel Sabido. However, it is a useful mistake, which shows me how difficult it is to think outside hegemonic ideology. The film shows the risks that Mestizos, including me, have to externalise a transparent pro-Indian view when we are, as we are, immersed in the ‘devil’, in a dominant ideology constructed to reinforce domination, reproducing a post-colonial society which continues to think and behave with a colonised mind.

All the examples of interethnic constructions under Mestizo control show a range of possibilities of cultural forms resulting from different kinds of interethnic exchange. All of them can be considered positive expressions of the interaction between Indians and Mestizos, trying to reinforce the value of Indian culture. However, they are not exempt from effects of the dominant ideology with its isolating emphasis on the Indian past. In the case of the Nahaut choir, as a quintessential Indian proposal, the two cultures interact in a more dynamic way, integrating different
moments in the manifestation of culture without being restricted by the stereotype of Indianness as prehispanic. In their view, and to me, it is the key to understanding Indianness in contemporary Mexico, Indian culture is a continual dialogue, a past actualised in the present for the future.
Chapter 6
Transforming tradition within the matrix

By looking at the *fiesta* of San Francisco in Cuetzalan we saw some of the ways Indians and Mestizos interact and create new meanings and practices through dialogue. The exchange of cultural elements between the groups is a continuous process of transformation of views, practices and attitudes from past to present, in an imaginary dialogue with the future. Cuetzalan town, however, is controlled by Mestizos, and hence the manifestations of Indian culture and the conditions of cultural exchange are restricted by the actions and political and economic needs of Mestizos, from government, church and commerce.

In this chapter I will explore interethnic exchanges in the Indian community, where Indians internally control some cultural, political and economic practices. In this case the concept of Indian control is understood, following Bonfil’s theory of cultural control (1987a: 27) as the system which allows groups to exercise their capacities for social decision on cultural elements (materials, organisation, knowledge, symbols and emotions). The action on these cultural elements transforms external and internal elements to become part of their own culture, irrespective of whether these elements are alien or from the group, national or regional, ancient or contemporary. This exercise of control over cultural practices and meanings has been at the core of a long process of transformation of previous elements into new ones.

The transformation of Indian culture has been achieved by different means. These include continuity of former cultural practices, refunctionalisation of some to new needs, appropriation or imposition of external knowledges and practices, and responses to such impositions. As a result of the various ways Indians have responded to the outside world, previous cultural behaviours have acquired new meanings, external elements and knowledges have been appropriated, and practices from both cultures have been refunctionalised. All these processes can be found at different times in the history of every community, sometimes as alternatives, sometimes in combination. I interpret this process as the result of a creative dialogue between different views within each culture, finding similarities among elements in both cultures, and between different needs and behaviours. This ‘autonomous way’ has been influenced and constrained by the continuous interaction with Mestizos from the municipal capital, from state and federal institutions, and external researchers who have worked in the area for many years. The possibility of autonomous decisions varies depending on what aspect of the culture is controlled, the material resources of each community and its strength and degree of independence from the external context.
The increasing importance of cultural control for Indian groups is clear in the negotiations between the government and the Zapatistas. In that case, the nub of disagreement concerns the Indian demand for full recognition of Indian autonomy and the right to exercise control over their own political decisions and resources (territory and natural resources). This conflict points out the limited autonomy that Indian communities have had until now, when it comes to issues of control of the same resources by the two groups (Indians versus Mestizos). However, there are some areas of culture, those practices more closely linked with the everyday reproduction of the community, its internal organisation and religion, which have been more directly under communal control. Even though Indian communities suffer continuously from imposition in interethnic exchanges, there has always been space in communities for Indians to use their cultural resources to further their goals, needs and cultural views.

**Communal organisation: interethnic construction under Indian control.**

To explore contemporary practices and their meanings for Indian groups in a community I will focus on internal forms of organisation and specifically on fiestas as a primary focus. In this case I will focus in the Santo Patrón fiesta in San Miguel Tzinacapan, celebrated on September 29, some days before the fiesta in Cuetzalan.

San Miguel Tzinacapan is one of the oldest communities in the region, situated close to Cuetzalan. Both towns used to be part of the same administrative unit run by different families who settled in the region before the arrival of Spanish. For this reason the history of this community and the construction of its identity are bound up closely with the relationship with Indian Cuetzalan in the distant past, and with Mestizo Cuetzalan since the end of the last century. This latter interaction, marked by the conflict between Indians and Mestizos, defined many Indian views and their present interpretation of their cultural behaviours.

San Miguel Tzinacapan is now a fully (99%) Nahuat community within the municipality of Cuetzalan, but with an independent leadership and internal organisation. As an Indian community it can be considered, like others in the country, as a self-contained social unit with “a structure of organisation of its own, which while still dependent on the national society, acts within the framework of its own dynamics by means of social practices and norms legitimated by the collectivity within the group” (Coronado, 1999a: 23).

In most Indian communities the internal organisation combines two structures closely entangled in what is named sistema de cargos* (system of responsibilities, duties). The sistema de cargos: “is the way to work ... for the community, it is what
gives respect in the eyes of other workers in the community ... it is also a form of service” (Díaz 1988: 36). In this structure community members participate in distributing duties to run the community as a collective. Young people begin to participate at lower levels as assistants, police, messengers (topiles), etc. and they slowly progress, taking on more responsibilities by occupying higher positions in the structure. Participation of men in these duties is considered important for the individual and his family to become part of the community, and thus earn the right to use land to live on, to work and to be buried in.

In its internal aspect the system of duties has important integrative functions, which incorporate the work of every family into collective works (building schools, working in the church, on roads, public buildings, and in activities for fiestas). This collective work is achieved by means of the faenas (the contribution of one day’s work from each family) as controlled by the communal authorities in the sistema de cargos. This organisation, directly or indirectly, reinforces the cohesion of the group and also mediates influence from the external world to control the changes produced by interethnic interaction that impinge on the collective well being (see Aguirre Beltrán 1967, Medina 1988). It also provides ways of dealing with internal differences between groups and the conflicts that arise from those divisions.

The sistema de cargos includes political and religious responsibilities. Contrasting with other levels of Mexican public life, where there is a sharp division between state and church, in Indian communities political and religious activities are fully intertwined in a dual hierarchical structure. “Aquí valen igual el gobierno local y la iglesia, los de la iglesia y el gobierno se coordinan, son uno solo”. (Here the government and church are of equal value, the ones from the church and from the government coordinate, they are only one) (President of Tzinacapan in CNCA 1992). Individuals can climb from the lowest levels of responsibility to the highest within the community, combining political/administrative and religious duties in the structure. Through the sistema de cargos most members of the communal assembly (mainly men) work for the community in various activities and levels of responsibility. In it they learn how to work for the benefit of the collectivity and to show others their skills and commitment. In this way they acquire respect and recognition from all members of the town. Part of the knowledge they acquire through this participation is knowledge of la costumbre (the custom), the cultural matrix. Another part is interethnic knowledge, which includes skills in managing the cultural and political code of Mestizos at local and national levels.

The sistema de cargos in Indian communities comes from the territorial and social organisation created during the colonial period to link and control Indian communities with the Spanish government. The new organisation was successful partly
because of the strength of the Spanish after the destruction of the Aztec Empire but also because it rested on similar principles to Mesoamerican ways. Prehispanic institutions also had “the principles of representation and rotation ... the organisation of land into calpullis [guilds] and towns, and a local system for organising public works and collecting tribute” (Carrasco 1991: 14-15).

During five centuries of interethnic exchange Indians and Mexican institutions developed and transformed this system. Some positions disappeared and others were introduced as the result of the transformation of Indian-Mestizo relationship, or the refunionalisation of former positions. One case of refunionalisation is the alcalde de costumbres (governor of the custom). This position was part of the internal communal structure when Cuetzalan was an Indian town. It remained part of the structure when the municipality was created at the end of last century, when Pala Agustín, an Indian leader, was president of Cuetzalan (see chapter 4). Later, when the Mestizos controlled the municipal capital, this position became concerned with interethnic mediation, retaining the function but inserting it into the Mestizo government.

Changes in Mexican laws, with greater involvement of Indians in Mexican society, also created the need for new forms of internal organisation and new links with the national system. One example is the creation of committees for activities related with the school, road works, health clinics, etc. Although they are new organisations their functions are inserted in the internal structure and fulfilled by the same form of duties. It is a new form with the same collective goal. The goal of the sistema de cargos, not always explicitly, ensured the continuity of the community as an autonomous social unit, at the same time maintaining links and standing as part of Mexican society.

The political positions in the system are similar to those in other non-Indian towns -- presidente, secretario, tesorero, juez de paz, policía, etc. (president, secretary, treasurer, justice of peace, policeman, etc. They reproduce the macro-political structure at a micro-level, following the fractal structure of the nation. Into this fractal structure Indians introduced, in their mental schema, another level in the underground world, in the mythical sacred mountain, the Tlalocan, where a similar structure is reproduced.

The mayordomo is the most important religious cargo associated with Indian cultural practices, along with the regidor de costumbres (also named alcalde), who, although part of the political structure, has a duty to maintain the continuity of tradition by coordinating mayordomos and dancers for religious fiestas. His duties show clearly the inseparability of civil organisation and religion as the centre of communal unity and fiestas as the heart of communal life.
Fiestas: communal unity, cultural diversity.

Fiestas in Indian communities have an importance that goes beyond the time and space of the actual event. Also important are the preparations and links that are reinforced in reciprocal exchanges between individuals and groups, inside the community and with other communities (see Coronado 1999a, Tascari 1987 and Masferrer 1984). The number of fiestas in each community produces a calendar that structures time in the life of the community through the annual ceremonial cycle. The fiestas are sometimes associated with the agricultural calendar and thus mark the annual rhythm of communal and familiar activities: work versus rest and enjoyment.

The success of the fiestas rests on the commitment of people involved in the cargos and the mayordomo’s ability to make a large number of people participate; men, women, children, young, elders, from the community and from other communities. The mayordomos are in charge of the organisation of the fiesta for the saints. Although the main fiestas in Tzinacapan are for San Miguel and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the religious organisation overall needs as many mayordomos as there are saints honoured in the community (29 in this town). The duty of a mayordomo lasts one year, and during it he must take care of the saint, offering flowers and candles, cleaning him or her, providing new clothes for the fiesta, organising the fiesta in his or her honour by means of dances and feasts. The biggest expenses associated with this duty are during the fiesta. In those days (usually 3 to 10) the mayordomo needs to supply everything to provide the saint and the community with an unforgettable fiesta: huge numbers of flowers, candles, rockets, masses and meals and drinks (chingueritos) for dancers, musicians and guests.

The duties involved in the fiesta are shared with the mayordomo by his extended family and friends (including compadres*, ritual relatives), who are part of his network of reciprocal exchanges. They have obligations from previous undertakings. The organisation also includes some diputados (deputies) as part of the religious sistema de cargos. They help the mayordomos with the expenses and some tasks. “Their function is to arrange the altar in the church and in the mayordomo’s house, they help to make the candles in the fiesta of the saint and invite the dancers to eat in the mayordomo’s house” (su función es arreglar el altar del santo en la iglesia y en la casa del mayordomo, ayuda a hacer las ceras en la festividad del santo y llamar a ‘las danzas’ a comer en casa del mayordomo) (Taller 1994: note 64, page 173). The regidor de costumbres urges potential dancers to participate and sometimes tries to find funds (from the municipality and federal institutions) for the continuity of tradition,
especially the dances. To this end he asks for support from the municipal *alcalde de costumbres*.

People have different reasons for agreeing to become a *mayordomo*, or to have other involvement in the *fiestas*:

Unos lo hacen porque la autoridad les pide como un servicio social, como una parte de servicio de apoyar a las autoridades para conservar una danza, otros ... es como promesa, para conservar la salud, los cultivos que salgan, que se pueda aprovechar bien que no tengan muchas plagas que el señor nos bendiga con todo lo que se tiene que llevar a cabo.

Some do it because the authority asks them to do it as a social service, as part of the service to support the authorities to preserve the dances. Others ... it is like a promise to preserve the health, the well-being of the crops, so they can prosper and not suffer from many plagues, this is why the Lord blessed us with everything that needs to be done (Indian from Tzinacapan)

This statement points out the importance of civil authorities in religious activities. The legitimacy of the authority is recognised, and these activities are seen as a communal service, as a sort of *faena*. It also shows the deep devotion associated with *fiestas* as offerings to saints. *Fiestas* are a form of mediation between saints and people, the Indian way of connecting secular and sacred life, using the same kind of reciprocal exchange they establish with members of community for natural elements “as a protection to keep the physical and social environment propitious for a good life” (Nutini 1989:111, also Briseño 1994). Through dances, flowers, music, ceras, they give deep religious meaning to every act of their custom. Indians offer the *fiesta* as an exchange for protection and well being.

The cost of the *fiestas* has made some people think they will disappear. On the contrary, this is a vital cultural practice which, far from shrinking, is expanding to incorporate new saints and new *fiestas*. According to a man from Tzinacapan the expenses are very high, but the number of *fiestas* is still increasing:

surge una nueva imagen de Santa Cecilia que es la abogada de los músicos ... aquí nace un mayordomo, dona la imagen, con esta imagen ya son vintiocho ... viene San Martín Caballero ... abogado de los comerciantes, luego viene el Perpetuo Socorro, otra imagen, antes no había existido ... alguien que tiene la devoción la promueve ... eran veinteséis en total pero con las tres ya son veintinueve ... bonito, pero es mucho gasto.

A new image of Santa Cecilia appears who is the advocate of musicians, then there is a new *mayordomo*, he donates the image, with that image there are twenty eight
... San Martín Caballero comes ... advocate of retailers, then comes the Perpetuo Socorro, another image which has not existed before ... someone who has the religious impulse promotes it ... there were twenty six in total but with these three new ones there are now twenty nine ... beautiful, but it is a lot of expense.

The fact that numbers of fiestas are increasing instead of reducing is clear evidence for the importance of fiestas for Indian groups, countering a common stereotype of the behaviour of Indians in fiestas as irresponsible, given their low economic level. One response to this negative view is given by a Sanmiguerleño, who explained to me his view on the importance of fiestas:

la familia la organización social y la economía son tres cosas muy importantes que se dan en una comunidad y todos girando alrededor de un eje muy importante la fiesta y de eso está hecha la comunidad. No es que andemos de fiesteros toda la vida sino que estamos hechos de una estructura diferente a las culturas que están regidas por una cultura de organización en que cada institución está separada ... Y hay cosas [la fiesta] que se tienen que dar por encima de todas las conflictividades en las comunidades.

family, social organisation and the economy are three very important things that happen in a community and all of them circle around a very important axis, the fiesta, and the community is made of that. It is not that we are in fiestas all the time, but we are made of a different structure from the cultures that are governed by an organisational culture where every institution is separated ... And there are things [the fiestas] which must be carried out over the top of all conflicts in the communities.

His view highlights the wholeness of communal Indian life, compared with the fragmented sense of life in western cultures. Without this sense of wholeness in each act it is impossible to understand how Indian culture is reproduced and transformed. In the same sense the fiesta is a symbol of unity at the communal and regional levels. The fiesta "is a means to testify to the whole community that its component parts manifest a sense of respect for tradition... to benefit the social and ecological harmony of the group" (Tascari 1987: 185). This view is reinforced in a comment about the role of fiestas in unifying the community. "When there are divisions between people, at the time of the fiesta they come together, the same strength of Lord keeps us together to realise his fiestas" (Cuando hay divisionismo de gentes, a la hora de la fiesta se unen todos, la misma fuerza del Señor nos une para realizar sus fiestas) (Indian from Tzinacapan).
However, *fiestas* also contain symbolic elements that express another of the most important aspects of Indian life, conflict, which I have mentioned before is central in the Indian view of history (see chapter 3). In the same way as other authors have found elements of subversion against the regional powers\(^1\) in *fiestas*, this region records conflicts between Indians and Mestizos. Some are stories about struggles with the Mestizos of Cuetzalan over the image of San Miguel; others are represented in dances.

**Creating new meanings for religious signs: the Patron San Miguel.**

One day before the main *fiesta* a group of men, led by the *mayordomo*, perform a ceremony to clean and dress up the image of the saint. Surrounded by an impressive silence in the middle of the church, this group carefully prepares the saint to dazzle everybody in the town. They clean his face, his arms and legs and with the same devotion they clean the *amocualí* (devil) who is under his feet. They change his clothes and carefully put on his new cloak and fix his sword in his hand. When the saint is ready they put him back in the left side of the altar, close to the pews, and bless him with the censer of *copal*, pointing the cross to the four cardinal points. Just after this blessing other people begin approaching to honour him by kissing his clothes and leaving some offerings (corn cobs, flowers and candles). Others come inside the church to offer their dances. Before lighting the candles they rub the saint’s clothes with them and do the same to their bodies. Then they light the candle and put it on the floor in front of the image.

The actions of cleaning and dressing the image can be interpreted from a superficial view as just preparing for the *fiesta*, which will begin the next day. But looking at the devotion of people in that event and the fact that a mass was performed after that ceremony I was clear that the cleaning was an important process. I did not approach closer to see the ritual, feeling intrusive in an intimate ceremony involving the saint and the Indians. I took no photographs, fearing the flash might be interpreted as a lack of respect.

They consider this ceremony, and all other preparatory activities, as important as the climactic ceremonies in honour of the saint on his day. One Indian from Tzinacapan explained to me:

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\(^1\) Especially in the carnival, popular annual *fiestas* performed in many towns of Mexico and other countries (see Galinier 1990).
La fiesta de Tzinacapan ... es costumbre que se inicie dos meses antes ... los fiscales tocan el tambor y al tocar el tambor todo mundo como que despierta después de un período que no había nada de ruidos, y es señal de que ya prepárense porque vamos a llegar a la fiesta de San Miguel Arcángel. Ese día empiezan las señales ... tocando el tambor acorde con el ruido de las campanas.

The fiesta of Tzinacapan ... It is the custom that it begins two months before.... The fiscales (the ones in charge of church) play the drum, and then everybody seems to awake, after a long period with no noise, and it is the sign to begin to be prepared because the fiesta of the archangel San Miguel is coming. That day the signals began ... playing the drum to accompany the sound of bells.

The beginning of this long preparation coincides with the fiesta of other saint, Santiago, who is Santo Patrón of a neighbouring town, Yanhuitlalpan:

se relacionan las fiestas de Santiago Mayor y la fiesta de San Miguel, porque aquí en Tzinacapan es costumbre que ... el 24, el 25 de julio, amaneciendo con [las campanas de] la torre de la iglesia en el pueblo de Santiago, lo llevan [la imagen pequeña] para allá para que con el acorde de las campanas lleve el acorde del tambor.

The fiesta of Santiago Mayor and San Miguel are related, because here, in Tzinacapan, it is the custom that ... on the 24, 25 of July, they greet the dawn with the [bell in the] tower of church in the town of Santiago, and some carry him [the little image] there, so that through the tune of bells he carried the tune of the drum.

The connection between communities, which includes other reciprocal exchanges -- such as dances -- shows the existence of a wider network that unifies different Nahuat communities (and sometimes some Totonac communities as well) at a regional level. This network is also reproduced in other activities with political or economic goals, as in the case of the regional cooperative.

The dressing ceremony has a further meaning. "The clothes are made as a promise to God, they are the result of effort [work and money] ... because these are not common clothes (la ropa se hace como una promesa a Dios, es resultado del esfuerzo [en trabajo y dinero] ... porque no es ropa común y corriente) (Indian from Tzinacapan). The old clothes are changed each year and are carefully stored. They are considered sacred because the saint used them, as if the clothes acquire the essence of the saint. The community then owns the garments. The belief that clothes contain the essence of the sacred explains the ritual of rubbing candles before lighting them. The same action is common in healing rituals. What is burnt, then, is not the wax of candles but the essence of the saint, and the life essence of the one who offers it.
I heard some stories that confirmed the importance of the garments. One was about a *mayordomo* who tried to sell the San Miguel’s clothes and was punished by the saint:

*Cierta ocasión una persona quiso vender, o vendió, una parte de la ropa ... hubo una tormenta y le cayó un rayo, y a lo mejor coincidió por la naturaleza, pero a lo mejor no.*

On one occasion a person wanted to sell, or sold, part of the clothes ... there was a storm and lightning struck him, maybe it was a coincidence but maybe not (Man from Tzinacapan).

On other occasions there were conflicts with priests over different views on the meaning of the saint’s clothes. One story was about a procession the community decided to make carrying the clothes of the saint. The priest thought it was inappropriate and tried to stop it, but the community reacted against him:

*Hace poco a la comunidad se le ocurrió hacer la procesión con el traje del Santo Patrón y con los danzantes y el padre se enojó, fue un disgusto de esos, cuál es el problema ... y casi amenazó a la gente que estaba en la puerta, si ellos van a hacer sus gustos a ver como los tratamos, y sólo acertamos a gritarle, respete las costrumbres porque las costumbres del pueblo son primero.*

Not long ago, the community had the idea of making a procession with the robes of the *Santo Patrón* and with the dancers, and the priest got angry, it was a big controversy ... and he almost threatened the people who were at the door, if you are going to do what you want to you’ll see how we treat you; and we could only shout at him, you must respect the custom, because the customs of the town are primary (Indian from Tzinacapan).

Another quarrel was with Padre Herminio because the people of Tzinacapan did not want to lend the clothes for the filming of *Santo Luzbel*:

*El padre quería que le prestaran a Miguel Sabido las ropas de San Miguel pero la autoridad no quiso, entonces el convocó a una junta a nivel de la comunidad, también la comunidad dijo que no, que no se podía usar la ropa para vestir otra imagen.... El quería que usaran un traje, como ahí están guardados, cada año le quitan la ropa y queda ahí guardado ... pero ¿y si cae una maldición?*

The priest wanted us to lend San Miguel clothes to Miguel Sabido, but the authority did not want that, then he convened a meeting at the community level, but they also said no, that it was not possible to use the clothes to dress another image.... He wanted them to use a robe ... as they are all stored there, every year
they take off the robe and it stays there in storage ... but what if a curse fell on us? (ibid).

It is difficult to know how much this belief comes from old Indian views, or if it is an old Catholic belief. What is clear is that there is a difference between how Indians see their present practices and how the church interprets them. Even Padre Herminio, whose actions show a high respect to Indian culture, has difficulties to understand and accept some contemporary Indian beliefs. Probably, the difficulty is based on lack of recognition of new behaviours because they are not ‘typically Indian’, because they are new creative forms of Indian culture. In the first statement is clear that for Indians custom is not what has been repeated for centuries, but what is done in accordance with cultural principles they believe in and respect. On that occasion the event was a new idea, but it was still interpreted as part of la costumbre.

Early in the morning of September 29, the day of San Miguel, people began to gather in the atrium of the church. Most were from the community although a few came from outside to watch a splendid Indian fiesta. All dancers arrived to dance first inside the church and later throughout the day, outside on the atrium and in the streets of the town. Most dancers came from the town but there were also some from other towns, including a group of Voladores from Cuetzalan. There were Voladores, Quetzales, Migueles, Santiago, Negritos, Toreadores, Vegas, all interacting simultaneously in an apparently chaotic way. However, they waited in an orderly fashion to dance inside the church, filling the whole space, giving place for all to be together in the same prayer (Illustration 32).

The priest arrived to give the mass. He dressed in his liturgical clothes in Indian style, wearing the necklace of yellow flowers, and carrying the baton of authority, which he put on the altar -- maybe symbolising the transference of that honour to the saint. Surprisingly, on this occasion the mass was in Spanish. One woman in the church commented to me that he seldom gave it in Nahuat. The fact that he did it in Spanish on such an important occasion, the main mass of the main fiesta of an Indian community, reminded me of the conflict between him and this community. I wonder if he is still resentful because the whole community rejected his petition about the use of old saint’s clothes.

At the end of the mass all dancers began filling the central aisle of the church to accompany the saint during the procession along the main street in the town (Illustration 33). A group of men carried the image, following the small images of San Miguel and San Francisco, which were led by the mayordomo, the musicians and the dancers. Everyone walked behind accompanying them during the journey. At different points they stopped to dance, to pray and to light rockets.
Illustration 32: Dancers entering to dance inside the church and dancers and musicians filling the atrium (San Miguel Tzinacapan 29/09/97).
Illustration 33: San Miguel leaving the church and processing along the streets of the town (San Miguel Tzinacapan 29/09/97).
In the past this procession used to continue to Cuetzalan. San Miguel went there to visit San Francisco. But this is no longer done because of a conflict with the people of Cuetzalan, who wanted to keep the image for their church. The story about this conflict has a significant place in the history of this community and also in the meanings given to the Santo Patrón. The story appeared in the oral history book (Taller 1994), in a video (CNCA 1992) and in interviews with people from the town. According to an interview, the people from Cuetzalan wanted the image:

_Cada vez que visitaba el patrón a Cuetzalan, por la calle dicen que le tenían mucho afecto a la imagen, la gente venía con sus bandejas para su limosna y todas las gentes le pasaba a dejar y se llenaba la bandeja de monedas ... y seguía la gente y se llenaba otra charola por el centro y todo ese dinero se quedaba (en Cuetzalan), era un negocialo ... y varios cuetzaltecos vieron como una minita de oro y entonces fueron a traerlo y la gente se les puso enfrente y dijeron, no se lo llevan, porque esto es nuestro y se va a quedar aquí porque es nuestro patrón. Y la iglesia se estaba cayendo y el curita de Cuetzalan vino y les dijo nos lo llevamos a Cuetzalan y ahí va a estar un rato en lo que le construyen su iglesia. Y dijieron, pus no, la imagen se queda allá enfrente, en una casa allá la metemos y allí hacemos misa, o construimos otra casa pero no se va. Construyeron un galeron enorme y allí estuvo San Miguel._

Each time the Patron visited Cuetzalan, along the street, it is said that they expressed much affection to the image, people came with their trays to collect alms and everybody went there and the tray was full of coins ... And people continued collecting and another tray was filled, close to the centre, and all that money was kept there (in Cuetzalan). It was big business ... and some people from Cuetzalan saw it as a goldmine, and then they came to fetch him and the people stood in front of him and said, you will not take him, because he is ours and he will stay here because he is our Santo Patrón. And the church was falling down and the priest of Cuetzalan went and he said to them, we will bring the statue to Cuetzalan and it will be there only a short time while you build his church. And they said, no, the image stays there, across the road in a house, we will put him in there and perform the mass there, or we will build another house, but he will not go. They built a huge room and San Miguel stayed there.

This version reinforces the cultural contrast between Cuetzalan and Tzinacapan. It repeats the idea that Mestizos from Cuetzalan have only an economic interest in fiestas, while Indians are interested in its religious meaning.

An important meaning associated with this story involves a reinterpretation of Catholic iconography. San Miguel has links with the prehispanic God of Rain. But in this case the connection with rain was made in a completely different way, following the
Catholic belief in miracles associated with images. The miracle in this case appeared as the reaction of the saint to Cuetzalan’s attempts to take him out of his town:

_Dicen que antes cuando pensaban llevar a Cuetzalan al Santo Patrón San Miguelito, empezaba a llover o cada vez aumentaba de peso y ya no lo podían llevar. A veces se iban a regresar ya cerca de Cuetzalan, ahí por la calzada. Se regresaban porque el Santo Patrón se hacía pesado y de aíl tenían que regresarse... querían llevarse al Santo Patrón otra vez pero él los detuvo, reunió mucha gente para que lo detuvieran... y de veras no lo movieron de lugar._

It is said that some time ago when they thought of taking the Santo Patrón San Miguelito to Cuetzalan it began to rain, or each time his weight increased and they were unable to carry him. Sometimes they got back close to Cuetzalan, there, by the large street. They returned because the Santo Patrón became heavier and they had to get back... They wanted to take the saint again but he stopped them. He got together many people to pull him... and truly, they were not able to move him from the place (Taller 1994:139).

The Indians’ relationship with the saint is clear. They talk about him not as an image but as the saint himself. They even put some of their thoughts into the saint’s mouth, using indirect speech: “se resistió a irse a Cuetzalan el Sanmiguelito, -- será la iglesia mal hecha pero es mi casa” (He resisted going to Cuetzalan, -- this might be a ruined church but it is my house) (Indian from Tzinacapan). There are other indications of the animism of Indians towards images of saints as well as to natural elements, which they consider sacred. One example is the belief that San Miguel gives signs about what the weather will be like in his fiesta:

_Cuando San Miguel tiene la cara bien rojita en su fiesta va a haber buen tiempo... Si se le detecta algo así escurrido, va a haber mal tiempo... si sucede porque ha sucedido... está relacionado el tiempo con la imagen._

When San Miguel has his face reddish there will be good weather in his fiesta... If it looks slightly slippery, it will be bad weather... It happens because it has happened... the weather has a relationship with the image (ibid).

The importance of the image and the miracle links with the importance of trees in the Nahua worldview. Trees and humanity in Nahau life have a mystical relationship. Trees play an important part in many cultural practices to represent the cosmic axis, the flowering tree associated with the pole of Voladores (see Aramoni 1990:196ss. López Austin 1994), which is also used as a decorative motif in the church of Tzinacapan. Regarding the image of San Miguel Indians mentioned with great admiration that it was made from a whole piece of wood. “It is said that they looked for a tree, very big and
thick, and from its heart, *tlayolotl*, they chose the best wood to make the sculpture* (Dicen que buscaron un árbol muy grande y grueso y de su corazón tlayolot escogieron la mejor madera para hacer la escultura) (Taller 1994:136).

The conflict with Cuetzalan Mestizos has not been enough to stop the Indians of San Miguel expressing their own beliefs in the religious space, even in Cuetzalan, which is outside their control. However, to avoid the risk that Mestizos will exploit them, they came to a compromise. They make a pilgrimage to Cuetzalan with San Miguel, but they carry only the small image. In this way they maintain their control over their custom, saying that they are visiting San Francisco not the Cuetzalan Fair, and as well they avoid the risk that Mestizos will steal the main sculpture. Their knowledge of past interethnic interactions and how Mestizos try to sell the image of Indianness for tourism underlies their construction of this event. They know well that Mestizos try to profit from Indian customs: “*su folclorismo comercial, su aprovechamiento de la imagen indígena es siempre a favor del municipio solamente*” (their commercial folklorism, their abuse of the image of Indianness is always only in favour of the municipal capital) (Member of Taller). The pilgrimage now happens the day after the main *fiesta* of Cuetzalan, on October 5. According to some people of Tzinacapan they changed the date to prevent Mestizos taking advantage of their dances. One man from San Miguel told me:

_Muchos grupos de danza les han dicho, no vamos a ir el 4 de octubre porque nos utiliza mucho, vamos a ir el 5 de octubre, vamos a visitar al Patrón San Francisco de Asis, pero no vamos a visitar al gobernador ni al presidente. Vamos por nuestros asuntos._

Many groups of dancers have told them, we will not go on October 4, because we are so exploited, we will go the 5th of October, we are going to visit the Patron, San Francisco of Assisi, but we are not going to visit the governor, nor the president. We go because of our own business.

Combining the stories about the clothes with the stories about the miracles carried out by the saint and the practices performed to honour the saints, it is clear there is a specific cultural inflection of Indian religious beliefs. Old conceptions about the relationship of the community with nature are mixed with Catholic forms of religious beliefs in their evolving culture. This process of transformation creates new beliefs, which give a sense of continuity to practices at new moments in the context of contemporary forms of interethnic relationships. The dialogue with past knowledge and future expectations emerges again.
Intercultural meanings in Indian culture.

The procession from San Miguel Tzinacapan to Cuetzalan, with all the dances, the symbols and the people, combined two levels of interethnic exchange. The same dancers performed what seemed the same dance but the interaction in a different social context transforms part of its meaning. The event linked two places with different, interrelated histories and these histories created two forms of Indian culture expressed by the same individuals. The dances seemed the same, but the meaning can be read in different ways depending on how they are inserted in different structures of significance, which in this case are more or less interethnic, more or less under Indian control.

Among the dances performed in that event, the one that shows most clearly the effect of different interethnic structures of meaning is the Voladores. This dance was performed in the atrium of the church of San Miguel as an offering to the Santo Patrón. During the pilgrimage it was performed by the same dancers in the atrium of the church of Cuetzalan in honour of San Francisco. The two performances together had a common religious aim; both were offerings to Saint Patrons, one of the community, the other of the region. At the same time the two performance made offerings to nature, to the sun (San Francisco) and the rain (San Miguel), a fact which reinforced one of the meanings given to the dance, as a ritual associated with fertility.

In terms of the different meaning of space the two performances are enacted in contexts that are ethnically differentiated, one an Indian church, the other a Mestizo church (although both are open to all, each is controlled by one or other group). However, the permanent presence of the Voladores pole (although always replaced before the fiesta) creates a sense of Indianness in the setting of the Mestizo town, which, for me, symbolises an Indian appropriation of the Mestizo space. Indians represent, through the symbols of the dance, the full weight of the meaning of Indian culture. The pole, as a sacred tree, represents the axis mundi in terms of which the dancers will perform their cosmogony. The axis mundi in this imagined representation of the cosmos is placed in the centre of the atrium, in the centre of Cuetzalan, which through this action signifies the centre of the Indian world. The pole dominates this Mestizo space, as part of the permanent spatial structure, symbolically inverting social reality in a contrast with the fact that Mestizos have actually dispossessed the Indians of the space they used to occupy. Mestizos accept this symbolic appropriation by Indians because of the importance of Indian image in the construction of Cuetzalan's identity as a magical tourist place. In practice that church has been controlled by priests who have been more frequently allied with the Mestizos of the town.
The way the pole is fixed before the fiesta makes the dance different in the two cases. In Tzinacapan the dance is a complex event which includes different acts performed on specific dates before the main event. The whole community participates in the preliminary acts, finding a tree and cutting it, and erecting the pole in the centre of the atrium, whether they give faenas or merely attend the special communal event:

Para talarlo [el árbol] de preferencia el lunes para traer el palo para que sea una de las faenas del pueblo, y cuando suenan los sonidos de que vamos a traer el palo de los Voladores ahí van todos con sus machetes, sus sogas, todos para el cerro y lo mismo cuando va a levantarse, todo el pueblo se amotina, se junta ... es muy bonito cuando se empieza, toda la gente se acerca, todo mundo está contento ... y cuando ya tenemos el palo, ahí ya levantado el pueblo se glorifica, ora sí, es también parte de las plegarias ya al ver que el palo está en su lugar todo el mundo está contento ... todo tiene que ser un día especial

To cut it [the tree] Monday is the best day to fetch the pole as one of the faenas of the town, and when the sounds ring out that we are going to fetch the Voladores pole. Everybody goes with their machetes, their ropes, everybody to the hills and it’s the same when it is going to be erected, all the people come together ... It is very beautiful when it begins, the all people come close, everybody is happy ... and when we have the pole, there, already erected, the town is glorified. Indeed this is also part of the prayers, to see that the pole is in its place makes everybody happy ... everything makes it a special day (facilitator of a Voladores group).

In the case of Cuetzalan this event is prepared by the Indian dancers who live in the town’s vicinity, supported by assistants and the parish priest (Aramoni 1990), but it is not an activity of the whole community. The hard work of transporting and erecting such a big pole requires support from the municipality. So Mestizos are included as supporters but with the guidance of Indian dancers, who know how things should be done. As the dance performed by the Tzinacapan dancers in Cuetzalan does not include those events, the meaning of the dance does not reinforce the collective function of communality, in the same way as when the dancers have the whole process under their control. However, the Tzinacapan dancers are linked to other communities through knowing that the right ceremonies were performed, so they do not risk failing in the dance. Their dancing on a pole cut and erected by other Indians who share the same beliefs reinforces the collective trust among Indians from different communities.

Meanings of the performance of the Voladores dance have been widely studied in different parts of the Sierra; in Nahuat, Totonac, Otomí and Huaxtec communities (Reynoso 1977, Quezada 1977, Ichon 1973, Streaser-Pean 1989, Galinier 1990, Christensen 1989). Most of these discussions include early references made by the
friars, who were greatly impressed by the magnificence and symbolism of the dance (see Sahagún 1986, Clavijero 1979). It is not so clear how far the meanings included in prehispanic versions are consciously reproduced in contemporary Indian towns. Some ritual practices are still performed, and I was able to see them much as they are depicted in those ethnographic works. It is not sure that the dancers know all the old meanings attributed to this dance but it is clear they keep the sense of the dance as a ritual associated with life and nature.

The dance as a whole has different phases when all the elements (from cutting the tree with its proper ceremony, preparing the hole where the pole will be erected, raising the pole, purifying dancers and pole, and the dance itself) are full of symbolism associated with the Mesoamerican worldview, in which numbers have meaning. In the ceremony before cutting the tree there is a reference to the number nine, the number of underground levels in the Mesoamerican worldview. Although the relationship is not explicit I deduce that the nine turns that the Indians do before cutting the tree is a symbolic way of communicating with the spirits of the underworld to ask for fertility. The meaning of this as a ritual addressed to the underworld is reinforced by a later ceremony in which they bury an offering in the ground (see Aramoni 1990: 200-201). Whether they are conscious of the association or not, does not matter. The important fact is that they continue reproducing the action as meaningful for them.

In the Coffee Fair of Cuetzalan the secretary of municipality, in a seemingly spontaneous way, described this ceremony as follows:

La ceremonia se inicia con cinco personajes ... que recorren bosques entre montañas y valles bailando y tocando una flauta en la difícil búsqueda de un árbol con características especiales de gran altura, grosor y resistencia, cuando el eje o sacerdote encuentra ... el árbol apropiado da nueve vueltas a su alrededor con cantos rezos y música ... Al caer no debe ser tocado con las manos y con el saumero de copal al pie del árbol que ya caído levantan las manos y utilizando horquetas, travesaños y cuerdas para no tocarlo, lo conducen al atrio de la iglesia.

The ceremony begins with five people ... who walk through the forest among mountains and valleys dancing and playing a flute in the difficult search for a tree with special characteristics -- great height, width and resistance. When the pivotal person or priest finds the appropriate tree he makes nine turns around it with songs, prayers and music.... When it [the tree] falls down it must not be touched with hands and they use a censer of copal at the bottom of the tree once it has fallen. They lift up their hands and use wooden forks, crossbeams and ropes so as not to touch it, they carry it to the atrium of the church.
The description made me think that he, as a local, might have seen what he described but later I found almost these exact words in a paper published more than three years ago by a researcher in a book edited by a local cultural association (Reynoso 1977). The insistence on not touching the tree with hands sounds dubious to me for ceremonies today. In Tzinacapan someone told me they now use trucks and pulleys to make the work easier and less risky. Besides, I once saw the pole being raised and those involved used their hands or any other part of their bodies (1996). The versions of Cuetzalan researchers and Mestizos conserve old traditions that say how it once was done, without reference to current practices. They sound more Indian, ie closer to Mesoamerican traditions, than the Indians, who express their culture without fearing the influence of modernity if it can be adapted for their aims, keeping the essential core.

At each stage of the ritual there are different ceremonial moments addressed to the sacred beings (including the Santo Parrón) for the well being of the community. The meaning of this dance as a communication between humans and sacred beings is expressed in the ritual performed by the dancer at the top of the pole who bows making a cross to the four directions of the universe and leans back with his arms open in a cross. The dancer “makes prayers for the times to come, that there be good profits, that his crops grow well” (hace plegarias para que las épocas que vienen más adelante hay buenos beneficios, que sus cosechas salgan bien) (facilitator of a group of dancer). From this we can see the significance that Indians give dances as prayers to bring about a good future, strongly related to agricultural activities. The dance has an explicit association with the cult of the sun in the hat they wear, shaped like a sun and sometimes with a little mirror with solar form. The conical form of the hat represents a mountain, probably the Talocan. The whole assemblage in my view is like sunrise on the top of a mountain (Illustration 34). Looking for prehispanic meanings we could associate this image with the beginning of each Aztec cycle, when the sun rises again, thanks to ceremonies performed by Indians on those occasions to restore the energy lost during the 52 years of the cycle. But we do not need to look for prehispanic meanings to find the image meaningful. The relevance of the sun is expressed in contemporary Indian life, ie. in the Nahuat language. They use the same word, tonal, to name the sun, day, heat and the anima or strength of the human body (see Key & Ritchie de Key 1953, Signorini and Lupo 1989). This meaning can also be found in the oral tradition story of the origin of the sun “Cuando salió el sol” (When the sun first rose) (CEPEC 1984) or in ornaments used in the fiesta, which have solar forms: flowers of cucharilla and the crests in the Quetzales dance (Illustration 35). It is used in posters, in the church and in the municipal palace, with common values but different aims.

There are different interpretations of the meaning of the dance, not necessarily excluding each other. The best known, used by Cuetzalan Mestizos emphasising
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prehispánico, asociado con el desempeño de la calendario azteca. Según esta versión, el ciclo de 52 años se representa en el baile a través de quince giros los cuatro hombres hacen descendiendo desde el top a the bottom (13 x 4 = 52). En esta viaje ellos viajan a través de los quince etapas que forman los cielos en la cosmología mesoamericana:

*En Cuetzalan la danza de los Voladores es representada por cuatro hombres ... representan los cuatro puntos cardinales ... el quinto hombre se ubica en la parte más alta del poste y toca una flauta de cariz de tres tonos y un pequeño tambor de dos caras ... el bailarín del centro baila y toca primero en dirección a los cuatro puntos cardinales y después, sentado, dirige una plegaria inclinando la cabeza en las cuatro direcciones. Luego los cuatro hombres ... amarrados con una lona alrededor de la cintura se lanzan al espacio como si fueran aves ... por medio de trece vueltas sobre sí mismos los cuatro hombres que circulan volando alrededor del poste simbolizan ... los 52 años del ciclo del calendario azteca.*

En Cuetzalan el baile de los Voladores es presentado por cuatro hombres... representando los cuatro puntos cardinales... el quinto hombre está en la parte más alta del poste y toca una flauta de tres tonos y un pequeño tambor de dos caras... el bailarín del centro baila y toca primero en la dirección de los cuatro puntos cardinales y después, sentado, dirige una plegaria inclinando la cabeza en las cuatro direcciones. Luego los cuatro hombres... amarrados con una lona alrededor de la cintura se lanzan al espacio como si fueran aves... por medio de trece vueltas sobre sí mismos los cuatro hombres que circulan volando alrededor del poste simbolizan... los 52 años del ciclo del calendario azteca (CEHSNP 1990:29-30).

I do not have a contemporary reference to say this meaning reported by Mestizos is still represented by dancers in this region. I could not count if they rotated thirteen times each while descending, but the number of times the pole itself turned round was more or less 26. Whatever the case, it is clear the dance includes prayers and rituals, even when it is performed as a tourist event.

The other meaning attributed to the dance is its relationship to fertility rituals, as offerings to the ancestors, the mythical couple *Talokan Tata / Talocan Nana, Totatzin/Tonantzin* (God Father/Goddess Mother). Through the dance they represent the creation of life, as a symbol of fertility, in the act of fertilising the earth. This fertility ritual is symbolised by inserting the tree (pole) into the hole in the ground, where a live black turkey (*guajolote*) is offered as a propitiatory sacrifice (Aramoni 1990:204). The bird dies when the pole is inserted in the hole, and its blood symbolises the creation of life. The sacrifice of an animal in this dance was the reason why priests forbade it, believing it replaced human sacrifices but kept the meaning that life is offered to the Gods to recreate life (Quezada 1977). Contemporary Nahua Indians in the communities also mentioned the sacrifice of an animal, a black hen, to avoid accidents during the
ritual. During the dance in the *fiesta* of San Miguel there was a little accident and the *caporal* was ashamed because he had made the offering, so the accident must be his fault.

The different aspects of the dance manifest the sense of wholeness so important for Indian life. The Indian conception of the universe is like a series of 'mirrors', or copies in fractal levels: universe > *Talocan* > town > house > altar > ritual. The performance of the dance connects two axes; the heavens and the underworld. A vertical axis crosses a horizontal axis (constituted by the four directions of the universe) in the centre where the *axis mundi* is: in the hole in the earth, at the top where the dancer prays, in the centre of the religious space. The movements of the dancers descending, turning around their own axis and around the pole, link the two planes in a dynamic recreation of the cycle of life 2. It is not clear if Indians interpret the meanings of this dance in Mesoamerican terms, but certainly present forms of the dance join multiple shared meanings which make sense in contemporary Indian culture.

**Different origins, same cultural meaning.**

The highly developed ritual in this dance does not mean that other dances are considered less important or less sacred. In Tzinacapan I found no sign this dance has priority over the others, as is the case in Cuetzalan where it is a tourist spectacle. All have a sacred sense. Some researchers have reported that sometimes the *caporal* or *padrino* (godfather, facilitator) of a group of dancers is a *curandero* (healer) and dancers sometimes practise rituals of purification before performing the dance in the main *fiesta* (Lupo 1995, Merlo 1986).

The sacred value of dances in contemporary Indian towns probably reproduces an old Indian view as an important component of the cultural matrix. This meaning has provided a context for the appropriation of new dances introduced by the Spanish. It is known the friars found dances useful didactically to introduce some Catholic and Spanish meanings to Indians (see García Icazbalceta 1980, vol. ii: 223). For Indians, the Spanish dances were similar to what they practised to honour their Gods; "Prehispanic Mesoamerica, for many centuries before our era already performed a series of rites where dances of different kinds were included.... The cult included the active participation of the faithful, singing and dancing for long hours" (Merlo 1986: 11).

The compatibility between the two cultures made it easy for Indians to accept new dances introduced from the Spanish tradition. Also important for this appropriation

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2 An interpretation of this movement compares the form created by the turns with the form of the movement of energy.” Their flight represents the helicoidal movement of the divine energies they believed was created by the connection between the three planes of the world (heaven, earth and underworld)” (Lupo 1995:44).
was the fact that some of the dances represented battles, and thus were similar to some prehispanic rituals to win the favour of the Gods in war, where dancers were warriors in battles (Merlo 1986:47). In many Indian or Mestizo towns in Mexico Spanish dances were adopted and transformed, with some details that produced different versions of the same dance. The most extended is the dance of Moors and Christians, known in this region as *Santiagos*.

This Nahuat area preserved two dances of prehispanic origin that have disappeared from other Indian regions. Probably the history of the region as a peripheral area since the fifth century (on the margins of the Totonacapan, on the margins of the Aztec Empire), and during the colonial period (far from the centre of power) has meant less pressure on this Indian culture. This fact in my view has made it more possible for this Nahua group to maintain control over their culture and its transformation, allowing a freer and more creative way to appropriate and refunctionalise cultural practices and knowledge of the other.

In the region of Cuetzalan now there are dances with Spanish origins (*Santiagos, Negritos, Miguelitos, Toreadores, Vegas y Tecotines*) and two others, *Voladores* and *Quetzales*, widely recognised as prehispanic. But the differences between them are subtle after five centuries of transformation and both kinds now share Indian and European symbolism in the steps, the clothes, the props and the music. All of them mix elements from both cultures: for example, the dancers of a Spanish dance, *Santiagos*, use guaraches, while the prehispanic *Voladores* wear boots. The same is true of the music, where differences seem more related to when the dance was introduced than to its cultural origin. The dance of *Santiagos*, especially, has music, which sounds prehispanic. (Merlo has a similar opinion 1986:57). In any case the dances now have been formed by a continuous transformation of elements from both cultures.

One characteristic of the Spanish dances is that they are based on written documents. Each group of dancers has its own script kept by the chief of the group (the *caporal* or *teniente*) who teaches other dancers and has the responsibility of continuing the tradition of the dance. This document is named "testamento" (testament) or "relaciones" (account of facts) and is an old book (sometimes from the end of last century) usually in Spanish although in rare cases in Nahuat (Merlo 1986, mentioned one from a community in Cuetzalan). According to one *caporal* of the *Negritos*:

*La historia la tenemos desde aquel tiempo, el testamento lo tenemos desde nuestros abuelos, los abuelos de nuestros abuelos y lo hemos venido renovando para que no se pierda la historia, todo lo que es el alabanza, el alabanza es un son ... casi todo lo tenemos en español porque la verdad pues nuestros*
antepasados si podían hablar en mexicano la lengua del alabado, pero ellos nunca supieron leer, nunca tenían una letra, nunca pudieron dejar por escrito en náhuatl, esto que está por escrito lo redactaron los españoles.

We have the story from that time, we have the testament from the time of our grandparents, the grandparents of our grandparents and we have continued to renew it to avoid losing the story. Everything which is the eulogy, the eulogy is a son [type of music] ... almost everything we have is in Spanish because the truth is that our ancestors can speak the words of the eulogy in Mexicano, but they never knew how to read. They were not literate, they never were able to leave it in written Nahuat, this, which is written was made by the Spanish.

The testamento is sacred and only to be seen by those responsible for the dance. Although the groups try to follow closely all elements of the dance, there is space for individual creativity, producing variants in different communities (Merlo 1986). In the next quotation from the same caporal the balance is clear between change and tradition in the Indians’ view, including the fact that new conditions of life give new resources to use and also problems to solve:

Sabemos que la danza de los Santiagos, la danza de los Negritos no es de ahora poco, que apenas lo inventaron como se va a bailar, viene desde aquellos tiempos; que ha cambiado mucho, si es cierto, le hemos cambiado un poco de color a nuestros trajes, a veces ... se le mete otro tipo de adorno ... pero tampoco lo hemos querido cambiar mucho porque eso ya no es lo natural, cambiar un poco pero no totalmente porque entonces ya no sería original, sería como que estamos cambiando de moda.... Ahora hemos agarrado una niña [en lugar de un joven disfrazado de mujer] porque la cabellera, se nos hace difícil conseguir una cabellera, muy cara, ya no hay original, hay cabellera pero de plástico y no es igual, entonces agarramos niñas que ya tienen la cabellera y nomás les ponemos el sombrero

We know that the dance of Santiagos, the dance of Negritos is not just recent, that they just invented how it will be danced, they came from those times. It has changed a lot, it is true, we have changed the colour of our clothes a little, sometimes ... we add other ornaments, but we do not want to change much because it is not natural any more, to change a little but not everything because it would not be original. It would be as if we are changing a fashion.... Now we have taken on a girl [instead of a young man disguised as woman] because the wig is difficult to get, very expensive, there are none of the originals any more, there are wigs but made of plastic and it is not the same. So we get girls who already have long hair and we just put a hat on them.
Another example of a significant change occurred in one group of *Voladores*, whose *caporal* decided to teach his daughter the dance because he did not have sons. He thought the tradition would continue because she would transmit this knowledge to her son. This decision had implications for gender roles. Some sources say women are forbidden to watch the ceremony of cutting the tree (according to one woman who worked in the region some years ago) and, according to others, women dancers cannot be included in dances of *Negritos* (Merlo op.cit.). In the two examples it seems that continuity of tradition is more important than its content, so they prefer to make some changes in the dance rather than break the transmission of knowledge they received from their ancestors. It is also possible that this is not so great a change from an Indian perspective, and the prohibition might owe more to Spanish patriarchal views. There is not much information on the role of women in prehispanic society and what we know was mediated by friars or soldiers.  

Another source of change has been the fact that the continuity of the dances has not always been maintained. Some dances fell out of use and were reintroduced with modifications, learned from different versions in neighbouring communities. One example of the revival of a dance is the case of the *Voladores* in Tzinacapan, where the tradition was interrupted for 20 years. The dance was discontinued because the Indian authorities refused to support the dance because of its cost, and the rituals were not possible without communal participation. The disappointed group moved to Cuetzalan where the authorities wanted them to dance, and the municipal president gave all the support they needed. It was only in 1990 that a group of young men revived the dance. One Nahua man from the town undertook to support them for seven years as a promise to the saint. The new group asked the *caporal* of the Cuetzalan group to teach them, and so they incorporated some changes, such as clothes like other dancers from the Totonac area, who came to Cuetzalan. The facilitator of this dance told me:

> del 90 para acá se toman los trajes que son del tipo Tajín ... antes era algo parecido al traje de los Migueles, pero no quisieron la otra ropa porque no se sienten varón ... prefirieron el pantaloncillo rojo; las faldas sí se vetan bonitas, se ponían como globos.

Since the nineties they have adopted clothes of the *Tajín* type ... before, they wore something similar to the *Migueles* clothes, but they did not like the other dress because they did not feel masculine ... they preferred the red trousers. The skirts really looked beautiful, they looked like balloons.

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3 See Rossell 1995 for a different interpretation of women’s roles, using images from codices, where women are warriors.
While some elements change, there are many meanings still reproduced as part of la costumbre. The phrase 'la / el costumbre' appears every time an Indian is asked why some cultural practice is reproduced. One old dancer answered "it is the custom, I learned it from my father and he from my grandfather, my son it is already caporal and my grandson is beginning to learn. I am now tired of dancing but I am happy because my children will continue the custom" (es la costumbre, yo lo aprendí de mi padre y él de mi abuelito, mi hijo ya es caporal y mi nieto ya está aprendiendo. Yo ya me cansé del baile pero estoy contento pues mis hijos van a continuar la costumbre).

Perhaps part of the specific knowledge of the symbolism and meaning of dances is lost, but it could also be the case that they retain the knowledge but do not want to share it with outsiders. This seems the feeling expressed by the caporal of the Voladores dance in Cuetzalan who commented that when researchers come to ask questions "I tell them anything, to confuse the dickheads" (yo les digo cualquier cosa para que se hagan bolas los pendejos). He said this after he had explained to a foreigner that the pole has 54 steps because it represented the spinal vertebrae. I counted 57 steps, but in any case I know there are only 33 vertebrae. This makes me cautious in interpreting specific aspects of the dances. What is certain is that in la costumbre Indians refer to the core of their culture as a kind of cultural matrix, with a generative power to change without losing the continuity of a culture that goes back to ancient times (see Bonfil 1987a & b).

Dances as prayers and fights as dances.

Other previous works report some of the meanings of dances in this area and other areas of Mexico. There are descriptions of the plots of each dance and the explicit and implicit meanings of their symbols, some clearly Spanish but others with plausible links to symbols from Indian culture. For example, Merlo’s ethnographic research on the dances of some communities of Cuetzalan found some elements as described by the dancers which could incorporate Mesoamerican meanings; ie. links between Tezcatlipoca, an Aztec God, and their black clothes and mirror in the centre of the hat, both signs of that God. The presence of these elements, clearly important in Mesoamerica, made him doubt the explanation given by Indians and look for other meanings associated with prehispanic signs. He made this point about a character in the Negritos dance, the “Maringuilla”, who represents the mother of a child who was bitten by a snake. He argued against this interpretation: “rather we believe it is a hangover from some Goddess of prehispanic times” (más bien creemos que se trate del resabio de alguna deidad femenina de la época prehispánica) (1986:22).
The interpretation given to me by the caporal of one group of Negritos is consistent with the whole meaning of dances for contemporary Indians. He told me the story came from blacks enslaved by the Spanish. In this case what had relevance to him was that the blacks resisted the Spanish, and that the dance is a ritual and powerful prayer to win God’s favour; in this case to avoid death from an animal which is dangerous in the context of rural communities where these dancers live today:

_Nuestros antepasados nos contaron y nos dieron el escrito de que esta danza vino desde los españoles, pero ellos compraban a los negros y los hacían trabajar ... los negros se resistieron y se quedaron aquí en México y comenzaron a formar grupos de bailes ... pero son bailes, bailes tradicionales se puede decir como esta danza, como es el caso de los Negritos ... había señores, señoras que creían mucho en la danza, en los ritos que hacían estos negros. Una vez una señora con su niño estaban en hacer su comida en eso que el niño sale y le dice no arde la leña, yo voy al monte a buscar leña para que no estés con ese humo. El niño salió se fue al monte, buscó la leña, pero ... en el monte que le pica una víbora, una serpiente ... en eso llega sin la leña y le decía que le había mordido una víbora, la mamá corrió con los negros y les dijo a los señores que les pedía el favor de que le fueran a orar, que fueran a bailar porque su niño había sido mordido por una víbora. Los negros se organizaron, bailaron, cantaron, alabaron y todo, y tuvo mucha fe la señora de que su niño se iba a curar con ese rito, bailando ... el niño no se murió con la mordida de la víbora y de ahí fue cuando se creyó más en esta tradición, de que es un rito, es una promesa que se le hace a Dios y no sólo bailamos porque nos gusta el baile sino que es una promesa que estamos haciendo ante Dios.

Our ancestors told us, and they gave us the written text, that this dance came from the Spanish time, but they used to buy the black people and made them work ... The blacks resisted and they stayed in Mexico and they began to form groups of dancers ... but these are dances, traditional dances, like this dance, the Negritos ... there were some men and women who believed strongly in the dance, in the rites of those blacks. Once, a woman and her child were preparing the meal and the child went out and said to her, the wood isn’t burning, I am going to the hills to look for wood so that you won’t be left with that smoke. But ... in the hills he was bitten by a snake, a serpent ... and he returned without the wood and told her that a snake had bitten him. The mother ran to the blacks and asked them as a favour to go there to pray, to dance, because a serpent had bitten her child. The group of blacks organised, danced, sang, prayed and everything, and the woman had strong faith that her child was going to be healed with that rite, the dancing ... and the child did not die with the snake bite and from then on, the belief in that tradition grew, that it is a rite, it is a promise which is offered to God. And we dance not only because we like it, but because it is a promise we are making to God.
It is important to note here the use of rite, prayer and dance as synonyms, thus expressing the religious nature of the dance. This usage is common with all the dances.

The stories of this and other dances tell about different events where the central meaning of the dance is a confrontation between opposite elements or characters. For example, in the Santiagos the battle is between Spanish Christians and pagans, in the Negritos there is a serpent which is defeated, in the Vegas the enemy is a tiger, in the Toradeores a bull and in the Migueles the battle is between the saint and the devil. The prehispanic ones seem more ritualised but still have a deep sense of struggle, in that case a fight between death and life. This common element in all the dances alerts us to their contemporary function. All express a dualistic struggle between good and evil. This sense of struggle in all the dances grew in importance in the community, and led the people from San Miguel to create a new event, which combined the idea of struggle in national life with the religious sense of struggle contained in the dances.

The facilitator of the Voladores told me that people in Tzinacapan recently decided to celebrate the Day of Revolution (a national holiday celebrated in schools) with traditional dances. They named this fiesta “El día del combate”. He said:

El combate se relaciona con lo social que se celebra con el día de la revolución, aquí se celebra el triunfo de San Miguel Arcángel con la lucha con el amocuali, el combate. Presentan lo de la revolución, [con danzas como] la Cucaracha, la Valentina, la Marieta, la Soldadera, Madero y su ejército ... las escuelas hacen eso en coordinación con las autoridades civiles ... ya en la tarde lo religioso, ya el combate, ese día se hacen los dos, lo cívico-social y lo religioso. Ahí sobresalen los Migueles porque es la lucha ... los Migueles siempre están adelante y los demás, de los Santiagos, los Negritos también pelean, cada uno tiene su forma de como vencer al mal y al bien.... Los Voladores tienen otra manera porque ellos al subirse en el tallo ... al subirse en la altura, el caporal, el jefe de ellos se abre de brazos, y allí es donde él desafía a la vida y la muerte. Al vencerlo allí y baja bien, es que ya venció.

The theme of battle has links with the social, which is celebrated on the day of the revolution. Here we celebrate the triumph of the Archangel San Miguel in the fight with the devil, the battle. They bring it to bear on aspects of the revolution [with dances such as] the Cucaracha, the Valentina, the Marieta, the Soldadera, Madero and his army.... The schools do it in coordination with the civil authorities.... In the afternoon religious dances, battles, that day are both performed, the socio-civic and the religious. There the Migueles are prominent because it is a struggle ... the Migueles are always at the front and the others, the Santiagos, the Negritos they also fight, each one has its way to defeat the bad and the good.... The Voladores have other ways, because when they go up on the pole
... when they climb to the top, the caporal, their chief, opens his arms, and that is where he challenges life and death. When he triumphs there and descends safely, it means he has already won.

In this statement it is clear that struggle is a key element which articulates different aspects of Indian life. Although the Day of Revolution is a national fiesta, it also has local meaning: "Tzinacapan también tuvo sus líderes, sus guerrilleros" (Tzinacapan also had its leaders, its guerillas) (ibid.). And that meaning is integrated into their major cultural representations strongly marked as part of the history and identity of Indians in this region. National meanings transmitted through the educational system are transformed by a local sense of struggle, and the Indians appropriate the fiesta by including traditional dances, which in their view also represent struggle. The religious meaning given to dances is completed by appointing a new mayordomía* for the saint who is celebrated on that day, Santa Cecilia.

In the last quotation there is an interesting trace of Indian dualism. It is expressed in the phrases “vencer al mal y al bien” (defeat the bad and the good) and “desafía la vida y la muerte” (challenge life and death). These two phrases imply the inseparability of opposites in every process of life in their cultural view. This duality, which permeates different levels of understanding life, gives a specific meaning to the representation of struggle in dances. Dances are not contained in a single performance, but repeat the same actions in a struggle, which is not clearly defined in terms of winners and losers. They continue dancing the whole day and night in an interaction of opposites, which creates a kind of eternal cycle. This quality in dances, like the sense of history defined by the continuity of the struggles between different groups inside or outside the community (see chapter 3) reflects a dialectical view of the process of reproduction and transformation of the group and its culture. In the same way as Marx and Engels interpreted struggle as the “driving force of history” (1976:61) Indians saw the continuous dynamic of dualism (struggle and equilibrium) as the motor of their history (interethnic and intraethnic struggle) and reproduction in life and nature (tonal / ecahuil, anima / shadow, hot / cold, healthy / sick, death / life, wet / dry, light / dark, day / night).

**Indians show themselves through modern media: An ethnographic film**

I want to finish this chapter by analysing a video "En alas de la fe" (On the wings of faith) (CNCA 1992), which includes film of the fiesta of San Miguel in
Tzinacapan. What I want to point out in this case is what happens to the interethnic interaction when Indians are allowed to decide which meanings to show to portray them. The video was produced by a group of professionals from a national institution, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (National Council for Culture and Arts), who have made ethnographic films in other Indian regions. This video is part of a series named "Los caminos de lo sagrado" (Roads of the sacred) (Illustration 36).

Although it is a national production, I know from my fieldwork that the video was made with the participation of an Indian group from Tzinacapan whose names are in the credits. They are also authors of the Oral Tradition Book I have discussed earlier. Like Santo Lucbel, (see chapter 5) it was mostly in Nahuat with Spanish subtitles. The Indians in their own language conducted all interviews in the video, and they themselves translated it into Spanish for the subtitles. I do not know who took the decision to present it in Nahuat. Other videos in the same series are in Spanish, and the people involved (except perhaps one old man) speak Spanish very well. This makes me think the decision had an ideological basis. It may be a way of showing the position of the team as radical ethnographers, including the voice of the subjects of research instead of treating them as objects. But equally it might show the strength of Indian group to impose their language on those who wished to make a film in their community. Using Nahuat, the Indians controlled how their culture is represented for external viewers.

From an academic point of view the video as an ethnographic film would be expected to give a more extended explanation about the culture of the group where it was made. A typical ethnographic film would inform the audience about the content of what is shown and how it represents the culture, usually selecting folkloric images to show the difference; objects that seem exotic from the mainstream point of view. In the old ethnographic style, the fact that some Indians are mentioned in the credits could mean they were assistants or informants for the content, just providing information as natives about topics the producers selected for filming. In this video it is not the case. The group of Indians was much more active, and dances and other aspects of traditional culture are present and beautifully shown, but are constructed differently.

The content of the film is announced in the introductory written text as follows:

Esta región nahu a es un ámbito privilegiado de las danzas de raíz mesoamericana -- Quetzales y Voladores -- y novohispana -- Santiago, Migueles, Negritos --, de la tradición oral y la medicina mágica, muchedumbre de signos que rinden culto, piden favores y dan gracias a los santos patronos.

This Nahua region is a privileged space for dances from Mesoamerican roots -- Quetzales and Voladores -- and new Hispanic -- Santiago, Migueles y Negritos --, for oral tradition and magical medicine, a throng of symbols that pay tribute, ask for favours and thank the Patron Saints.

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Please refer to print copy
In this passage the authors include the topics (dances, oral traditions and magical medicine) which are common objects to represent Indianness as a tourist commodity, which, in some sense, is one of the aims of an ethnographic film. The producers also mention the religious function of symbols in Indian culture, an aspect that fulfils the didactic aim of documentary films, giving information to general audiences. All these topics are actually included in the film, however, the way they are shown looks different compared with a typical ethnographic film and hence the product does not fulfil their aims completely, or rather, it fulfils them in a different, more successful way. It is more didactic because it gives a more living image of Indian culture, and it is as attractive as any other tourist image, maybe not so exotic but full of meaning and respect for the value of particular cultural practices. The construction of such a different product, I think, is in great measure due to the participation of Indians who have worked in the community for more than ten years in a project to study the oral history of the town. So they were not just informants or assistants but played a leading role, conscious of how they wanted to project themselves publicly, not as an object appropriated by the dominant group but representing themselves, in order to be better known and understood by a national and international audience.

From my fieldwork I knew the interaction between the filmmakers and the Indians arose by chance, and the possibility of forming an interethnic team was generated by the interest of each group in the others' resources. Mestizos wanted to get the knowledge of Indians and Indians to use the authoritative voice of the institution to reach a wider audience outside the community. The outsiders edited the film, while the Indians decided which meanings, interviews and topics to select. The result is very close to the views expressed in the oral tradition book, including as interviewees some of the same people and their stories, but it is complemented with the visual images produced by the outsiders with guidance from the Indians. The combination produced a richer representation of the culture than could have been expressed by either voice on its own.

Two voices, two codes, one interethnic text.

The way the main topics are constructed shows clearly the effect of the participation by the Indian group. In different ways they allow us to see various strategies that combine the aims and interests of both groups, mixing traditional images of Indianness with the Indians' own views on the relevance of their culture.

Oral tradition is an important topic for anthropologists dealing with Indian culture. Its importance has grown in the new approaches in anthropological and historical research (see Jenkins 1991, Coronado 1999b). Therefore, its inclusion in the video and the space given to it would have been well received by the outsiders, although
it was not their central aim, as is clear from the back cover of the tape, which referred only to fiestas of Patron Saints and dances. In the video, oral traditions supply the main verbal text, showing Indian views on events taken from their oral history. They selected two particular events, which were crucial in constructing identity in the community: the foundation of the town and the conflict with Mestizos over the saint’s image (see above). The story of how the town was founded was illustrated by shots of a spring of water and a cave with bats. The bats gave the town its name: “Y le llamaron Tzinacapan porque al quebrar la piedra salieron muchos murciélagos de la cueva” (And they named it Tzinacapan because when they broke the stone many bats came out from the cave). Both images might be just visual decorations, showing off the well-known tourist image of the place (a beautiful landscape, caves), but associated with the oral narrative the images became expressive of Indian culture, implying more than is said. Water and caves are associated with Talocan, so this foundation of the town is not just what happened, the ‘objective’ history, but constructs the symbolic importance of the place, founded precisely on the spot which the collective Indian mind interprets as the entrance to the sacred mountain where water flows.

The other story, the conflict with Cuetzalan over the saint, and the miracle that kept him in the Indian community, was a critical moment in the interethnic conflict that is recalled each time the small image of San Miguel travels to Cuetzalan. This story is mentioned by each Sanmigueleño who tries to explain the relationship with the municipal capital. It is a central story through which this community constructs itself as rebellious Indians who do not let Mestizos control their cultural resources, a town privileged by the favour of the saint who wants to be there, in that place and not in any other. The film uses its visual resources to bring out some Indian meanings while at the same time showing the processions that are the official topic of the film. In the image of the saint leaving the church, camera angles create the illusion that the saint is moving by himself, without human help. This effect recalls how the saint himself decided to stay in Tzinacapan when the people from Cuetzalan tried to abduct him. He seems to move by himself in the film, and became heavier in the story to avoid being taken from the community: “Aumentaba de peso, no se lo podían llevar porque aumentaba de peso” (He increased his weight, they couldn’t take him away because he increased his weight) (CNCA 1992).

The film dealt with the topic of dances through a different strategy. Much of the film depicted them. In this case the visual objects (the fiesta and dances) already existed, and the team only needed permission to film. But the film included little information about the dances, mostly just the name as written, as the only verbal text complementing the image in the screen. Instead of giving the meaning of each dance (plot, symbols, steps and history), they just used them as a colourful backdrop while
other themes were being narrated. The only discussion of dances was a conversation between a mature man and a group of children to reinforce the importance of *la costumbre*:

*Dense cuenta de esta antiguísima danza que bailan ahora ustedes. Ustedes niños piensan que es un juego, pero esta es una costumbre y ustedes son responsables. No se separen, no lo tomen a juego, porque si lo toman a juego nunca van a saber cuantas melodías antiguas hay ... Dense cuenta niños, así se repiten las costumbres, a mí me enseñaron lo que ahora les estoy enseñando.*

Notice this very old dance that you are dancing now. You think it is a game, but it is a custom and you are responsible for it. Do not take yourselves away, do not take it as a game, because if you consider it a game you are not going to know how many ancient melodies there are.... Notice, children, this is how the custom is repeated, it was taught to me and I am teaching it to you now.

In this case the relevant content is the importance of cultural continuity, not the specific meaning of each dance. The Indian meaning of one dance was conveyed only through visual techniques, as was done with the saint’s image. In this case the camera filming the dance of *Voladores* mimicked the movement of the dancers, to signify the cosmological meanings of the dance (mentioned earlier). The camera began moving from the bottom of the pole to the top, travelling from underground to the heavens, then they filmed the dancer at the same height, from the tower of the church, performing the ritual to the sun. Then they filmed the descent, recreating the vertiginous movement by using a camera attached to one flier’s foot, filming the movement of ground till they landed, as if the whole earth was moving.

Magical medicine is the third topic from traditional culture included in the video’s introduction. The interethnic interaction here seems less reciprocal, perhaps an indication that the Indians refused to perform this part of culture. The information was minimal, mainly a backdrop to emphasise Catholic meanings of healing and the *fiesta*, in an image overlaid by the sound of prayers. One act of healing was inserted without explanation, presented as if it was happening during the *fiesta*. This image showed a woman being healed, with prayers as the only verbal content. The supposedly sick woman was an outsider, using make up and wearing Indian clothes from another region, a characteristic style of young Mexican anthropologists; perhaps an anthropologist from the team, the same Carolina who is in the credits in charge of the research. She looked healthy, happy to have this ‘healing experience’ and be an actress in the film.

The sense of magic mentioned in the introductory text was not represented in the images. In this case the ideology which categorises traditional medicine as magic
appeared only in the introductory text created by the outsiders, only in Spanish. For Indians this is not magic but a common and effective medical practice of their culture. And this is what was shown in the visual images and the prayers of the curandera. The fact that the sick person was not an Indian from the town can be interpreted in different ways. It could indicate disagreement between Indians and these Mestizos about the propriety of filming a true healing. Maybe the curandera or a sick Indian did not want to perform a healing ritual to show it to outsiders or to film it, considering it too private, belonging only to Indians. So the conciliatory solution was to fake a therapeutic ritual⁴. If so the Indians collaborated without losing control of their culture.

The introductory text also indicates the region where the film is set. It contrasts San Miguel Tzinacapan and Cuetzalan as twin poles representing vitality and loss of traditional culture respectively: “En San Miguel Tzinacapan está viva y en expansión la cultura tradicional que comienza a extinguirse en Cuetzalan en la Metrópoli regional.” (In San Miguel Tzinacapan traditional culture is alive and expanding while it begins to be extinguished in Cuetzalan, the regional metropolis). This statement may misunderstand the complex interethnic relationship between the municipal capital and the communities. My research in the area shows Indian traditional culture is present in Cuetzalan because of the participation of communities in fiestas. Furthermore, the interest of Mestizos has provided impetus to the traditional Indian image of the place, though constructing it as a commodity. The collaboration between Indians and Mestizos that arises from this negotiation is in fact what allowed the producers of this video to show a traditional fiesta in the regional metropolis, which they say is losing its tradition. The prehispanic dance (the Voladores) that is the climax of the film is performed in Cuetzalan and not in the Indian community. Probably the contradiction between the images and the statement also comes from Indians and a dilemma, which runs through Indian interethnic behaviour. They emphasise their hostility to Cuetzalan people and their efforts to stop the exploitation of their culture. But they still go to the town to perform their dances, moved by their own beliefs, or to gain Mestizo support to maintain the continuity of the dances. Their presence in Cuetzalan could be what the team considered an expansion of the traditional culture of Tzinacapan, but in fact it reproduces an interethnic relationship negotiated by Mestizos and accepted, with some reservations, by Indians. In some ways, instead of an expansion of Indian culture, the video shows the role of the communities in keeping alive the traditional culture of the regional metropolis, Cuetzalan. It is precisely this meaning that Indians emphasise all the time: “Las comunidades son las que hacen que Cuetzalan tenga una cara bonita” (The

⁴In the same way, Lupo (1995) in his study of traditional prayers “súplicas”, (petitions) in the region of Cuetzalan presents a collection of texts and ethnographic descriptions of rituals that the curandero performed for him, imagining the different situations in which the prayers would be used.
communities are the ones who give Cuetzalan a pretty face) (Indian who collaborated on the video).

Communal organisation is another topic in the video. It is not often included in typical representations of Indianness but Indians consider it central for the reproduction of culture under Indian control. In the film there was an interview with one authority on the religious activities in the fiesta. His statement reinforces the sense of unity and consensus that make the community a collective whole:

Las autoridades de aquí de nuestro palacio nos llevamos muy bien y nos coordinamos. Así se viene haciendo desde hace tiempo. Cuando éramos chicos, mirábamos a nuestros padres así, y ahora estamos trabajando igual.

Here in our palace, the authorities lead us well and coordinate us. This is the way it has been for a long time. When we were children we watched our parents this way, and now we are working in the same way.

This sense of a unified image of the community seems part of the dialogue with Mestizos. Indians construct an image of unity inside the community and the region to display strength to support economic demands from the municipality, and the state, as was seen in the speech of the Tosepan representative in the political event (see chapter 4). But this unified image does not necessarily mean homogeneity inside the Indian group. From an interview with a Nahua from Tzinacapan I knew that the year the film was made was very troubled for the community due to divisions into two political groups. They put this division aside for the fiesta, working together for it, but expressed the conflict in a sort of contest between the two groups. Each group tried to show their strength inside the community through the dances.

La presidencia auxiliar organizó todo lo de la danza y el grupo opositor también tenía su danza, eso se dió y se veía más hermoso, incluso el presidente de aquí cuando vio esas danzas dijo ¡Ay Tzinacapan! Mientras más se divide más realiza sus fiestas ... fue el año que tuvo muchas danzas acá y fue el año que vinieron a grabar esas instituciones.

The auxiliary presidency organised everything for the dances and the opposition group also had its dance, that happened, and it looked more beautiful, even the president from here said, Oh Tzinacapan! When you are more divided your fiestas become better ... it was the year there were many dances here, and it was the year that those institutions came to film.

The conflict produced a very successful fiesta, useful to express the vitality of their culture and the unity of the group in the film.
The dialogue with Mestizos also raised the topic of expenses for the fiesta. The amount of money spent by Indians on fiestas is often criticised by Mestizos, and is mentioned in the film without apparent motive:

*Dicen algunos, como nuestro presidente de Cuetzalan, dice, que tanto de cooperaciones dieron? ... Pues no sabemos, porque no planeamos cuanto vamos a gastar ... La celebramos porque nos comprometimos, además se la dedicamos al Santo Patrón con mucha devoción. Siempre queremos que nuestra fiesta salga bien.*

Someone said, such as our president of Cuetzalan, he said, how big were the donations you gave? ... We do not know, because we did not plan how much we were going to spend ... We celebrated it because we made the undertaking, besides, we dedicated it to the Santo Patrón with much devotion. We always want our fiesta to be successful.

This statement emphasises their own values, which attach no importance to the amount of money only to the religious importance of the event, making them different from the Mestizos who are concerned only with economic profits.

The Indians chose to show, in the film, some cultural events that are important for the community, such as the quarrel over the saint’s image, which expressed conflictual interethnic interaction. At some points in the film they highlight the conflict with Cuetzalan as an important aspect of their history and identity, while at other times they hide by not mentioning the internal conflicts that are part of the dynamic of every community. The existence of internal conflict seems to be for them not a negative fact, but a normal aspect of a vital culture. Thus their need to hide it in my view is related to the dialogue they have with others, Mestizos of Cuetzalan or from the state and national governments, who might interpret internal divisions as weakness or as signs of a decline of an Indian culture characterised by communality and consensus.

The meanings expressed by this film need to be interpreted in the context of interethnic negotiation, in this case not as a face-to-face interaction with local Mestizos, but as an imaginary dialogue with audiences at different levels of Mexican society. In this case Indian control in the collaboration with a national institution opened the way to create a different view of Indianness to transform the national ideology. Maybe in the context of political negotiation, which includes interethnic relationships with different levels of Mexican society, they also warned dominant groups of potential conflict if they try to appropriate Indian culture, as when the Mestizos of Cuetzalan tried to steal the image of the saint. In my view an implicit message of the video, as an interethnic product, is that Indians may collaborate and share their culture with Mexicans but only if they accept Indians as owners and controllers of their culture.
The different image of Indian culture displayed in this *fiesta* -- with all the signs of change and continuity in the dances, in beliefs and other cultural practices that are more or less interethnic -- shows how richly Indians reproduce and transform their culture when the control is in their hands. The creative set of practices I have examined in this and the previous chapters show that the future of Indian culture is not, as usually believed, a choice between modernisation or tradition, loss or continuity. On the contrary, it lies in a creative way of bringing practices up to date, giving meanings of their own to the new through the generative power of the Indian cultural matrix: "*la costumbre*".
Chapter 7
Changing the world through interethnic knowledge

The contemporary relationship between Indian communities and Mestizos of Cuetzalan has been mediated by a new kind of interethnic interaction. Since the 1970’s some individuals and groups from different institutions, national and international, arrived in the region, bringing with them funds and their own abilities to develop projects for the benefit of Indian communities.

In the region of Cuetzalan one community that was the most attractive for the beginning of those projects was the small Nahua town of San Miguel Tzinacapan. I am not sure why this town was chosen ahead of others in Cuetzalan to develop the first projects. Probably one fact was its proximity and the vitality of its Indian culture. But more important in their view is that they are well known for actively fighting against Mestizos throughout their history. “It could be because we have always been rebels, we have always opposed what they have imposed on us” (será porque hemos sido siempre rebeldes, siempre nos hemos opuesto a las imposiciones que se han hecho) (Indian from Tzinacapan) These three conditions perhaps initially made this town attractive, and this experience opened opportunities to others.

The entrance of other types of Mestizo, as well as foreigners, created new forms of interethnic interaction, where the Indians had different relative positions compared to what they had in relation with Mestizos of Cuetzalan, whom I will call koyomej to distinguish them from the new kind of Mestizo. The new group of Mestizos mediated between Indians and koyomej by constructing a different image of Indianness, by behaving differently in the interaction. The different attitudes of these outsider Mestizos towards Indians was seen by people from the community as a chance to increase their strength against the koyomej who had power and controlled political and economic life in the region.

When these first outsiders arrived the Nahua communities were fully dependent on the power of the koyomej. They controlled the main commercial crops, the labour force on the big coffee plantations and the market for basic goods such as sugar, rice, beans, corn, chilli, etc. Decreases in the amount of land owned by Indian peasants\(^1\) for their own consumption has reduced the scope for autonomous economic development in communities (see chapter 3).

\(^1\) Produced by the progressive displacement by the koyomej, the pressure on land because of increased populations and the slow decline of polyculture (corn, beans, cane sugar) due to the introduction of coffee as a monoculture.
In this context the Indians merely survived, controlled by rich landowners and merchants, both koyomej. The situation is clearly depicted in the next quotation written by a collective workshop from San Miguel Tzinacapan:

*Hace algunos años en las mesas de nuestras casas había de todo para que comiéramos. Bastaba ir a nuestros terrenos o al monte para conseguirlo. Ahora dependemos cada vez más de la cabecera municipal o de otras regiones para abastecernos de los productos que nuestro suelo puede producir. Esto nos da pena, pues fuimos viendo cómo se llenaban los cerros y cañadas de cafetales de otros, de potreros rodeados de alambres de púas. Fuimos necesitando mucho más del dinero.

Vimos también como se iban de nuestras manos los pedazos de tierra, los pocos productos que sacamos y el maíz que cosechábamos, así como el café, que cada vez se producía más. Todo se iba para los acaparadores y a las ciudades. Muy poco del dinero que valía nos regresaba.

Por eso nos comenzamos a organizar, a capacitar y a buscar recursos que, con ayuda, hemos podido conseguir.*

Years ago there was everything for us to eat at our home tables. We just went to our lands or to the hills to get it. Now, each time we rely more on the municipal capital or other regions to get products that our own land is able to produce. This makes us feel sorry, because we saw how coffee plantations of others covered the hills and gullies, and cattle ranches surrounded by barbed wire. We needed the money much more. We also saw how the pieces of land, the stuff that we produced and the corn that we harvest were taken out of our hands, as well as the coffee which was produced in ever greater quantities. Everything was going to the monopolists and the cities. Very little of the money got back to us.

That is why we began to organise, to train, and to look for resources that, with help, we have been able to get. (PRADE A.C./PRAXIS A.C. 1985:120).

In that situation they had few options, so the offer by the new Mestizos was an opportunity to break their total dependence on the local elites. They were open, with some reservations, to hear the outsiders’ proposals to improve their conditions. It took some time for these Mestizos to find ways of interacting that Indians would accept, but when they succeeded, Indians and outsiders began working together in a new kind of interethnic exchange to develop various projects with external funds.

The first project began in 1973 between a group of young Indians and a group of urban migrant researchers who went to live in the community of Tzinacapan. Since then, more than 25 years later, many people, projects, international foundations, governmental programs, and religious groups have come and gone, supporting Indian
organisations and activities. Since then there have been projects related to coffee production and commercialisation, commercialisation of handicrafts, collective buying of groceries, the oral tradition workshop, a Nahuatl theatre group, and other activities concerned with health, education, human rights and sustainable agriculture.

These projects in Tzinacapan did not develop in isolation but generated a wider effect, creating links with other communities to develop new forms of organisation at the regional level. This first venture opened the way for other activities in different communities and in the capital, Cuetzalan, which led to the formation of the Indian cooperatives -- Tosepan Titataniske and Maseualsiuamej Mosenyolchikaua -- and other organisations created by government indigenous programs with the active participation of Indians from the communities.

The people involved in the first experience of interethnic organisation knew they had to increase links between communities and different projects, but they were conscious about the risks of increased contact with government agencies:

*Se aprendió que para seguir creciendo y consiguiendo beneficios, había que relacionarse con comunidades circunvecinas y con instituciones, pero sin dejarse manipular por ellas, ni por nadie ajeno al interés popular.*

We learnt that to continue growing and getting benefits, we needed to relate to the surrounding communities and to institutions, but without allowing them or anyone alien to the popular interest to manipulate us (ibid: 108).

They needed to balance the process carefully in order to create a sense of group, as Indian, while respecting the differences in the needs and interests of the communities. In effect they needed to reverse the process of polarisation and sense of separation between communities which arose as a result of displacements when the koyomej entered the town. They reinforced the cohesion based on a shared language and culture and on their structural position opposed to the koyomej.

Many other outsiders have sought to assist the development of indigenous groups in other parts of Mexico over the past two decades, but to different effect. Often the external input just produced a temporary effect that lasted only as long as the outsiders stayed there. In this case, on the contrary, the whole process had some characteristics that made the experience specific, long term and in my view more successful. In this chapter I will show how the Indian communities of Cuetzalan have led the construction of a form of organisation based on their own needs and views. In this process they developed different strategies of interethnic interaction, which weave their own cultural ways into new knowledges brought by their Mestizo allies to develop a new, creative interethnic exchange. The experience had produced specific outcomes but it has also increased and diversified interethnic knowledge. These knowledges are
available to be applied to different situations where the interethnic relationship with Mestizos of Cuetzalan or from outside provides new opportunities for the development of Indian culture and better conditions of life.

Re-signifying Indian organisation

These external agents interacted in a different way with the Indian communities of Cuetzalan. The Indians, probably influenced by previous negative experiences with koyomej, were receptive but cautious, demanding respect for their culture, needs and aims. They also continued to withhold complete trust in accepting these offers of support from outsiders. I felt the same suspicion when they interacted with me. They did not reject me but waited to see what kind of Mestiza I was. In order to succeed in the interaction the people who arrived in the town needed to be aware of the fact that the only way to be accepted by the Indians was to support them, not to impose external views. Of course, the new visitors -- Mestizo promoters -- had their own expectations and views at the outset. Some were shared by the Indians but others were not. The way to arrive at agreement and then to action, was through full involvement in communal life, as the only way to understand the other’s views and needs. According to Indians “the promoter should be involved in the community life, even culturally, and together form a new community [people and promoter]” (el promotor debe involucrarse en la vida de la comunidad, aun culturalmente, y formar una nueva comunidad juntos [pueblo y promotor]) (ibid: 200).

One of the basic premises for the Indians who worked with the Mestizos, reinforced through the experience of all those years, was that the Indian communities have the knowledge of their problems, so solutions need to come from them, not imposed from outside. A later analysis of the process by Indians from Tzinacapan expressed it clearly:

No hay que plantear soluciones a las comunidades, sino encontrar los problemas que hay y que sean ellos mismos quienes generen sus propias soluciones; un programa que no surja de la comunidad no funciona ... el campesino tiene que hacer las cosas por sí mismos para aprender verdaderamente.

It is not useful to propose solutions to the communities, but rather find what are the problems so that they can generate their own solutions. A program, which does not come from the community, does not work ... the peasant has to do things for himself to really learn (ibid: 199).
The starting point was being open to hear, flexible to respond, and probably fascinated by Indian views of the main problems and Indian ways of solving them. The Indian communities have much to offer, and the new kind of action was based on the traditional communal organisation and the assembly, and rotation of work for the collective benefit. So the Mestizo promoters needed to follow rules made by Indians, and recognise their authority. The promoter’s role was to teach the skills for succeeding in the external institutional space (how to get funds and write applications, how to organise to be legally recognised, etc), but they had to learn how the proper ways to incorporate people into a common project, and how to deal with the conflicts that arose as regional ethnic projects evolved. And that rested on knowledge of traditional Indian forms of organisation.

The different organisations, as they continued or grew, have had to solve a range of problems, including the basic fact of the diversity of views in the community (with people for, against or simply indifferent) to the need to accept the good faith of the external agents and the external conditions for the change. Diverse activities were developed in different areas (economic, cultural and social) with different groups of people, and a variety of institutional resources (personal and economic) that arrived in the town at different times, or were obtained through the projects proposed. But the importance of these activities over time was the way they transformed individual projects and outcomes into a long-term process, appropriated by the Indian community as part of their interethnic knowledge. In this way a specific project might end or individuals working in one or other activity might depart but the experience continued. Each activity was just a step to a wider goal: the autonomous development of Indians to achieve better conditions of life. Following that aim each project, each collective activity, and each learning towards the interethnic relationship became a knot in a network that wove all activities together, instead of competition inside the community and between many communities. Each experience, no matter how small, produced an effect that enhanced the possibilities of others.

The process has been a continuous source of learning and experience that has produced new ways of behaving in interethnic interaction. The presence of outsider Mestizos -- who brought different attitudes and skills, worked together with Indians, and were deeply committed to changes in Indian condition in the area -- has slowly modified the relative position of Indian communities in the municipality. It is not that there is now an ideal equality between Indians and koyomej, but the experience has reinforced the value of Indian culture, their consciousness of their rights, and the effectiveness of a regional Indian organisation in the context of the national political situation. These important achievements became part of a new form of interethnic interaction in which Indians participate in most activities in the municipality, bringing in new knowledges from their ongoing experiences. In that way regional cooperatives
such as the Tosepan, or the handicraft women cooperative Maseualsiuamej, as well as other programs developed by federal governmental institutions, were able to incorporate experienced Nahuat people into their activities. Indian participants in those organisations brought Indian views and acquired interethnic skills to transform externally driven goals and views in spaces for Indian development appropriated on behalf of the communities.

These new experiences of interethnic interaction at the regional and national level provide a further impetus for the development of Indian culture in the context of Mexican society. It is not that the Indians have modified completely their ways of interaction with the koyomej of Cuetzalan, nor that the koyomej have completely changed their attitudes and ways, but the process is slowly transforming the conditions for interethnic interaction:

_Antes nos trataban como indios salvajes, aún así todavía una que otra persona le viene a salir la palabrita, pero ya no tanto. Aún así nos tratan como indios, como humillación, así lo dicen._

Before they treated us as savage “indios” (Indians), even now some people use that word, but not so much now. However they treat us as “indios”. To humiliate us they say it like that (Nahua man from Tzinacapan)

The main change I believe comes from the increased strength and self confidence of the Indian communities, forcing the koyomej to take Indian demands into account and probably to question their own taken-for-granted superiority. The change is visible but the strongly internalised ideology still appears in both groups, Indians and koyomej. The dominant ideology is there resisting change, but at the same time unable to avoid the slow changes produced by the creative action of Indian groups. In other places as well, Indian groups produce changes in ideology and action, and the transformation of interethnic relationships in Cuetzalan cannot be understood only in local terms. The strong link between the different levels of society (nation, state, district, municipality and community) becomes a broad ideological ambience that permeates each concrete action with the conditions of the whole. In this way the interethnic dialogue constantly acts in reference to present and imagined situations, in the local or the external space.

**From the backyard to the vanguard**

Some urban Mestizos arrived in Cuetzalan with the specific aim of developing programs to improve profitability in agriculture. They felt the Indian communities of Cuetzalan were a good place to begin, since these Indians were interested in
transforming traditional agriculture into a more profitable coffee monoculture. This fact seemed to the outsiders an opportunity to work with people open to new knowledges and technologies which they could transmit without needing to fight against tradition. These Indian peasants had accepted the new crops, which was a sign they were not resistant to change. This expectation led the Mestizos to think they could transform these Indians into modern competitors of the koyomej landowners and monopolists.

Their first surprise was that the Indians resisted involvement in increasing coffee production. At first this seemed just another instance of the common taken-for-granted 'fact' that Indians are held back by tradition and ignorance. But in fact the Indians were motivated by a deep knowledge of the socioeconomic and political conditions of the region, where the koyomej had total control over the commercialisation of all products. This was expressed by Nahua people to one of these urban Mestizos:

La gente decía, cuando yo produzco más es cuando menos nos pagan por lo que producimos. Entre más producimos los que nos compran el café nos pagan menos ... nos dicen produzcan más, inviertan más dinero y es echarnos la soga al cuello. People said, when I produce more it is when they pay us less for what we produce. The more we produce the less the coffee buyers pay us ... you say produce more, invest more money, and that is hanging ourselves (cooperative Mestizo adviser).

The Mestizos tried every option to bring people from the communities together to develop activities to improve agriculture. They went to different towns to explain their plans to individuals or in meetings and they organised meetings with community leaders in the municipal capital, but all attempts failed. People were clearly not interested. As a last attempt, they decided to invite people and ask them what they needed and how they could be of assistance to the communities. This was the first successful step towards forming a social organisation, which later became the regional cooperative.

The change of strategy produced a magical effect. Indians know what they need, what they want and how to organise themselves to work together. For some outside experts that was disappointing, not acceptable. They had studied and earned degrees, so they were the ones with the knowledge, they liked to have control over decisions. This new way of doing things positioned them as servants, not leaders. This reaction by the Indians dismantled their misconception, that Indians need someone to lead them. Instead it offered these visitors the opportunity to learn a different truth.

Throughout decades of work with Indian groups in this region, there were many promoters who left projects because they were unwilling to take Indian direction. The ones who stayed accepted that their skills must be used to benefit the people, that
they had to learn to work together to solve problems the community felt were important. They were the ones who believed in the potential of Indian organisations.

The first problem felt by the communities, as I mentioned in chapter 3, was the marketing of sugar, an important product in the diet of the indigenous population, their main source of energy. They were not able to buy it any more because of the high prices in the local market, more than 500% higher than the official price. To solve this problem the Mestizo promoters, mainly agronomers, had to put into a drawer all their university knowledge about agriculture and become simple consultants. "That was not their job but they had to do it for the work they were doing here to be useful" (Eso no era su labor pero tuvieron que hacerlo con tal que fuera útil el trabajo que ellos estaban realizando acá) (cooperative agronomer). Their first activity was just to look for cheap sugar from national commercial institutions outside the municipality. Around the collective buying of sugar they were able to promote the participation of people from different communities. They needed free collective work, financial cooperation and a house in each community to stock sugar and distribute it for the collective benefit. This process was easy, due to the traditional expertise in communal organisation and earlier communal attempts to organise the selling of products, such as handicrafts (PRADE/PRAXIS 1985:108). Indians knew all about collective organisation, as part of their traditional way of running the communities.

With those antecedents people from the communities were well disposed to doing all that was needed. It was more difficult to overcome the distrust some people felt about interacting with Mestizos. It was also difficult to convince them of their potential strength against the koyomej, a feeling that has been ingrained over decades of exploitation and violence. This feeling was continually reinforced by a systematic attack by some koyomej to block this Indian organisation, and thus avoid losing their control over Indians.

Five communities participated at the beginning (Yanhuitlalpan, Tzinacapan, Ayotzinapan, Pinahuistla and Xocoyolo), but slowly the success of their actions spread and more groups of people joined them. "That got people's attention, each Sunday there were many of us who began to be together" (Eso llamó mucho la atención a la gente, ya cada domingo nos empezábamos a juntar muchos) (Secretary of the cooperative). From this moment the Indian communities were able to increase their stock and sell other products at lower prices (corn, beans, milk, oil and rice), and also to think how to solve other problems, now linked to the commercialisation of their crops. This experience was the first step towards what became later the regional Indian cooperative Tosepan Titataniske, which today includes people from 80 communities from 10 municipalities of the states of Puebla and Veracruz. Most are from Nahua communities,
with a few from the other Indian group in the region, Totonac communities in neighbouring municipalities.

Over more than twenty years in the life of the cooperative there have been many successes and failures, and many internal and external conflicts to confront, but what I want to emphasise is that the cooperative represented a significant experience of positive interethnic relationship. I want to mention some of the characteristics which in my view made this project such a lasting success; able to modify Indian conditions in the region, not only for the members of the cooperative but for Indian people in general.

Another kind of interethnic experience

This project could only have happened through a different kind of interethnic relationship, where the Mestizos involved behaved in a different way to the koyomej of the town. The Mestizo promoters spoke out against inequality and exploitation, they offered opportunities to get funds, and they did not claim to work on behalf of government institutions, or a political party. Indian communities have much negative experience of koyomej and other Mestizos going to communities to offer solutions and leaving without results. What they usually got from them was minor and temporary changes, or even worse, empty promises. The Indians were not easy to convince:

*Nosotros en las comunidades ya no creímos mucho las invitaciones que nos hacen ... iba una persona que va a invitarnos ... que va a resolver los problemas, nomás hay que votar por él, y no era cierto, porque nomás estaba en la presidencia y ya no lo conocía a uno, dijimos, éstos van a ser igual.*

We in the communities do not believe much in people exhorting us ... one person came to exhort us ... that he is going to solve our problems, we just need to vote for him, and it was not true, as soon as he was president he did not know us any more, we said these are going to be the same (ibid).

So the promoters needed to show systematically their commitment and humility to win the Indians’ trust. Sometimes they resorted to the common strategy for identifying with Indians by using the same clothes or trying to learn their language. Although this kind of strategy has been seen as manipulative, it nonetheless shows respect for the others’ customs. In itself it could be just a fraud, but along with other signs of solidarity and reciprocity it has helped them become part of the group, not Indian of course but indigenised.

Another important element in the success was the fact that promoters deferred to Indian power in the organisation. Because the cooperative worked through the assembly, following the same kind of organisation they were used to, the Indians could follow familiar patterns of behaviour, appropriating new knowledges from outside and
inserting them into their own set of beliefs. The cooperative uses the assembly as its spine, enabling continuity, and avoiding previous experiences of governmental agencies which tried to manipulate communities, taking all the decisions without the consent of the people:

\[La\;\text{experiencia\;que\;se\;tenía\;en\;esos\;momentos\;es\;que\;eran\;muy\;manipulados\;por\;funcionarios\;ya\;sea\;de\;la\;Reforma\;Agraria\;o\;de\;Banrural.\;En\;las\;asambleas\;los\;que\;decidían\;que\;se\;hacía\;eran\;ellos.}\]

Their experience at that time was that they were very much manipulated by bureaucrats from Reforma Agraria [government agency for rural development] or from Banrural [rural public bank]. In the assemblies they were the ones who decided what to do (ibid).

With such an experience in mind, it was very important for the Mestizos to emphasise the authority of the assembly explicitly and in their practice:

\[Nosotros\;[los\;asesores]\;hemos\;insistido\;siempre\;que\;el\;poder\;es\;de\;la\;asamblea\;[de\;los\;indígenas]\;y\;que\;más\;que\;ser\;nosotros\;que\;dirigimos\;...\;nuestra\;principal\;labor\;es\;estar\;ideando,\;estar\;sacando\;de\;lo\;que\;se\;platica\;en\;la\;asambleas,\;haciendo\;síntesis\;y\;tratando\;de\;interpretar\;cual\;es\;el\;sentir\;y\;ver\;como\;hacerlo\;para,\;o\;a\;quien\;acudir\;para\;que\;se\;pueda\;resolver\;ese\;problema,\;que\;estrategia\;seguir.\]

We [the advisers] have always insisted that the power is located in the assembly [of Indians] and more than us directed things ... our main job is to get ideas from what is said in the assembly, making syntheses and trying to interpret the feelings and see how we can do the job, who to find to solve that problem, what strategy to follow (Mestizo adviser).

The success of this kind of relationship, in which the Mestizos' actions reflected their commitment to follow Indian decisions, made this form of organisation appropriate as the primary focus for their activities. The two experiences, the risk of manipulation and this way of avoiding it, defined the kind of organisation the Indians needed to develop, and the people of the communities decided to constitute the cooperative. A main reason for this decision was that in the legal code of cooperative associations no one from outside needs to be part of the assembly, and authority is vested in the assembly of partners. This formula fitted well with the traditional form of communal organisation and the kind of relationship they had with the advisers. Within this framework, drawing on the options available to them from the national political and economic system, and from their traditional ways of social organisation, they slowly evolved a specific kind of cooperative that responded to the needs and interests of Indian communities.
The choice of the general assembly as the central element in the organisation was crucial for many reasons. It was the way for Indian communities to control the cooperative and the different activities performed by the consultants, and to coordinate activities and needs of the community members. The growth of the organisation, however, demanded they keep a coordinating role but at the same time allow some autonomy to the different communities. So they created a general assembly of the cooperative with representatives from the communities, along with autonomous unions ruled by the communal assembly that nominated representatives to be their spokesmen in the regional cooperative:

_Fue creciendo tanto la cooperativa que se tuvo que optar porque en las asambleas regionales vinieran nada más los representantes y que cada comunidad tenga reunión con los socios._

The cooperative grew so much that we had to decide that only the representatives came to the regional assemblies and that each community had its meeting with its partners (ibid).

Another important aspect was that by participating in the assembly and in leadership positions at both levels (regional and communal) people gained skills to become active members, not just to hear and approve or disapprove but sharing in decisions and actions:

_A través de la asamblea la gente ha perdido el miedo a hablar en público ... ha expresado sus opiniones y ha encontrado eco a sus opiniones, ha sido la escuela para la mayor parte_

Through the assembly people have lost their fear of speaking in public ... they have expressed their opinions and they have found their opinions echoed, for the majority it has been their school (Secretary of the cooperative).

For the people of the communities it was clear they could learn little from what is imposed from outside and projects easily collapse when the leaders leave. In this case there is no one leader, but a sequence of peoples passing through the management committee, feeding the general assembly of the cooperative as well as the communal assemblies. In a way it is dynamic participant learning which reinforces the structure at different levels. This circulation of leaders in community assemblies and in the case of the regional cooperative in my view countered the potential risk of ossification that might otherwise have arisen due to the existence of some salaried positions in the administration of the cooperative, such as the secretary. This is a central role in the success of transactions and organisation of activities for the various projects. According to some members of cooperatives, this secretary has continued for many years in that
position thanks to the experience he has accumulated, serving the cooperative since the beginning. In some way his respected position and authority is conceived similarly to the position of the Tatiyacúas of the councils of elders in the communities. Instead of being a vertical, centralist structure (like the Mexican political one, see Introduction), there is a horizontal network that becomes stronger each time the different knots are reinforced. In this way experiences in each community enhance the possibilities of other communities as well as the cell that coordinates them all. This cell brings together all experiences from the communities and spreads outcomes from one to the others.

By integrating communal assemblies with the cooperative assembly a space was created to address different kinds of problems for different communities. For this reason the cooperative could draw on a broader perspective on the conditions of Indian people and consider a variety of approaches and programs to improve them.

The same ethos of collective work and participant learning can be seen in the cooperative’s strategy of training people from different communities to work for the cooperative. In that way people were trained as specialists in different activities. This was the best way to build a strong organisation while at the same time opening new options for jobs. A clear example is road works. The cooperative managed to take charge of federal programs to improve roads in that region. This benefited local people by creating paid jobs, which the workers performed with greater interest because the roads would benefit their communities. They received an income, but also worked for the community. In addition they learned skills which opened future possibilities of employment.

They followed the same policy in training Indians to promote agricultural activities. They paid for young people, selected by the assemblies of different communities, to be trained in new knowledge and technologies. Once trained they applied that knowledge to work their own land, committed to spread that knowledge to other people in the community. This strategy allowed a successful project to legitimise the new knowledge and the value of young people’s skills, breaking the common resistance of older people to be taught by the young. At the same time it avoided the problem of having people from outside imposing new ways, and gave more respect to the Indians’ potential.

Many, outside and inside the cooperative, have not understood this multiplicity of actions as central to the policy and planning of the cooperative. Koyomej do not see the success of the cooperative so clearly (and nor do all cooperativists) stressing that profits are not clearly distributed to individuals:

*Sí usted va con alguien orgullosamente cooperativista y le pregunta cuánto te dan cada año o cuánto te dan por cosecha, no les dan nada ... pero si la*
cooperativa generó tanto dinero que te digan tus ganancias de cooperativista este año cuanto fueron, la gente no sabe que es eso.

If you go with some proud cooperativist and you ask him how much do they give you each year or each harvest, they give them nothing.... So, if the cooperative generated so much money they should tell them how much was their profit this year, as cooperativist people do not know what it is (Mestizo woman).

In fact, profits are partly invested in other projects that benefit the region or the community, not only each individual. The profits go into the cooperative infrastructure which includes the office in Cuetzalan (with networked computers), two processing plants for the coffee, a treatment plant for pepper oil, stock buildings, a storeroom of building material (to support a cooperative that links house and road building), a handicraft shop, a health consultancy room, a pharmacy, a mushroom culture plant, two nurseries for coffee trees, some trucks to transport products to and from the communities and some cars used by the advisers to travel in the region, visiting communities and projects. The profits are also used to employ workers to manage the cooperative, some of them cooperative members, some advisers -- an agricultural engineer and a biologist. They also pay some doctors to visit the communities and to see patients in the cooperative building in Cuetzalan.

Indian views as an ethic of sustainability

This multiple approach, deeply rooted in the kind of work done in Tosepan, reflects the holistic Indian view of culture and organisation. For Indians, the person, the family, the community and nature (plants, animals, water, soil) all interact together, and hence human action needs to be seen in the context of its effects on all other aspects of life, in the same way as the actions of nature have effects on their own life. For them all members of the community, which includes humans, animals, plants, water, winds, soil, and also supernatural beings and the ancestors, interact to reproduce the totality of life (see Briseño 1994a & b). For this reason they have strong views on the condition of their environment and their action on it.

From this point of view, one of the problems felt by the assembly of the cooperative was the waste of water in the processing of coffee and way the flesh of coffee berries has contaminated gullies and rivers. This contamination affected some communities, which fish to complement their economy and need water for their survival, to drink and water their crops. With this problem in mind the assembly asked the consultants to look for new ways to process coffee from a sustainable organic point of view. Their research gave rise to a new project, which is today an important activity of the cooperative: the organic coffee project (Illustration 37).
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According to the agricultural engineer, the first step was to build a new processing plant with modern technology, and transform the older one. The new machinery, from Colombia and Costa Rica, processed the coffee with much less water that was collected from the rain. The second step was to find how to use coffee waste instead of throwing it into the gullies. So, the coffee waste was used in the production of mushrooms, now sold in Cuetzalan, mainly to restaurants that offer them as a traditional local dish. The waste from the production of mushrooms was used later to produce worm compost. They also include rubbish from Cuetzalan market, and sugar cane waste from some communities, reducing in this way the amount of rubbish produced by the koyomej, tourists and Indians.

The worm compost is sold commercially in Cuetzalan and outside, and also used in the nurseries where they grow new, more productive and fast growing coffee species to renew the older ones. Using this kind of compost they now produce more plants in a small quantity of land in the nurseries, reducing costs by introducing worm compost instead of peat moss imported from Canada. To complete the whole project, certainly influenced by a snow fall that destroyed the coffee crop in 1987 (at that time their main source of income) they promoted the introduction, or rather the return, of the policulture agriculture common in the region before coffee was introduced by the koyomej landowners. With the same aim they also began growing macadamia trees from Australia in the nursery, to replace the non-productive shade trees needed in the coffee plantations. In this way they have in mind a future commercial production of macadamia nuts.

The organic coffee project is just at the end of the experimental stage, but it is beginning to be introduced to different communities by 20 Indian promoters who have been trained to introduce the new system in their own land, in their own communities. The project became well known in national government institutions after they applied for various funds, to create the infrastructure and obtain new species of coffee, mushroom spores and worms. Now the Cuetzalan cooperative’s organic coffee project is the example other organisations must follow from different parts of the country, Indian or non-Indian:

*Fue el primer beneficio ecológico que se construyó en el país ... ahora cuando alguien pide un crédito para el café les piden que nos conozcan y sigan nuestro ejemplo como condición para darles el crédito.*

It was the first ecological coffee processing plant that was built in the country ... now when someone asks for a loan for coffee they ask them to find out about us and follow our example as a condition to approve the loan (Mestizo adviser).
What began from a simple local concern influenced the consciousness of other producers and policy makers. Unfortunately, due to their previous investments and desire for big profits, the koyomej have resisted the change, not wanting to spend part of their profits on new infrastructure. Paradoxically, the ones who see themselves as progressive do not welcome change, probably because the change requires collective vision that is not so strong among the rich Mestizos. This fact impedes a wider transformation of Cuetzalan, in spite of the efforts of Indians to clean up the environment. The engineer in charge of the organic project explained the different attitudes of the two groups as follows:

Donde más facilmente la gente se interesa en este tipo de proyectos es en las comunidades indígenas, yo creo que ellos están mejor organizados colectivamente y se preocupan más por cuidar su ambiente.

It is in the Indian communities where people are more interested in this kind of project, I believe that they are collectively better organised and they are more concerned to care for the environment.

I will add to this explanation the fact that Indian culture is immersed in a holistic approach that creates a greater awareness of the well being of others, including animals and plants, which are conceived also community members.

After twenty years Tosepan is still full of energy, creativity and experience to continue working and confronting the multiple everyday conflicts that usually arise in and out of the process of working on behalf of Indian communities. But they also face problems as they try to improve the Indian situation, and create different conditions of interethnic relationship with the koyomej of Cuetzalan. Among their problems it is important to mention some social ones related with cultural behaviours that, in my view, are the effect of a long history of marginalisation produced by processes of colonisation and domination of Indian people, who have occupied the most marginal position in Mexican society. Some problems such as alcoholism, lack of family planning and violence against women and children are intricately bound up with Indian traditions as they are now. That situation needs to be transformed in the interaction to achieve a more equal relationship inside the community and with the rest of Mexican society. Some of those problems are now on the agenda of the cooperative, part of its input into other projects they coordinate, such as the indigenous radio and health programs (see chapter 8).
Renewal of tradition through women’s creativity

The traditional form of organisation has raised one significant problem inside the cooperative, which has also affected the communities. Traditionally, women were not allowed to participate actively in communal assemblies. Women were part of the cooperative assembly but they felt the cooperative was not aware of their needs, and they were not able to participate publicly. It was not that it was prohibited but they felt constrained, due to lack of experience and more so because of the subtle pressure from men. For these reasons they began to ask for the support of the cooperative for their own projects and more independence from the assemblies of the cooperative and community.

The cooperative assembly, predominantly men, did not understand or react positively to that demand. Some even used their power as head of family and pressure from the whole community to repress the active participation of their wives. That conflict situation produced internal divisions, so a group of women decided to create a new cooperative. In this case the cooperative focused in the commercialisation of handicrafts, emphasising women’s point of view about their specific needs and problems.

This cooperative did not begin from a new form of interethnic interaction, as did the other cooperative. What was new was a change in the kind of relationship between the women and the community. The creation of a different cooperative formed only by women was a slow process that began inside the cooperative, promoted by a group of women students who came to Cuetzalan. They went to Cuetzalan to do the social service component of their degrees by working with women’s organisation. As with the formation of the regional cooperative this development involved participation by another kind of Mestizo, in this case ‘Mestiza’, who emphasised differences in the views and needs of women inside the Indian organisation. These outsiders were accepted more readily because of the Tosepan precedent, and they conditioned their participation to the kind of interaction that was acceptable. The Indian women, as part of the regional cooperative knew how to build up a collective project and how to use support from outsiders.

The women’s organisation began inside the Tosepan cooperative in 1985 around the selling of handicrafts, a traditional activity for women. The story was told to me by the current president of the cooperative, who, in the view of other women members, knows the whole process best, and is the legitimate source of information. According to her story the new activity developed from a traditional women’s practice, making their clothes, that was then transformed into a commercial activity for tourists:
Nosotras por tradición hacemos nuestras prendas para el uso diario, las blusas y los huipiles, y entonces por la misma necesidad empezamos a vender nuestras prendas al turismo y a los acaparadores.

By tradition we make our everyday costumes, the shirts, the huipil, and then to meet basic needs we began selling our costumes to the tourists and to the monopolists (president of the women’s cooperative).

An activity which used to be a task for individuals became a form of work whose problematic was shared by members of the Tosepan cooperative, men and women. The group agreed to begin working with the Mestizas to develop a specialised organisation as part of the Tosepan.

The new organisation, which began with only four members from two communities, found external outlets for selling their handicrafts, thus avoiding local competition and dependency on the koyomej who owned the handicraft shops in Cuetzalan. They began with money collected amongst them and went to sell the handicrafts at the universities of Mexico and Puebla, where the students came from. At the same time they promoted the organisation in their own and other communities to bring more people together to work with them. Thirty women from nine communities joined them.

The support of the Mestizas from outside included training in the production and commercialisation of handicrafts (training in sewing, quality control, new designs). But they also introduced reflections on gender problems, including topics related with preventative health for them and their families, and other activities to improve their families’ quality of life. All these projects were supported by national and international foundations with different funds raised with the support of the Mestizas. In this case the Mestizas from outside did not just respond to community demands, introducing some themes that were well received by the Indian women, but created conflicts with the traditional ideology where the role of women was so strongly determined by the view of men as dominant.

At the beginning the women’s organisation worked successfully inside the structure of the Tosepan as a commission, but they slowly began to create their own projects, getting their own funds and becoming more conscious of their own needs. The first assembly of women took place inside the regional cooperative in 1989. The decision to have other assemblies with women only was driven mainly by the subtle feeling that they had no space to express themselves as women, only as members of the community:
Necesitábamos un espacio propio, puras compañeras para que pudiéramos hablar en confianza. Estando con los señores a veces no nos animábamos a hablar, sobre todo cuando por primera vez participábamos en un grupo.

We needed our own space, with only women associates able to talk with confidence. Being with men sometimes we did not dare to talk, especially when it was the first time we participated in a group (ibid).

The participation of women was not much emphasised in Tosepan. They fulfilled their duties as members of different committees, but in the space for decision-making, in the assembly, the main participants were the men, who were also the majority. Women were traditionally excluded from communal assemblies, so their participation in the cooperative was their first experience of expressing their opinions in a collective public space. Responding to that situation the creation of a space only for women was very important, but on the other hand it produced a higher demand on the work that women had to do. They needed to fulfil their duties as part of the regional cooperative, working in some committees, and in addition had to develop their own projects:

A veces sí se nos complicaba un poquito pues teníamos que seguir con nuestra comisión, es decir siendo mujeres y aparte con el trabajo de la Tosepan.

Sometimes it was a little complicated because we had to continue with our commission, that is to say being women and in addition with the work of Tosepan (member of women’s cooperative).

And, of course, they also had to continue with their family duties. In this case these women did not have a double workload like many women in other places, but triple. The excessive duties however did not mean they were not committed to the cooperative. The point of rupture arrived later over a specific problem. They wanted to register a property acquired for a project. It was a communal house built with their own resources and outside funds, but this project generated a conflictual reaction from the community leaders:

Dictan que esa construcción no podíamos haberla logrado nosotras que tenía que ser de ellos. Entonces las compañeras dijeron, para que no nos la quiten vamos a registrarla.

They said that we couldn’t build that building, that it must be theirs. Then the women partners said, to stop them taking it away we are going to register it (ibid).

The opposition of authorities, as they interpreted it, was clearly not opposition to what they did, since the house benefited the community, but against their unexpected
behaviour as women. It is difficult to know how much this attitude influenced the reaction of the cooperative over this problem, and the fact that the women wanted to register the property as a separate women’s cooperative and not in the name of the regional cooperative. For the group of women it was very important to have the property in their own name:

queríamos gestionar nuestros propios recursos, sentíamos que de alguna manera íbamos creciendo y necesitábamos un espacio propio pero los señores no estuvieron de acuerdo, no entendieron que para entonces ya habíamos cambiado.

We want to apply for our own resources, we felt that in some way we were growing and we need our own space but the men did not agree, they did not understand that in that time we have already changed (ibid).

The men in Tosepan could not understand the change in the women, nor the implications of a new form of organisation inside the cooperative different to the traditional communal one. The regional structure managed the balance between communal autonomy and collective coordination, but this division introduced new spaces outside the traditional forms of men’s control. The change challenged not only the organisation but more importantly the taken-for-granted position of men in traditional ideology. The custom was that the men decided who owned and spent the family income. The communal leadership probably reacted as they did to prevent projects existing outside the men’s control, as exercised through the communal organisation they represented.

In practice these women rejected that ideology, wanting control over their own resources and profits:

Sabemos que también nosotras tenemos derecho a que seamos nosotras las que manejemos nuestro dinero y decidanmos el destino y no dárselo al marido para que al rato hasta se lo vaya a emborrachar.

We know that we also have the right for us to be the ones who manage our money and that we decide what happens with it and not give it to our husbands for them to use it later for drinking (member of women’s cooperative).

These quotations show clearly the level of consciousness of these women about their own position in the community and the problems they had to solve to achieve greater equality. I do not know how this consciousness has influenced the views of men in Tosepan, but it is possible the women have highlighted some problems that especially
affect women, such as the social issues mentioned above which are now part of the Tosepan agenda.

The decisive break occurred when the men rejected the representatives elected in the assembly of women, arguing that the decision was not taken following the rules of the cooperative, that is to say in the communal assembly of the cooperative or community:

*los señores no respetaron la asamblea que hicimos en que nombramos a nuestras dirigentes. Ellos nos nombraron otros representantes según los lineamientos de la Tosepan, pero nosotros ya habíamos realizado nuestra asamblea con más de 120 mujeres ... ya habíamos decidido.*

The men did not respect the assembly we held, where we named our leaders. They nominated other representatives for us, according to the rules of Tosepan but we had had our assembly with more than 120 women ... we had already decided (ibid).

In this case the important effect was the questioning of the traditional pattern of communal interaction where women were excluded from the sphere of decisions. They used to participate as part of the community, especially indirectly given that family interaction was central in the organisation of labour and reproduction of the labour force. They were also involved in wars, fighting alongside men (see chapter 3), but they were not allowed to participate in the communal assembly where collective decisions were taken. As a result their position was always subordinated to the men’s will.

The Tosepan cooperative introduced the participation of women into the assembly. As partners women had the same rights as men, but men’s position in the community was too strong, reproducing in practice the community ways, so it was very difficult to transform the women’s role in the new kind of interaction. The women needed to develop their own process and break with the traditional organisation, to begin to act as women, for women. At the beginning of 1992 they registered their own cooperative as Sociedad de Solidaridad Social (Society of Social Solidarity) with the Nahuat name *Maseualsiuamej Mosenyolchikauani*,”Indian women come together to work”.

*Traditional women but changing.*

This group did not wish to have a different organisation formed only by women as a movement against men, nor were they opposed to the community organisation or Indian tradition. They respected the communal organisation but there were some needs that the community, as it was organised, was not taking into account. They explicitly
argued that in the community tradition women have had their organisation before, and they were not going against tradition but against what forces from outside had changed in the communities, breaking the sense of brother/sisterhood:

Yo creo que antes sí había organización, sí había un apoyo, una hermandad tanto entre los hombres como entre las mujeres, como por ejemplo en la temporada de siembra ... pero después se fue perdiendo por las nuevas costumbres que nos vinieron a imponer más que nada con la conquista, pero de nuevo la necesidad nos ha hecho volver a tomar nuestra cuestión de organización y vemos que así como podemos lograr más cosas.

I believe that there was organisation before, there was support, a brotherhood/sisterhood between the men as well as between the women, such as for example during the time of seeding the crops ... But later it was lost because of the new customs that were imposed, especially with conquest, but now again necessity has made us to take back our ways of organisation and we see that it is in that way that we can succeed in more things (member of the cooperative).

According to this belief about ancient tradition, the new kind of interethnic interaction that produced the women’s organisation is similar to how they used to be organised, as when they work together to prepare tortillas for feasts or to support communal works. In this light the women’s organisation only refunctualised older Indian ways, and thus the new knowledge from outside were not imposed, making them less Indian, but were appropriated to solve current problems:

Lo que nosotros queremos es apoyarlos a ellos (a los señores) ... a nosotros siempre nos ha interesado el poder resolver problemas cuando está en nuestra posibilidad.

What we want is to support them (the men) ... we have always been interested in being able to solve problems when it is in our power (ibid).

In this case the changes of women’s role are not seen as imposed from outside but continues tradition in the same way as in other Indian activities. The deep cultural matrix is reproduced as the framework into which to introduce new knowledges, while maintaining the continuity of Indian traditions (see chapter 1, 2 and 6).

From outside, this is difficult to see. It looks more as if an ideology has been introduced from outside which has broken the cohesion inside the Indian organisation. In my view cohesion was not lost, just a new organisation created to open up new possibilities, following principles that come from deep Indian views. It is important here to point out how the women are constructing this process to pursue their own aims without being excluded from communal life or fighting against men. Their efforts are
designed to build up a new organisation outside the Tosepan but not in conflict with it. At the same time, included among the problems they must solve, is the conflict arising in the community because of their participation in this women’s organisation.

A booklet published by the cooperative (Maseualsiuamej Mosenyoichikauanij 1993) emphasised implicitly, but clearly, that they are not against tradition. This text is an interethnic text co-produced by a group of Indian women and a group of Mestizas. The booklet includes a brief text written in Spanish with short explanations of the aim of the cooperative, its organisation and structure, rights and duties. The simplicity of the text is expected given that many of the women in the cooperative do not have large experience with the written language and often do not speak much Spanish. By the same logic, I presume, the written text is accompanied by images of women speaking. All the images (35 in 11 pages) convey a consistent sense of the meaning of women for the cooperative. The images systematically reinforce the fact that they are Indian and traditional. This meaning is expressed in the pictures by the use of traditional clothes (embroidered shirts, huipil, long skirts, faja [wool or cotton belt]), the ceremonial hair dress (maxtatuat), or the common hair dress using trenzas, and bare feet, with occasional use of guaraches (sandals). The same meaning is reinforced in the organisation’s logo which depicts a traditional activity, weaving cloth with a belt loom, an activity from prehispanic times (Illustration 38).

Another meaning reinforced through the images is the fact that they work together. This is conveyed by showing groups of women seated in a circle, each holding her neighbour’s seat (Illustration 39), and also in the name given to the cooperative. Another major meaning is the importance of the women’s voice. One repeated image shows women with their hand raised, as if they were asking to be heard (Illustration 40). The meaning is transmitted through these images even to those unable to read in Spanish: these are traditional women, working together and having something to say. At the end of the booklet new activities are introduced and illustrated: reading books and women writing (Illustration 41). This non-traditional activity emphasises, in my view, their sense that the cooperative is a place for them to learn new things. As one Indian woman who works in the cooperative shop said:

*En la organización hemos aprendido muchas cosas, no solamente por ejemplo de contabilidad o a elaborar nuevos diseños, también hemos aprendido a perder el miedo a hablar ... y además aprendimos a valorarnos como mujeres*

In the organisation we have learnt many things, not only for example about accountancy or how to create new designs, we have also learned to lose the fear of talking ... and in addition we have learned to value ourselves as women.
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The development of the new organisation did not begin from nothing. They had the previous experiences of the other cooperative, and their aim was now to transform that experience, to respond to women's sense of their own needs. In this process they valued the support of a group of Mestiza women who pointed out new topics to reflect on. Even where those topics had not been so clearly on the Indian women's agenda before this interethnic experience, they were strongly part of their problems. Apart from the specific activities related to the commercialisation of handicrafts, they had other problems that seriously affected the well being of women in that region. Although the importance of these problems deserves more extensive research, I just mention them here to illustrate some of the challenges the Indian cooperatives are tackling now, challenges which involve the transformation of tradition without losing the legitimacy of their cultural views.

*Against tradition or domination?*

The two problems mentioned by Tosepan representatives as urgent but difficult to solve were alcoholism and birth control. In the women's perception these problems affect the general condition of women in the region and impinge adversely on the well being of the family in economic and social terms. In their view they are not separate problems but inherent in some of the traditions they are trying to change.

Alcoholism has deep roots in the history of social inequality and discrimination in Mexico (see Menéndez 1981), growing out of the interethnic construction of Indian communities, mostly influenced by the indirect or direct actions of dominant groups trying to control subaltern groups, in this case Indians. Economic interests that promote and sell alcohol are powerful enemies. In the region for example, the Tosepan secretary told me:

*Nosotros pedimos a las instituciones de salud que nos ayuden pero imagínese si son las mismas enfermeras las dueñas de la cantina. Podrán faltar muchas cosas en las comunidades, pero nunca falta la cantina.*

We asked the health institutions to help us but imagine, if the same nurses own the bar. There are many things the communities lack, but the bar, it is always there (secretary of the Tosepan).

This external provision of alcohol in the communities is reinforced internally by the ritual use of alcohol in cultural and religious ceremonies. Although this practice used to be more associated in prehispanic times with older people it has been extended to the whole population, especially men. Large amounts of alcohol are drunk in fiestas, and on many other occasions. Alcoholism in the region, mostly among men, has very damaging effects on family and community well being. Most cases of violence in the
communities, fighting between men and violence against children and women, are associated with excessive consumption of alcohol, which also has a negative impact on the economic situation of the family, already so much affected by the typical poverty of Indian communities.

Alcoholism is a problem not just for Indians but also for Mestizos. However, Indian drunkenness is more severely judged. The drink problem is part of the negative stereotype of Indians. In this region it is probably true there are more Indian alcoholics, but the Indian population is larger and, as in the rest of the country, Indians have a lower socio-economic position. So the stereotype ignores the social causes that reproduce the problem, causes that are not inherent in Indianness but come from inequality and domination.

In the case of family planning the problem is that birth control is unacceptable to a traditional view. The Catholic ideology of family and men's and women's role in the rural organisation of work are still tied to former conditions where communities used to be more autonomous, self-sufficient and with access to more land. The size of the family then was not such a problem. Big families with many children were needed to carry out the work of reproducing the family and the community. But now economic conditions have changed faster than attitudes to family size. There is not enough land to provide the minimum conditions of welfare for the families, and many young people cannot get land from the family to grow crops.

Women's identity, as constructed in the traditional ideology, is also a major obstacle to reducing the size of families. Husbands often refuse to allow their wives to participate in family planning, considering that to be truly woman she needs to prove her fertility through multiple pregnancies. In the same way, manhood is not only shown by sexual potency but by reproductive success. In this case the problem is affected by the dynamics of a tradition that has not been adapted to the new conditions as fast and efficiently as is needed. It is also the case that the poverty in the region hinders the success of family planning programs even when people accept the principle of birth control.

From this overview, it is clear that the problems that the cooperatives have to confront need not just the unidirectional programs that are usual for such problems, but a wider approach that includes major changes in the general condition of the people and in their ideology and cultural views. The leaders of Tosepan are conscious of that, and their strategy is to coordinate with health and educational institutions, and, more importantly to promote a slow process of reflection and a greater consciousness of the problem. This process of reflection is included in the agenda of the assemblies and reinforced through materials transmitted by the Indian radio in Nahuat, Totonac and Spanish.
The women’s actions are more central in developing programs around gender in their cooperative. They introduced workshops where some women received training, and were able to spread that knowledge in the communities, in the same way Tosepan did with promoters of agricultural techniques. The main topics in the workshops were reproductive health, maternity and birth control, human rights as women and Indians, domestic violence against women and children, and environmental problems. From those workshops they produced booklets, which recapitulated the position of the participants and were also designed to promote discussion among women in each community through the explicit invitation that ends each booklet. "Las invitamos para que lean y platiquen este tema en su familia y su comunidad" (We invite you to read and talk about this topic in your family and your community) (Maseualsiuamej Mosenyolchikauanij. Serie Mujer Indígena y género)

These booklets reflect some of the problems facing Indian women inside the community as women, and those, which come from the fact of being Indian. They focus on topics that challenge the taken-for-granted views in the community they have to change. They make no explicit judgements against their culture or Catholic ideology as wrong or right, but just bring out the aspects they think disadvantage them, which they want to change. These include topics concerned with the construction of women’s identity, especially what restricts their development and so their capacity to improve the general situation of the community. In the next quotation from one of the booklets produced by the cooperative we can appreciate the kind of problems these women confront in transforming their own lives, fighting the internalised ideology into which they and their husbands were socialised:

*Se piensa que el hombre tiene todos los derechos y la mujer nada, ellos tienen derecho de hablar, a formar grupos, a enojarse, a mandar, a tener las mujeres y los hijos que quieran, a estudiar, a descansar. Y la mujer tenemos obligación de atender al marido, servirle, cuidarlo, trabajar, cuidar a los hijos y si no cumplimos nos pueden maltratar, pegar y hasta matar.*

The belief is that the men have all the rights and the women none, they have the right to speak, to form groups, to get angry, to give orders, to have the women and the children they want, to study, to rest. And we women have the duties of taking care of the husband, serving him, caring for him, working, taking care of the children. And if we do not fulfil those duties they are allowed to mistreat us, to hit us and even to kill us (Maseualsiuamej Mosenyolchikauanij: Mujeres Indígenas y Derechos Humanos)

This quotation brings out the task facing these women with problems that are not so clearly recognised by men but which affect women’s everyday life. It is especially
important to highlight the mention of violence against them as a normal cultural practice. It surprises me they are the only ones to mention it explicitly; it was not even on the agenda in Tosepan as a problem to confront. The men probably see it as related to alcoholism, not as inherent in cultural behaviour. The women are just beginning to transform themselves to challenge this ideology, proposing actions to transform Indian society. Among the actions they propose to change this views, culturally internalised, they mention different levels of activity that include:

a) Consciously changing forms of socialisation inside the family, “no pegarle a nuestros hijos, educar a nuestros hijos [niños y niñas] sin distinciones, quererlos y atenderlos de igual manera” (do not beat our children, educate them [boys and girls] without distinctions, love them and attend to them all in the same way).

b) Demanding the schools raise awareness about these problems and teach the children other ways of behaving, “que en las escuelas se enseñe a los niños a no ser violentos” (that in the schools children are taught not to be violent), and

c) to raise the consciousness of men in the community “hablar con los señores, explicarles, hacerles ver que lo que hacen no está bien” (to speak with the men, explain to them, make them see that what they do is not right).

These goals are probably far from being achieved, as they know well. But their persistence in their actions and beliefs about their potentialities are slowly modifying women conditions, at least to some degree. “Nosotras sabíamos que era necesario y tuvimos el valor de enfrentar este problema” (We knew that it was necessary and we had the courage to face this problem) (president of the cooperative). The greatest difficulty was at the beginning, when they began to behave in ways that were unexpected according to community customs. They had problems to go out of the community to attend meetings or sell products outside the town:

Por tradición los señores no permitían que las señoras salieran de sus casas y pus nos veían como algo raro ... al principio si se molestaban [los maridos] ... lo vieron mal no solamente nuestros familiares sino también la comunidad ... sí, nos costó lágrimas, disgustos, regaños

By tradition the men did not let the women leave the house so they saw us as something odd ... at the beginning they [the husbands] were upset ... not only our relatives saw it as wrong but also the community ... yes, it cost us tears, quarrels, rebukes (member of the cooperative).

These difficulties, to some extent, continue because they still have to cover a double workload and fight daily against the taken-for-granted values of centuries. However, they do not give up and slowly they are legitimating their actions by results. Now they
have worked for more than ten years and the 200 partners of the cooperative have successfully developed various projects to raise income levels and improve the family diet. They run orchards and pig, chicken, and egg farms. They also have two tortillerias (machines to make tortillas) and two corn mills, to ease the amount of work for women, who used to mill corn and make tortillas by hand. The other important project that shows clearly what these women have achieved is the development of what is named an eco-tourist project, the Hotel Taselotzin, which was launched recently, the 26\textsuperscript{th} of September 1997.

\textbf{Signs of change: the women and the earth who produce.}

The women were forced to develop alternative projects through their need for more resources to improve the general condition of their families, against fierce competition and obstacles to producing and selling more handicrafts. Cuetzalan’s success with tourism generated the idea they should take advantage of that fact instead of just being, as they are in the views of Mestizos, a tourist commodity (see chapter 4). So they decided to build a hotel. The proposal was discussed and approved in the general assembly of the women’s cooperative and 45 of the partners, those who could contribute money, decided to be involved. The idea, as agreed, was to build this hotel as a commercial project but in accord with Indian views. This is subtly conveyed in the name they gave the hotel, Taselotzin that means “The earth which produces”. This name emphasises the importance of the earth in their life, and the word “ecology” reflects their view that nature in this place is an important tourist attraction. The project was born with the explicit idea of promoting respect for the environment and for the Indian communities among visitors to Cuetzalan:

\textit{Su objetivo es promover la actividad turística de la región, fomentando entre los visitantes el respeto a la naturaleza y a las tradiciones de los pueblos}

Its goal is to promote tourist activity in the region, fomenting among the visitors respect for nature and the customs of the peoples (hotel manager in \textit{La Jornada de Oriente} 30/Sept/1997:12)

The interviews do not make it clear what it means for them to be in an eco-tourist project. Apart from recognising that the constant influx of tourists depends on the fact that there are Indian communities and beautiful places to see and enjoy so it is important to care for them both. This idea has not manifested so much in actions, probably because the project is just beginning. However they mentioned plans to respect the environment in work on the hotel by building a plant to treat the water,
making compost from organic rubbish from the restaurant, and using fruit from their own orchards in preparing meals. I wonder how much this idea is also related to their interethnic knowledge, which probably includes the fact that today many national and international institutions promote ecological approaches. In this way they can succeed in gaining funds to do something that is close to their culture, so the technology and rationale are easy to appropriate.

The first step was to collect money to buy land for the hotel. Each woman paid 200 pesos towards the plot and contributed collective work (*faenas*) to clear it so they could begin building. This was not enough money to continue, so they began looking for funds from various institutions. As on other occasions, the Mestizas (who had stayed in the town, now running a consultancy in support of human rights for women, ENCADEN A.C.) supported them. With their help in writing the application they obtained funds from an international program for improvement of nutrition (*Programa Mundial de Alimentación*) and other national institutions such as Fonaes and the Ministry of Tourism. Both institutions supported them with funds for the building works and provided training in managing and running a hotel.

In some ways this was the beginning of a different experience for them. They had made applications like this before but in this case as they became more visible in Cuetzalan they also encountered more resistance from the people of the town who saw them as competitors:

*Más que nada pues nosotros sentimos que se les hace difícil reconocer que un grupo de mujeres indígenas pueda tener un producto así, si fuera gente mestiza, seguramente les facilitarían todo y les apoyarían pero al ver que éramos un grupo de mujeres indígenas como que no consienten.*

More than with other things we feel that it is difficult for them to recognise that a group of Indian women can have a product like this, if it were Mestizo people surely they would make things easy and support them, but when they saw that we were a group of Indian women it was as if they did not consent (member of the cooperative).

Their feeling of a double standard had good foundation, given that one of the problems mentioned by Mestizos from the municipality was insufficient tourist services to cope with all the people who came, especially for the *fiestas*. So why would they oppose the construction of a new hotel? In this context, the interaction with Cuetzalan *koyomej* created new problems to solve. For instance, Mestizos were able to jeopardise their funding applications to external institutions. One *koyot* from Cuetzalan worked in one of the institutions, and from there was able to block their application. They also had
problems with neighbours who tried to prevent a road being built to access the hotel by car. The advertisements of the hotel were broken or destroyed:

pusimos los letreros, pero no tardó, nomás estuvo una noche y nos los quitaron ... como es de madera lo cortaron con machete y quién sabe donde tiraron la tabla.
we put up the advertisements, but they did not last, they were there for just one night and they took them down ... as they were made of wood they cut them with machetes and who knows where they threw them (manager of the hotel)

Failures to get external funds and all the other problems mentioned did not stop them. When one door closed they looked for another to open and in that way they slowly developed their project. Their insistent requests for support have even changed the position of the municipal authorities that in the end agreed to support them in constructing the road. The women provided the work force (their husbands) and the municipality the materials. The women even won absolute control over the use of the resources:

nos pusimos necias a estar insistiendo y nos hicieron caso, así presionando lo logramos y ya ahora hasta el presidente municipal nos felicitó porque era de los empedrados que había quedado mejor y nuestras cuentas salieron bien.
We insisted stubbornly and they heard us. Pressing in that way we achieved our goal and finally even the municipal president congratulated us because it was one of the best roads, and our accounts were right) (member of the women cooperative).

The whole process of building the hotel lasted more or less a year. They bought building materials and carried them to the lot. During the building process they began changing the conditions for a new kind of interaction with the communities. Instead of radical opposition from their husbands they could now draw on men’s help in the project. At the beginning the men helped the women with some faenas, and later, when they got resources to build the hotel, the women offered them work on the project supervised by an architect and a master mason:

ya empezamos a citar a los señores para que vinieran a trabajar acd ... sus esposos de las señoras vinieron a trabajar y ya les empezamos a pagar por día o por metro.
We began to appoint the men to come to work here ... the women’s husbands came to work and we began to pay them per day or per metre (manager of the hotel).
Their position partially changed because of this experience, as they slowly are winning acceptance for their activities and behaviours inside the communities. In some ways they even became bosses of their husbands. The recognition of their work by the communities was happily expressed by the woman in charge of the hotel:

_Hasta nuestras familias están contentas, le digo que sí apoyaron, ellos vinieron a trabajar y están contentos porque en este proyecto el recurso que tengamos, se va a dar a las mismas socías._

Even our families are happy, I tell you that they supported us, they came to work and they are happy because in this project the profits we earn go to the partners themselves (manager of the hotel)

The success is just beginning to show (Illustrations 42 & 43). After only few months they are still working on their plans, slowly learning how to run the hotel and compete with other hotels that for decades received the tourists who come to Cuetzalan each year. Apart from the fact there is enough demand to make the hotel a profitable business, this project has been part of a slow transformation of relationships inside the community. In order to become an active group they needed first to manage the relationship with the community and its traditional ways. They also needed to open a new kind of interethnic interaction with the Mestizos of Cuetzalan. With these two interrelated sets of exchanges, even if there is still a long way to walk, they are beginning to build up a new image of Indian women, or maybe renewing the traditional one to become the Indian women that today’s world needs: being women, being Indian, part of the totality of communal life and therefore of nature.

The two cooperatives in their different stages have dealt with multiple inner and external challenges, some successfully resolved, and others still in process. In my opinion their success and continuity rested on a more positive interethnic relationship based on the principles of the Indian organisation and culture. In the same way that the Zapatistas used a positive interethnic interaction to create an inclusive national movement against the exclusion of large sectors of the Mexican population by dominant groups, the Indians of Cuetzalan are working from an interethnic relationship based on the same principle of respect and recognition of the value of Indian culture and social organisation. This kind of interaction in Cuetzalan, in Chiapas, and I hope in other parts of Mexico, shows the potential creativity that Indians can develop and offer to solve problems that are very acute in the case of the Indian regions, but not absent elsewhere.

The two cooperatives in the region of Cuetzalan show the dynamic social action possible if ideological conditions are transformed to construct Indianness differently, without discrimination, paternalism and imposition from above. The two have similar
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Please refer to print copy
Illustration 43: Launching the Hotel *Tazelotzin* (La Jornada de Oriente September 30, 1997).
strategies in that both emphasise the leadership of Indian communities and give the main place to Indian experience and knowledges. They are also based on the same kind of interethnic relationship to provide them with new knowledges, which they incorporate into their own experience and understanding of Mexican society to project new alternatives inside it. At the same time they have different approaches depending on their own situations. *Tosepan Titataniske* refunctionalised the traditional Indian social structure and forms of collective action to take advantage of national options, thus making the best use of multiple alternatives. *Maseualsiuamej Mosenyolchikauanij* is transforming and adapting traditional cultural views to produce a fairer relationship inside Indian society and open a more extensive collaboration between men and women, so that both cooperatives can grow stronger for the benefit of Indian people. The social, economic and cultural problems the Indians need to confront are multiple, as multiple as the actions of these two groups of Indians who have worked, creatively and persistently, through a positive kind of interethnic interaction to change their world, which is also ours.
Chapter 8

Transforming hegemonic views through interethnic culture

Among the activities of the Indians of the town of Cuetzalan are some projects that have developed through a different kind of interethnic interaction. The activities of the cooperatives and other political or cultural organisations over more than 20 years opened up a wider space for other kinds of interethnic exchange. This space proved attractive for generating various alternatives for developing projects to improve the conditions of life of indigenous groups. For such projects, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Institute for Indigenous affairs, commonly named INI) is the most important national body. For more than 50 years INI has coordinated the programs of different governmental agencies dealing with indigenous people; it is the place where national policies on Indian affairs are manifested in specific actions. Its presence in the region thus represents an important option for accessing support to meet Indian needs and interests.

In Cuetzalan there are two specific projects that have been developed through programs of INI. One is the rural hospital (Hospital de campo) which has operated for more than 20 years, with a complementary traditional medicine project from the end of the eighties. The other important program for developing Indian culture is the indigenous radio station, launched in September 1994, after several months of planning and working with Indians groups to get them involved. Both programs were initiatives of INI, following the general aims defined at the national level to address needs of indigenous people. These aims are in general to promote the development of Indian communities to achieve better conditions of life; to reinforce Indian culture through actions, including research; and to support activities in the areas of health, education, justice, culture, and material infrastructure (see INI 1988). In the context of these general goals, each region mounted different programs with specific features that depended on the particular approach of the local staff and the responses of the population.

The presence of this institution in Cuetzalan means for Indian people a specific kind of interethnic exchange, different to what they have with the koyomej and also different to the relationship with the Mestizos who came from outside to give assistance to Indian organisations. The interethnic exchange in the case of the INI programs is in some ways more difficult due to the reluctance (explicit or not) of government institutions to recognise the potential of interethnic interaction in a reciprocal dialogue and to accept the Indian ways. Although the indigenous policy explicitly states the importance of active participation by Indian peoples there is still a gap between the rhetoric and the action.
Change and the resistance of hegemonic ideology

In discursive terms the INI has responded to the political events sparked by the Indian outbreak in 1994 by carrying out a self-critique of the Institute expressed in a recent document named *Nueva Relacion Estado - Pueblos Indigenas* (New Relationship State - Indigenous Peoples) (INI 1995b). This document is based on the recognition of Mexico as a multiethnic and multicultural nation. It and other later declarations emphasise that indigenous policies should promote "the free development of the Indian peoples as subjects of the decisions that are owned by them" (Boletini 1997:29). In these terms we could suppose the activities of this federal institute in the different programs should primarily aim to simply support initiatives of Indian organisations to develop their culture, their economy, and their welfare.

This contemporary discursive change is not so great if we compare it to earlier INI policy statements. For example, in 1963 Alfonso Caso made this recommendation for working in regional Indigenous Coordinating Centres (*Centros Coordinadores Indigenistas*): "research first what are the aspirations of the community and how likely they will accept what we offer them and arrive to an agreement with them" (in INI 1978:80). The same principle appeared in 1977 in the document *Bases para la acción* (Bases for action). In this case the then-Director of the INI stated that one of the 'obvious' principles to emphasise in programs is "to recognise in indigenous communities the capacity to decide and progress materially under their own dynamic, as subjects and not objects of political, social and cultural decisions" (INI 1978:13). The three statements, made at different times by the body in charge of Indian affairs, all advocate Indian participation in their own development as basic for institutional goals to be fulfilled. Then what is 'new' in the present relationship between the state and Indian peoples? In my view the difference, beyond the meaning of the words, is the fact that during those years Indians have created their own regional organisations. They are now clearly interlocutors with the government agents, while before ethnic groups, communities, indigenous groups, were abstract entities represented by organisations designed by the institution itself, such as the *Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indigenas* (National Council of Indigenous peoples). In those terms the 'subjects' who would decide were not represented and the 'representatives' had no legitimacy, leaving a vacuum where Indians easily became the objects of institutional decisions, and hence objects of governmental control.

The discursive and political changes in indigenous policy were responses to pressures from Indian movements, which include the Zapatistas at the national level, as well as the developing regional organisations such as the Indian cooperatives. This change does not necessarily signify a change in the previous ideology or its effects.
However, if words can sometimes hide the truth, at other times they open spaces for concrete changes. So discourses may transform actions or not, depending on the strength of the groups involved and also on the force of the deep ideology still at work in the interaction. In this context it is relevant to mention some examples that show discursive conditions created by INI in some programs in Cuetzalan which framed the dynamic dialogue between Indian communities and INI programs in the present.

INI’s stated intention to promote the participation of Indians in developing their community and their culture could be interpreted as just a patronising way to project onto Indians the meanings that INI, or some individuals within it, consider important. In that case the outsiders would be actually driving and manipulating the development of Indian communities, constructing the other — the Indian — from their external perspective. In the sense of Said’s influential concept of orientalism (1995) as the construction of the other from the perspective of the hegemonic culture, the national policy for indigenous affairs would be constructing the identity of Indian people according to their specific hegemonic western view. This in fact has happened here and in other regions, when INI has taken a directive role in leading the development of Indian communities. Instead of supporting the process of community development they defined the kind of development Indians should follow ¹.

The role of INI has slowly changed. According to the Director of the INI-supported radio in Cuetzalan, each region works differently to fulfil the general aim of developing Indian culture and community, depending on the specific circumstances, but all have the principle of working with the participation of Indian communities:

_Dentro de nuestros objetivos está todo este ámbito cultural y está el ámbito del desarrollo de la comunidad y siempre a través de la comunidad ... esos son los objetivos y creo que son aquí y en las demás radiodifusoras, en alguna medida se le da más peso en unos aspectos en una radio y en otra se le da más peso a otros aspectos, pero en general por ahí se mueven todas las estaciones._

Among our aims is the whole cultural sphere and it is the sphere of community development and always through the community itself ... those are the goals and I believe they are here and in all the radio stations, to some degree more weight is given to some aspects in one radio station and more weight to others in other stations, but in general all the stations are moving in that direction.

Following the same principles the promoters of the radio station of Cuetzalan (Indian staff members and Mestizo director) emphasised from the beginning that the community

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¹Personal communication with ex-director of the radio station of Yucatán about some experiences with INI.
would drive the process. This conviction was expressed by the present director of the radio as follows:

_Nosotros (el radio) no somos la vanguardia, eso es ciertísimo, nosotros no estamos promoviendo los cambios en la comunidad, nuestra función así como yo la entiendo, es estar a un lado de la comunidad, acompañarla en los procesos de cambio, ir con ella al mismo tiempo_.

We (the radio) are not the vanguard, that is completely true, we do not promote changes in the community, our function, as I see it, is to be beside the community, accompanying it in the processes of change, going with it at the same time. (XECTZ Director).

At the beginning this kind of statement might have been considered just as a politically ‘correct’ sentiment, leading to the same actions as Indians have experienced in previous INI projects. But, at the time it was said, after five years of work, it described not only the sentiment but the process the project had followed, increasing the space for the community participation. The response of the people from the region in accepting the explicit meaning as true and so offering their active involvement was well received by the INI authorities, both in Cuetzalan and in Mexico City. Their involvement included not only Indians working for the radio, but also various Indian organisations intervening to support the project, and probably to press it to develop in directions the Indians wanted\(^2\). This pressure convinced INI to create the radio station in Cuetzalan instead of Zacapoaxtla, a municipality with a less dense Indian population but where the regional centre of INI is located, which was the original idea. As a result Indians could participate more easily because it is located now in the middle of a densely populated Indian region with strong Indian organisations (and maybe it is also significant, without the continuous presence of other INI authorities). Indians also influenced the formation of a consultative committee composed of Indian organisations based in the Nahua communities that exist in Cuetzalan and in other Nahua and Totonac municipalities reached by the radio broadcast. This committee, representing Indian views from the communities, decides on content and programming, which is reviewed and updated every six months.

I presume this instance of Indian participation was made possible by the policy changes pushed by Indian pressure at the national level, which had an effect on discourse and also at least partially transformed the concrete conditions to open new spaces for negotiation. However, within the framework of this new ideology it is

\(^2\) This participation of Indian organisations is common in all indigenous radio now and is part of the official structure as proposed by INI. However the effectivity of these consultative councils varies depending on the conditions in each region where the radio stations are working (see McSherry 1999 for a general view of the INI-supported indigenous radios).
possible to find differences in the ways these principles are put into practice, and signs that the previous ideology is still being reproduced.

Views on the development of this radio station show the different perspective of the different agents involved: Indian communities, the Indian staff, and the director -- a Mestizo outsider who represents and depends on the federal institution. The interethnic interaction is defined not only by face-to-face exchanges with the director, the only Mestizo staff member, but also by the views and rules of the federal institution. The different perspectives come out in different interpretations of the problems, successes and expectations of the radio. According to the current director the success of this radio station was due to experience in other regions of Mexico:

*Con ese antecedente, con esa experiencia las cosas no se inventan ... ya está toda esa experiencia previa, experimentada en otras estaciones de radio*

With that antecedent, with that experience, things are not invented ... there is already all that previous experience, tried out by other radio stations (XECTZ director).

For the Indians success came from the fact that they have built the process in their own way, continuously interacting with the communities:

*Nuestros programas les gustan porque son programas que salieron de la gente, no que nosotros los estamos haciendo porque nosotros queremos, lo estamos transmitiendo porque la gente así lo ha pedido.*

They like our programs because they come from the people, it is not that we do them because we want to, we transmit them because the people demand it like that (Totonac staff member).

Probably the conjunction of both views and experiences were very important to the outcome, especially given that it is an interethnic exchange. It is true that the space these Indians now have was opened and defined by previous successes and failures in other radio stations, but the involvement of Indian communities was possible because of previous interethnic experiences in this region.

The director’s view that the success of the radio is due to institutional experience is central to INI’s position, which needs to claim a pivotal role in spite of its explicit emphasis on the importance of community leadership. This need for involvement by the communities was also expressed by the Director of INI in Mexico City in 1997. “*Lo importante, y en eso estamos trabajando en el instituto es de continuar con estos programas ... que se apropien de los radios*” (The important thing, and we are working on this in the Institute, is to continue with these programs ... that [the Indians]
appropriate the radios) (Boletini 1997:3). But the same quotation implies INI’s pivotal role, in the phrase, which declares the process of appropriation needs the ‘work’ of the institute. It seems the changes in the institution are not so deep as to let them escape the hegemonic ideology that considers Indians incapable of driving their own processes. From this dominant perspective the radio gives Indians what they need, what they cannot get by themselves. This meaning is also implied in a poster produced by the radio station when it began working in Cuetzalan.

The poster (Illustration 44) printed to introduce the new radio station includes as its main written text a short statement in the three languages: La Sierra Norte de Puebla ya tiene voz (The North Range of Puebla now has a voice). The word “ya” (now) implies the radio gave voice to the region as if people from that place had no voice before. The radio is then constructed as the only legitimate form of communication, offered to the Indians of that region by the national institution. INI, whose acronym heads the whole text (in the centre and the top with bigger, bolder letters), is the one who gave this voice, who has the power to decide who and what people can speak, ‘generously’ giving Indians the opportunity to be part of this media. In the same poster the image of an old woman dressed in traditional clothes may represent the type of Indians targeted by the radio. In this way they define the kind of ‘other’ they are interested in: old women, probably monolingual and illiterate as are most Indian women of that age, traditional and reproducing Indian culture as it was learned.

This poster also emphasises the importance of Spanish as the dominant language. The Spanish text comes first, then the translation to Nahuat and Totonac. This leading role of INI and Spanish is also emphasised in the promotional booklet, written only in Spanish, with more text that follows the same sentence (ya tiene voz) included in the poster:

* XECTZ se inauguró el 9 de septiembre de 1994 y se establece como instrumento en las redes de comunicación cotidiana de la gente, en el vivir, soñar y su trabajar ... como modo de reconocerse, encontrarse y ponerse en contacto.

XECTZ was launched the 9th of September, 1994 and is created to function in the networks of everyday communication, in their life, dreams and work ... as a way to recognise themselves, to find themselves and to be in contact.

This history of the radio, and the phrase about “having a voice” completely ignores the role of Indian organisations in the creation of this radio station. It ignores the traditional means of communication of Indian people and claims that the possibility “to recognise themselves, to find themselves and to be in contact” needed help from outside, as if they had not done this in their own ways for many centuries.
Image unavailable due to copyright restrictions.

Please refer to print copy
In spite of the patronising views unconsciously expressed in these quotations the project still opened a space to construct a more strongly Indian project. Given the obstacles to dialogue in the context of a pervasive hegemonic ideology, this Indian appropriation has succeeded because of the growth of a collective identity which brings together different experiences and goals into a common project, where individuals and groups, independent of their differences, are nonetheless committed to the collective well-being of the ethnic group, the communities, and the individual members.

This group consciousness has been reinforced since the late 1970s in the different experiences of the Indians of Cuetzalan in the regional process of ethnic organisation. But this also had antecedents in previous interethnic experiences. According to one interview with an Indian from Tzinacapan that consciousness came from the history of interethnic conflicts in the region:

*En la historia se señala que ... San Miguel fue a pelear contra los franceses, agarra una conciencia étnica de grupo ... después, al agarrar esa conciencia de grupo defienden al pueblo con uñas y dientes*

In the history it is stated that ... San Miguel (the people) went to fight against the French, they took on an ethnic consciousness as a group ... later, because they took on that group consciousness they defended the town tooth and nail.

This group consciousness is reproduced and internalised through oral tradition stories, like those collected and published by the Oral Tradition Workshop of Tzinacapan, and also in the families where these stories circulate. In this case their conscious commitment to the group was carried by the participants into the various programs, and their ideas and actions as individuals included interethnic knowledge, cultivated by the Indian communities of Cuetzalan, available for use in every project that involved them.

**Different radios, different Indians.**

The kind of interethnic experiences of Indian communities defined the kind of involvement by Indian people, so that what began as an external initiative from a federal agency evolved into a project that transformed alien goals. The strategy, as in other instances, was to appropriate the project, to transform it into something useful for community development in the Indians’ own terms. The development of this project shows how the Indian communities of this region use their interethnic knowledge to take advantage of every circumstance and make it beneficial for them. This process of appropriation slowly built up in the daily radio broadcast. Through increasing participation of communities making use of the radio, and in the presence and pressures from different Indian organisations to create a radio to support the communal and
regional Indian development, they constructed step-by-step their own activities with their own views.

The program of Indigenous Radio Stations in INI is an old initiative, developed in other Indian areas of Mexico using different languages that are found in various regions (Nahuat, Mixtec, Zapotec, Tzotzil, Purepecha and Maya are some examples). In this case the Radio station XECTZ "La voz de la Sierra Norte" (The voice of the northern sierra) was planned to cover an area that includes Nahuat and Totonac speakers in the region of the North Sierra, where Cuetzalan is located.

The aim of indigenous radio, here and in all the other radio stations, is to promote the development of Indian communities and their culture, using a form of communication Indian people have already accepted. It is even the case that radio for many Indians is the only form of mass communication, or at least a very important one that links them with Mexican society outside. In such a rural space, with few good roads, poor communication by phone or telegraph and unreliable public transport, the people adopted radio as a basic information tool for what is happening beyond the local space. INI thus sees radio as a privileged instrument to transmit institutional meanings to fulfil its aims. Its messages quickly reach extended regions where Indian people live.

The focus of the Radiodifusora Cultural Indigenista (Indigenous Cultural Radio) as this kind of radio is named is different to other radio stations that are heard in the Indian areas and elsewhere. Its aim is not commercial but cultural, and its main target audience are groups defined by their cultural and linguistic specificity as indigenous.

**Indians in national media.**

The other type of radio received by Indian communities is mainly commercial and directed to a modern, urban mass audience, whose model is the centre of the country, Mexico City. This is clear in the odd fact that many radio stations received in rural areas broadcast extensively on the activities and problems of that city. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear traffic conditions in the main freeways of the city. This shows the radio does not consider the diversity of needs and views, in this case of Indian peoples, but, on the contrary, tries to homogenise Mexican society. Commercial radio’s only interest in Indian audiences, when there is one, is as a potential market, so in regions with many Indian speakers they make occasional use of Indian languages to make sure their message is understood. According to people who live in Cuetzalan other radio stations sometimes use Indian language. “They use it occasionally in political campaigns or to promote chemical products for farming, but just that” (Director of XECTZ). The use of the Indian language in those cases does not reflect a cultural interest in the language or the speakers, just to reach them as consumers or potential voters, thus solving the problem of communication with these non-Spanish speakers.
By using Indian languages the target population grows, including people who do not speak Spanish, so there are more buyers, more political supporters.

Most treatment of Indian culture in the mass media, on the rare occasions they include anything about Indians, conform to the restricted stereotypes of Indians as prehispanic\textsuperscript{3}. This reductive construction of Indianness is common throughout mainstream culture, as I have shown in the first chapter, so it is not strange to find this ideology on radio as well. It is the case with the radio program \textit{La Hora Nacional}. (The National Hour), which is produced by the government to bind the whole population of Mexico together. This national program (broadcast each Sunday evening from 9 to 10 networked throughout the country) often refers to prehispanic culture, but I have never heard an item about the culture and sociopolitical situation of contemporary Indians (though of course I have not heard every program).

The program often makes reference to prehispanic Indian culture to give an idealised sense of history, mostly to decorate contemporary themes that form the core of the program. For example they mentioned Moctezuma’s Zoo which the Spanish found in Tenochtitlan when they arrived, as something for Mexicans to take pride in:

\begin{quote}
\textit{El zoológico de Moctezuma causó admiración entre los europeos que llegaron a nuestras tierras antes del siglo XV.... El aprecio por la naturaleza es un ejemplo más del nivel cultural de los antiguos mexicanos.}
\end{quote}

The zoo of Moctezuma aroused admiration among the Europeans who arrived to our lands before the 15th century.... Appreciation of nature is another example of the high cultural level of the ancient Mexicans (24 August 1997).

This reference came in an interview with the director of Mexico City Zoo, to give a sense of continuity from the past to the present, a continuity also emphasised in the fact that the presenter did not refer to ancient Indians or Aztecs or Mexicans but to the “ancient Mexicans”, which is also the name given to the contemporary population of Mexico, Indian or non-Indian. There was the same use of Indian references in other topics such as hydraulic works by the government in Mexico City (ibid) and in an interview with the director of the National Archives. In this last case the reference to Indians came from the story of the fall of Tenochtitlan (17 August 1997). The \textit{Hora Nacional} programs gave an historical perspective to contemporary activities of Mexican Mestizos, as heirs of Mesoamerican civilisation, but not those of Indian Mexicans. The link goes in only one direction, from prehispanic Indians to contemporary Mestizos, not including the contemporary Mexicans that are Indians.

\textsuperscript{3} One exception is the cultural radio \textit{Radio Educacion}, which includes music by contemporary Indian groups and also programs about rural problems that sometimes include Indian perspectives.
Elsewhere, Indian groups as audiences have been incorporated by a particular
form of radio that has built up a generalised mass culture. In this context the indigenous
radio station had to compete with well-established means of mass communication that
previously were the only option, and thus defined the medium. The new kind of media
communication needed creative new ways to provide the audience with some of what
they were used to and liked, (such as popular music or external news, though not
exactly traffic reports), while introducing new meanings that made more sense for the
kind of people they were targeting, in order to construct through these meanings a
different Indian culture.

The Indian image constructed in the shared culture of Mexicans is different to
the image built up in the cultural radio station of Cuetzalan. The Indians construct
themselves through their own voice, as contemporary and in a process of
transformation that makes them similar to other groups while keeping the cultural
specificity that most Mexicans have rejected in their own identity. In this case the
processes of interethnic relationship they have experienced previously have created the
possibility for them to develop a new interethnic experience, one in which they can
project their own views of Indian culture.

Giving voice to the community

The radio station found important resources for their work in the previous
projects. After 20 years of continuous work in the Indian communities, the new project
readily found experienced people, with an ideological position that equipped them for
an active role in the municipality, while immersed in a process of re-valorisation of their
culture. An important player in this process was the Oral Tradition Workshop of San
Miguel Tzinacapan. This project assisted the radio by providing staff who had been
members of the workshop, thus making available many texts from Nahuat culture
written in Nahuat and Spanish. Equally important was the process of reflection in the
workshop on the importance of Indian culture. In this way the local experience of a few
young Indians, and the core aims that drove the previous project, became a resource for
developing the new project, with its new media but the same principles. As individuals
they brought to the radio their interethnic knowledge and their commitment to the
community, both useful tools in appropriating the options offered from outside,
transforming the federal views of INI to fit with the views of the Indian communities.

The members of the oral tradition workshop, some of whom now work for the
radio station, believed the oral tradition was very important in reproducing Indian
culture, and hence important as well for the new project. It is not that this is a new idea
for indigenous radio. Other INI radio stations have made use of oral traditions as source
for Indian cultural content. What was important in this case was that the proposal came
from members of the communities, so its meaning was situated in their views about its
social function. It was, I believe, part of the process of community involvement which later drove the process of appropriation of this media by the communities.

In those circumstances the use of oral traditions was seen as reinforcing traditional ways of transmitting knowledges, beliefs and social norms. As one of the workers in the radio station expressed it:

No somos de la sociedad occidental, somos de un tipo de comunicación que no tiene por que ser igual que las otras radios, y creo que los relatos, como siempre confiábamos también en el taller de tradición oral, en que hay una serie de consejos implícitos en cada relato. Entonces el platicar eso a la gente, a los niños, a los jóvenes, a los adultos, implica también llevar un mensaje al estilo de la población indígena.

We are not from western society, we use a type of communication that is not the same as in other radios, and I believe that in the stories, as we trusted also in the oral tradition workshop, in each story there is a series of implicit counsels, so that telling them to the people, to children, young people, adults, means also that we give our message in the style of indigenous people (Nahuat staff).

INI authorities welcomed the introduction of the oral tradition, from the workshop and directly from the communities, into the content of the new radio station. It fulfilled their aims and joined institutional and communal interests, creating a double effect that increased the efficiency of the radio. The fact that Indians saw it as a shared view not an imposition probably increased their enthusiasm. The use of oral tradition in the radio was also well received by the population, together with the use of Indian languages in that public space. According to one Nahuat staff member, this was an advantage of this project compared with other programs developed by INI:

La radio tiene mucha convocatoria porque la radio es la única institución que tiene personal indígena y que puede atenderlos en su lengua, porque a pesar de que hay muchas instituciones de carácter indigenista no tienen personal indígena y es la grave bronca que tiene el INI.

The radio is good at bringing people together because the radio is the only institution that has indigenous staff and is able to address them in their language, because in spite of the fact there are many institutions dealing with Indigenous matters they do not have indigenous staff and that is the hard problem INI has.

Planning for the radio included a prior study in the Nahuat and Totonac communities, which would be reached by the radio's signal, to define its profile, joining preferences of the communities with INI's goals. From this study the radio was planned to broadcast in the three languages of the region (Nahuat, Totonac and
Spanish), drawing its cultural perspective from the indigenous population. They trained some Indians to do the initial research to build up the programs, and then become presenters in their own language. Apparently this training was mainly focussed on technology and use of the equipment. According to an Indian presenter his training was very short and he needed to develop his skills in practice, in front of the microphone:

*Se nos dio un curso intensivo que duraría aproximadamente media hora, [la ex-directora] nos explicó las metas de la radio, los lineamientos a seguir y cual era la función que teníamos que desempeñar y de que se trataba el trabajo de la radio y cómo teníamos que dirigirnos a la gente. En pocas palabras nos explicó como hacer nuestra función y terminando el curso nos metimos luego a cabina ... y empezamos a transmitir.*

We received an intensive course which lasted approximately half an hour, she [the former director] explained to us the aims of the radio, the lines to follow and the function we had to perform, what the work of the radio was about and how we should address the people. In short she explained to us how to fulfil our role, and after the course finished we went immediately into the broadcasting room ... and we began to transmit (Totonac staff member).

With such minimal training the resources of each individual in the team were very important, probably more so than the director’s guidelines. Each presenter drew on basic principles to develop the views transmitted through the radio.

The project was an external initiative with its own goals and rules, which meant the communities did not feel such ownership of it. But as the explicit aim was to respond to the communities’ needs and wishes, the Indian staff slowly began acting with more freedom as members of the communities, instead of just radio employees. Even when they followed the policy of the radio the way they did it increasingly involved community participation. In this way a radio, designed as a national institution to promote the development of Indian communities, became an institution conducted by Indians to respond to community needs and demands:

*Antes como que la comunidad estaba esperándolo todo de la radio, ahora ya se está revirtiendo el asunto poco a poco, ahora la comunidad parece ser que quiere aprovechar ya la radio*

Before it was as if the community was waiting for everything from the radio, now that situation is slowly changing, now the community seems to want to make use of the radio for their benefit. (Nahuat staff member).

If the radio began promoting a particular development the community very soon took on that role, so the radio became an instrument of the communities. Its daily programming
which once met national aims and goals\(^4\) became more and more a community project to develop Indian organisations in the context of national and international exchanges.

The Nahuat and Totonac workers had a mediating role, bringing communal and national demands together, selecting information and materials from different sources and producing meanings from different cultures (Nahuat, Totonac and Spanish but also from other Mexican and Latin American Indian and non-Indian groups). They selected meanings from other cultures for the light they threw on the development of Indian societies. They aimed not so much to reproduce Indian culture as to create a multicultural culture grounded in the Indian cultural matrix. In this way they generated a dynamic and complex Indian image, an identity that responds to present needs of the interethnic exchange.

The creation of this Indian identity is not an explicit goal. It is more the continuation of a process found in all interethnic exchanges, built up now in the everyday interactions among Indian radio staff (each drawing on previous experiences) and participants from communities (with shared and also diverse views), drawing on national and international sources of information and local institutional offers and demands.

*The new Indian multiculture culture.*

To show how this new culture and identity is shaped by the multiple meanings transmitted by the radio I will refer to the music, programs, and participants involved in broadcast while I was in Cuetzalan. This sample is not exhaustive but clearly shows the tendencies of the whole process.

In theory programs are equally divided between the three languages: Nahuat (35.7%) Totonac (35.7%) and the rest in Spanish. In practice the ratios are not so exact. Nahuat speakers participate more because the radio station is closer to the Nahuat population. Thus, while the policy of the radio is to be precisely trilingual and to serve the two ethnic groups equally, the Nahuat people appropriate the medium more extensively. There is in fact a larger number of Nahua employees, and the Totonac radio speakers consider they have to work harder to provide the required air-time in that language. The use of Indian languages in the programs is a major aim of indigenous cultural radio and probably its greatest strength in competing with other radio stations. It is also an important way to re-value Indian culture. The use of the languages in the broadcast is partly generated by the participation of Indian people in the programs, for example in public forums where community intellectuals (in Gramsci’s sense [1979]) or authorities participate, or in interviews about the customs of some town or any topic. In these cases the presenters translate directly to Spanish or the Indian language as

\(^4\) The goals are transmitted through the materials from the indigenous and non indigenous meanings and
appropriate. They also translate directly from written materials in Spanish or from interviews with Spanish speakers. Occasionally they use the few written materials in Indian language they have at their disposal. The Spanish translation of Indian discourse is also used to bridge between the two Indian languages, from Nahuat to Totonac or vice versa.

The strategies developed to use Indian languages in this new media are remarkable. The fact that radio is a verbal medium, which has been the main form of communication in Indian communities, probably helps this process of adaptation. But it is also important to recognise the extraordinary skill these presenters develop to move from one language to another and from written forms to verbal performance in different languages as part of their interethnic skills. These abilities developed by the Nahuat and Totonac speakers in a bilingual or trilingual context have helped expand the functional scope of the languages to cover an area that includes 60 municipalities from the states of Puebla and Veracruz, moving from written Spanish to Indian languages, from spoken Indian languages to Spanish and vice versa.

The program plan draws on different information sources (national, state and local) but they give priority to what is relevant to the Indian situation. For example for the news broadcast Nuestro tiempo (27th September 1997) they selected from state sources the formation of the Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional in Puebla (a national movement linked with the Indian movement in Chiapas), stressing the importance of supporting Indian autonomy and the San Andrés Larrainzar Agreement between the Zapatistas and the government (see chapter 2). The same program included stories about a traditional medicine association, a new law to protect handicraft producers, and environment protection. From the international scene they mentioned one protest by an Indian community against the death penalty for an Indian migrant in the United States. All these items came from a national source (NOTIMEX), but the Indians made the selection to construct a specific version of the national and international situation relevant to the activities of Indian communities. It is no accident, I believe, that all those themes related to activities of local Indian organisations: Indian rights, traditional medicine, handicrafts, the environment. All themes (including also the situation of migrants) develop an image of Indian collective actions, not just informing local people about the national and international context. In this way the various levels of the country are integrated from an Indian perspective.

Program content is differentiated according to age (Globitos de papel for children, Nosotros los jóvenes for young people), gender (A través del espejo for women) and theme (education, health, human rights, work, Indian tradition). They include a diversity of music -- Mexican, Latin American and American (especially rock

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the rules expressed in training and other bureaucratic prescriptions

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and roll). However, local musicians who perform traditional Nahuat and Totonac music used in ceremonies and dances, as well as other regional music such as the Son and Huapango, produce an important part of the music transmitted in this radio station. The diversity in themes is enriched with programs from other cultural radio stations, such as Radio Educación from Mexico City and other indigenous cultural radios. Again meanings are selected to connect materials with the specific interests and needs of particular Indian communities. The aim is not to reproduce tradition but transform culture, based on the present aims of Indian communities.

An important aspect of Indian appropriations of the radio is its use as a communication network to link different communities and also the communities with the national, state and municipal agents that work in the region. The radio has a section named Sección de Avisos (announcements section) which is a space for information about different activities of the towns and institutions. It is also an effective link between people outside and their relatives and friends in the communities. This section is transmitted in the morning and the afternoon in Spanish and Nahuat and Totonac. Typical examples are: a report from the hospital on the health of a patient, the announcement of collective works (faena), the day and place to pay taxes or other services, reporting the arrival of subsidised milk, meetings of local associations, an invitation to the Santo Patrón fiestas in each town, an invitation to a basketball game, a request to community leaders to go to the municipal palace for political meetings with external authorities or to arrange municipal activities. It also includes information about lost, stolen or found objects and animals, personal messages between relatives or friends who live in different communities and from people who plan to phone from other places or arrive at a specific day and time.

By broadcasting these everyday activities the radio includes everyday life as part of the culture and at the same time it becomes a tool to facilitate interethnic and intraethnic communication in the region. What used to be done by individuals, usually as a communal duty (travelling from the municipal capital to inform the different communities, with communication made difficult or time-consuming due to the lack of roads or the distance between communities or ranches), is done now through the radio. So the radio substituted, or better said eased the burdens on some members of the community by making communication faster, or even possible. Radio now is inserted in the structure of organisation of the communities and in their relations with the municipal and regional sociopolitical organisation. The radio thus became an important means to serve the communities, a medium that is now part of communal and regional life.

The increased participation of people from the communities led to new areas of activity. For example people from the communities produced their own materials to be
transmitted by the radio (cultural, promotional, informative). This initiative, which arose spontaneously, has been well received by the radio team, who found this practice valuable in giving communities the opportunity to express themselves in their own voice. The messages are transmitted directly from the communities without any mediation from the institution. As one of the presenters said: *La cosa es que la comunidad hable en vez de nosotros, nosotros como locutores somos sólo los intermediarios.* (The fact is that the community speaks instead of us, we, as presenters, are only mediators) (Nahuat staff member). Following this idea they plan, subject to funds, to train more people from the communities and give them the basic technology (audiocassettes) to be community correspondents. This plan will make it possible to include more material from communal processes. In this way, Indian communities, previously excluded from broadcasts, can be part of them, transmitting views through community spokespersons.

The reaction to this radio station from the Mestizos of Cuetzalan was not negative as with similar radio stations elsewhere (see McSherry 1999). I was told, for example, of radios actively opposed by Mestizos, for whom indigenous radio was unacceptable:

*Sucedio en Tlagiaco, lo mismo sucedió en Peto, en Tlapa, en Cherán y fue la reacción clásica de un grupo mestizo que se quiere superior o con más derechos sobre los grupos indígena. Es una reacción de un grupo de poder dominante ante una situación que no maneja, y como no la maneja ¡a ver! desaparezcan eso, cierrénlo ... ¿por qué una estación de radio para los indios?, ¿cómo es posible siendo que nosotros la necesitamos más?*

It happened in Tlagiaco, the same happened in Peto, in Tlapa, in Cherán and it was the typical reaction of a mestizo group who want to be superior or with more rights over the indigenous groups. It is the reaction of a dominant group confronted by a situation they do not control and as they do not control it ‘you! make it disappear, close it ... why have a radio station for the Indians? How is it possible, given that we need one more?’ (Ex-director of Peto Yucatan radio station).

As the radio workers put it, in Cuetzalan Mestizos adopted a position of ‘tolerance’, meaning that they have not attempted to hinder the work. That supposed tolerance probably came in part from the fact that the radio station is useful for them. The radio makes their work easier, providing efficient communication at no cost to them, since the station is nationally funded. This peaceful relationship is probably maintained by the radio station’s caution, carefully avoiding any potential conflict in political or religious terms. What is most important is the continuity of the project. “It is a long process, so
the radio must last, and we now understand that, the community have always understood it” (Es un proceso largo, entonces la radio debe permanecer y eso ya lo comprendemos nosotros, la comunidad lo ha comprendido siempre) (XECTZ Director). There is a de facto agreement to maintain, at least explicitly, political neutrality to avoid any risk.

Mestizos claim they are not interested in listening to XECTZ, although sometimes I have heard its programs while walking along the streets of Cuetzalan. They have alternative media that showcase the more ‘desirable’ hegemonic urban culture. But Mestizo authorities in the municipality and local institutions are very interested in the benefits they derive by supporting a medium, which can be such a strong link between them and the Indian population.

"La voz de la Sierra Norte" is thus a different kind of interethnic experience for the Indian communities of Cuetzalan. This project combined two different views and goals. The interethnict construction of this project was built on the base of a national indigenous policy, enshrined in formal aims and explicit and implicit conditions, but drawing also on communal perspectives and previous experiences. Its creation and development shows clearly the slow transformation of a national project into an Indian community project. In this way the Indians have constructed and disseminated a new form of culture, an interethnict culture. Although this interethnict culture is mainly received by Indian people, the main audience of this radio, the general populace might see that it affirms the value of Indian culture by its presence as a legitimate component of a national mass media system.

The meanings of Indian culture as it is today, valuable for the present and the future, are a major part of the content of the local trilingual radio station. It introduced, at least in this region, some of the meanings excluded in the dominant construction of Mexican culture. Probably these Indian perspectives are still not widely understood by Mestizos in the region, but at least they validate Indian culture and the use of their language in the public domain. As an antidote to the hegemonic construction of Indians (as not able to lead their own development), the group of Indians in this radio demonstrate every day their capacity to manage a modern medium, appropriating it to their own terms, assimilating it to community practices and cultural manifestations. That process generates a culture, which joins meanings from different cultures into a continual interethnict exchange. It is a model of how Mexican culture can be constructed as genuinely multicultural. It is not a culture where different cultures appear in the same space but a creative process of cultural exchange whose dynamics generate a rich diversity of cultural expressions, which together form an interethnict culture. In my view, this experience shows how Mexican culture can develop as an inclusive multi-culture.
Competing health models.

The same ideological problems affecting interethnic exchanges in the radio are found in other interethnic experiences involving INI in Cuetzalan. In INI's health programs there are two views that are in dialogue (or competition?) to construct a joint project to improve the conditions of life of Indian population. Health programs for indigenous people in the municipality of Cuetzalan are now concentrated in the INI rural hospital, that hosts in the same place "modern" medical treatment, preventative health programs (vaccination, nutrition and health education) and traditional medicine. However, the dialogue between the two models of medicine coexisting in the region (the hegemonic health system and the Indian traditional medicine) has a history that involves a process of transformation of beliefs and practices still in motion and still in conflict.

The first attempt to coordinate different approaches to health by different institutions in Cuetzalan was in 1989 when INEA-Cuetzalan (National Institute for Adult Education), the Cooperative Tosepan Titataniske, INI and PRADE (an agricultural organisation from San Miguel Tzinacapan) came together. They created a Regional Health Program to work in a coordinated way through a network of Indian promoters working in the communities. The institutions coordinated their activities with each other and provided training for Indian promoters. From this first experience of Indians participating in health emerged the need to incorporate traditional medicine into this regional program, as a view on health and disease strongly immersed in the beliefs and practices of Indian people. This action brought to the surface the deep problems that hegemonic medicine found in working with Indian people: the existence of a different model for understanding the process of health and disease, and thus methods for healing. This problem simmered for decades in previous health programs in Cuetzalan, which explicitly and implicitly fought against a cultural model that has been despised as ignorance and superstition, but which was active in the practice of people, in many cases with great success.

This view of the 'other' Indian healing system, was constructed over centuries in the hegemonic medical ideology of Mexico, but Indian medical practices are still strong, not only in Indian communities but in other regions and sectors of population. What is called popular medicine in urban and rural mestizo areas has its basis in Indian traditional medicine, transformed by interaction with Spanish popular medicine and later with the hegemonic health system that grew and spread through the whole country (see Mōdena 1990). The dialogue between the two systems has been more a dialogue of dialogues, which includes the relationship between doctors and nurses (many of them
Indian), between doctors and patients, and also between the experiences of each health system in each person who uses both. As a result, contradictory statements about one or the other system are common. Sometimes public opposition to traditional medicine can change to tacit acceptance in private practice. This dilemma is summed in the words of the manager of the hospital: yo, como dicen, ni creo ni dejo de creer (I, as it is said, neither believe nor stop believing).

The institutions involved in the regional program invited traditional healers, curanderos, hueseros, yerberos, parteras (healers, bone healers, herbalists, midwives) to a first meeting to explore possible integrations with other medical practices. The response to this invitation was huge with 135 traditional medicine men and women coming to Cuetzalan to create a plan to develop and integrate traditional medicine into the regional health program. At that meeting, and another two months later, they outlined their needs for space, laboratories and equipment. As a condition of their participation they demanded their patients be accepted in the health system, implicitly a demand that doctors accept their health practices.

The first activity to begin to develop this program was a commission inside the Tosepan cooperative. The traditional medicine practitioners were also cooperative members, and Tosepan offered them a loan for a plot for a botanic garden, and support to obtain funds for their projects. Some time later they became the Society of Social Solidarity of Traditional Doctors of the North Sierra of Puebla (Sociedad de Solidaridad Social de Medicos Tradicionales de la Sierra Norte de Puebla), named in Nahuat Maseualpac (which means indigenous medicine). The rural hospital provided space for them to begin their activities and with funds from the company Kellog's they built an area (Illustration 45) which includes consultation rooms (with shrines), a place to give birth in the traditional way (crouching); a temazcal* (steam bath made with stones, similar to an igloo); a laboratory for herb concentrates; an electric drier, and a laboratory for quality control. Some of the projects they proposed were not directly related to the health process but were conceived as a way to obtain resources for that process by producing and selling herbs and traditional medicine products, such as ointments, extracts and syrups. This production of herbal medicines combined Indian knowledge about medical uses of plants (reinforced by scientific identification of plants and properties) with technical knowledge about the commercial production of medicines. Both aspects were part of the training they asked for, which was mainly provided by a doctor and her students who worked in a project on herbal medicines in a major health institution in Mexico City, the Hospital Siglo XXI of the IMSS (Mexican Institute of Social Security)
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Please refer to print copy
From 1991 the two health systems worked together, or better said tried to work together, to improve the health conditions of Indian people. According to people involved in the process the beginning was very conflictual:

*Al principio costó muchísimo porque los médicos alópatas *puedes claro* que no aceptaban a los médicos tradicionales, porque *puedes dicen yo me fui a quemar las pestañas por allá y resulta que aquí de noche a la mañana ya hay médicos tradicionales. Fue un verdadero choque.*

At the beginning it was very hard because the allopathic doctors of course did not accept the traditional doctors, because they said ‘I went to burn my eyelashes [to study hard] there and the result is that from morning to evening there are traditional doctors here. It was a total collision (hospital manager)

From this statement it is easy to see the ideology behind the rejection of traditional practices. The doctors were ignoring the complexities of traditional medicine, which includes a defined process of learning with a master for four or five years, and deny its value because the learning is not done in the western way through universities. It does not include formal education, so it is not considered valid. The speaker takes it for granted that the reaction against traditional medicine is justified, as is signalled by the phrase “*pues claro*” (of course).

The relationship between the two groups changed slowly, needing a systematic presence and certainty from the traditional medicine association. In some ways they were very much open to transforming their practice by contact with the other system. They had begun that transformation previously in the communities, incorporating new elements from the interethnic relationship such as patented medicines, or accepting the efficacy of vaccination. To me that is not surprising if we consider the interethnic experience in other areas of culture, which show how flexibly Indians transform their culture, maintaining the continuity of the Indian cultural matrix while adapting to the changing situation (see chapter 6). This is just another example of the creative response of Indian groups to attempts at imposition from hegemonic ideology.

The process of integrating the two systems was not always the same. It was easier to include Indian *parteras* (midwives) and *hueseros* (bone healers) since traditional practices here are similar to the hegemonic practice. Both work from experience to acquire knowledge of bodies and skills to bring them back to health. Even the common position for birth in Indian practice which was for many years rejected by the hegemonic health system, has been recognised by some critical obstetricians (see Módena 1990:176). The broad experience of traditional midwives and bone healers in the hard conditions in rural towns gives them an advantage that is recognised by doctors, at least in practice.
Even so the hegemonic system maintains a sense of superiority. The need for training is not seen as reciprocal. It is emphasised that traditional healers need to improve their practices, not the doctors. This attitude is shown in interactions with Indian patients where doctors blame traditional treatments for what has gone wrong:

*Cuando va uno a la clínica dicen “ya vienes un poco complicado porque primero acudiste con el curandero”.*

When someone goes to the clinic they say “you come already a bit worse because you went first with the traditional healer” (president of Maseualpac).

From the institutional point of view traditional medicine benefits from being incorporated because traditional healers can be trained to work in the ‘proper’ way, that is, with better hygiene and western medical knowledge to avoid them doing harm. This view is clear in the next statement about training workshops run by hospital doctors for traditional healers:

*Los talleres de capacitación es básicamente retroalimentar los conocimientos que ellos ya tienen, por ejemplo en el caso de los hueseros que sepan cuando hay una quebradura no pueden tener manipulación, en el caso de las parteras que ellas pudieran hacer la atención de una manera más higiénica.*

The training workshops are basically to feed back the knowledge that they have already. For example in the case of the bone healers that they know that if there is a break they cannot manipulate it, in the case of the midwives that they were able to attend the patient in a more hygienic way) (Maseualpac adviser)

I wonder how much this view simply ignores the conditions of Indian communities where traditional doctors work, ie rural towns, more or less isolated and without services such as drinkable water. It is likely that the Indian doctors were conscious of the need for better material conditions long before they received this training. Indians do not see the advantages in the same way. In the interviews they say they did not gain much knowledge from the relationship with the doctors. It is more the fact that they are able to help the doctors, and the Indian people who are their main focus:

*Los médicos saben que nosotras sabemos como acomodar el bebé y entonces vienen para que los ayudemos.*

The doctors know that we know how to position the baby and then they come to us to help them (Indian midwife).

I venture to say that for Indians the main advantage might be just the better conditions offered by the Cuetzalan Hospital in its modern urban location; conditions, which
enhance the success of their treatments. Otherwise why would they spend a day, walking two or three hours or paying for transport, especially since they are not paid for what they do?

The one advantage of the training mentioned by all the traditional doctors interviewed is the fact that through this program they get documents that authorise them to practise, thus avoiding legal problems with national health bodies. As one bone healer said:

_Yo vine porque tenía miedo de tener problemas por no tener papeles, que tal si se me muere alguien en mi casa nomás de tanto dolor. Así que vine para que me dieran una capacitación para que me reconocieran legalmente ... No me enseñaron nada nuevo, ora si que nomás por el papel._

I came because I was afraid of having problems due to the lack of the right papers, what if someone dies in my house just because of so much pain? So I came to receive some training to be legally recognised ... They did not teach me anything new, it was just because of the papers.

Their participation legitimated their work in the national context, giving it symbolic recognition, a diploma, accepted as valid by the authorities (see also Módena 1990:170-171). At the same time they continue to reproduce their existing social legitimation inside the communities.

In the case of other kinds of traditional healer there is more conflict between the two medical systems. The ideological and cultural difference involved is not always so explicit or clear, inserted into an asymmetric relationship that is consciously or unconsciously manifested in the interaction. The hegemonic health system considers itself superior and its view of diseases and forms of treatments more legitimate, regarding the traditional health system as inferior, with mistaken ideas about causes and cures of health problems. The hegemonic view constructs the whole Indian view of health and disease as ineffective, coming from ignorance and superstition. Healers are often called _nahuales_ or _brujos/brujas_ (witches) as a negative term. Although it is true that some traditional doctors are named in that way by their own community, the word has negative connotations in Spanish. For example in dictionaries (Key & Ritchie de Key 1953:21, de Molina 1571 [ed.1970:22]) the word _nahual_ is translated into Spanish as _brujo_, but the same root in other words has meanings related with the action of hiding, with no negative connotations as in the case of _brujo_. Moreover, in some contemporary Indian groups the _nahual_ is the animal associated with each person as an important part of the self (personal communication from Alejandra Cruz, a Mixtec person). The word also refers to people with special powers who can change into an animal, so that sometimes "Nahual is a witch" (_Nahual es un brujo_) (curandero from
Tzinacapan in Mora 1997:7). In Indian beliefs opposite meanings are found in the same word to express a dualistic view where life and death, good and bad, cold and warm, etc. are not distinct but part of a single process, so that brujos are not seen as bad in an absolute sense. It depends more on how they use their power, for good or bad. Using brujo to refer to Indian healers misrepresents their role in the interests of an ideological rejection of Indianess.

This ideology was expressed in a magazine, which was proudly given to me in the Hospital of Cuetzalan because it had an article about traditional medicine in San Miguel Tzinacapan (Boletini 1997). My surprise was to find an article in the same issue clearly hostile to traditional medicine. The story (page 39), is constructed as a fiction but implies it is a true story. The title “Está embrijada “ (She is bewitched) implies the traditional process of healing is witchcraft. The central theme of the story is the conflict between traditional and hegemonic medicine. It posed a dilemma for Indian people having to choose; suggesting it is dangerous for a sick person to choose traditional medicine. This is a choice the people of Cuetzalan must make every day, but in this ideological fiction the two models are constructed so as to discredit the Indian alternative, depicting that option as fatal.

The story is built up by using a series of dichotomies that contrast the two models in the qualities of the doctors, in the forms of diagnosis and in the treatments and effects. The doctor did everything well, from the dominant point of view, showing a commitment to order and hygiene and the practice of reading (underlined in the quotation): “la casa del médico del pueblo. Es pequeña pero hay en ella orden y limpieza, el doctor lee frente a la ventana” (the house of the doctor of the town. It is small but in it there is order and it is clean. The doctor reads in front of the window). This positive image contrasts with the image of the Indian healer who is in “a house of awful appearance” (una casa de aspecto desagradable) and his action is depicted in the following terms “un hombre, con la cara pintada y con un ramo de yerbas danza alrededor” (man with his face painted and with a bunch of herbs dances around). Indian living conditions and cultural practices are exaggerated in a negative way, in a crude contrast with the ‘right’ behaviour.

The diagnosis of the patient, a girl, is also constructed in terms of the same set of oppositions. The doctor wants to examine her and hear her heart to make his diagnosis: la voy a examinar ... cállese que tengo que oir su corazón (I will examine her ... shut up that I have to hear her heart). The “witch” instead explains the situation in terms that to me sound more like western astrology than Indian knowledge: es porque la luna está en menguante y tiene casa el sol (it is because the moon is waning and it has the sun in its house). The same opposition is expressed in the words
of the doctor, as the authorised voice who affirms without any doubt that his diagnosis is correct: “tiene pulmonía. No esta embrujada” (she has pneumonia. She is not bewitched). The whole Indian system of beliefs is despised, depicting the death of the girl as caused by the capricious behaviour of the “witch” and the ignorance and stubbornness of the Indian:

[El brujo] no quería curarla pero desde que lo vio le dio coraje y dice que sólo en el camposanto puede curarla ... pues usted [el doctor] dirá lo que quiera pero mi niña esta embrujada ... La llevamos [el papá y el brujo] al camposanto, pero ya ni llegamos. Al cruzar el puente un mal espíritu nos hizo temblar de frío.

[The witch] did not want to heal her but after he saw you he became angry and he says that he can only heal her in the cemetery ... you [the doctor] can say whatever you want but my girl is bewitched ... We [the father and the witch] carry her to the cemetery, but we did not even arrive. When we were crossing the bridge a bad spirit made us shiver with cold.

The text clearly shows the common view of Indian practices summed up dismissively by the hegemonic culture as superstición, a category that includes all popular beliefs (see Aguirre Beltrán 1980). In my view it shows a complete ignorance of the complex processes of knowledge and understanding in the Indian worldview. In this worldview diseases break the equilibrium of the conditions of life produced by internal and external relationships between humans, society and the natural world surrounding them. Briseño (1994) expresses the same idea in his study of a Nahuat group from a different region. “The Indian concept of disease represents a deep social relationship within the community and with nature” (page 57).

The whole story presents a racist, discriminatory view about Indians and their forms of knowledge. It is remarkable then that the official magazine of INI, with its positive indigenous policy, could publish such crude and simplistic anti-Indian propaganda as if it were just entertainment. I suppose it clearly expresses the contradictory meanings that struggle with each other inside the hegemonic ideology, between pressures and resistance to change.

In the specific situation in Cuetzalan, which has developed as a mixed system, it is also possible to find a diversity of positions. As with INI the value of Indian health practices is accepted and recognised, otherwise the two kinds of medicine would not have worked together in the same hospital for so long. But in everyday interactions each participant in the project has his or her own views. One doctor can recognise the value of Indian knowledge while another can be paternalistic, expressing subtle contempt for Indian beliefs, although probably not daring to reject them openly in an
institution that is committed to respect them. The next quotations illustrate the different positions:

_Cada día aprendemos algo, sí, es muy bonito, yo antes lo veía mal, no lo aceptaba, pero al estar en contacto con ellos uno aprende_

Each day we learn something, yes, it very nice, I saw it as wrong before, I did not accept it, but being in contact with them one learns (hospital doctor 1)

_Es importante que uno los conozca y explicarles y hacerles ver que algunas enfermedades que ellos dicen que es susto, empacho, tienen otra curación._

It is important to know them and explain to them and make them realise that some diseases that they say are susto* [fright], empacho [traditional diseases] have another treatment (hospital doctor 2)

In spite of these different attitudes, the health program has worked for eight years constructing, possibly as part of a more general interethnic process, a new kind of health system that opens the way for alternative medicine and also a mixed form. In practice the patients, mostly Indians, and also the doctors (traditional or hegemonic) find advantages in the two models to create effective solutions for the often difficult conditions of the place.

The Indians incorporate different practices such as vaccination programs, education about hygiene, nutrition and birth control, and they accept the existence of diseases that are new for them and cannot be cured with traditional treatments, such as cancer. At the same time they continue treating traditional diseases (such as susto, caída de la sombra*, mal de aire, empacho) with Indian methods that have proved effective, using herbs, prayers and social emotional support. They also continue to use herbs to heal common diseases, expanding their knowledge by introducing some remedies from the popular medicine in Mexico. It is difficult to know now which ones existed locally and which came from outside. In the list of medicines they produce, they call some by the names given by hegemonic medicine (diabetes, rheumatism, high blood pressure, and epilepsy). However, this does not mean those diseases are new for them. More probably they correspond to ones they treated under other Nahuat names. Complementary to this kind of medicine they introduced some commercial allopathic medicines such as anti-diarrhoea, analgesics and antibiotics to control the symptoms of common diseases in the region such as respiratory and intestinal infections. The whole process shows the expansion of their knowledge by mixing the two models of medicine.

Hegemonic medicine has accepted (whether deeply or not does not matter so much in this case) the existence of Indian diseases that do not correspond so clearly to
the ones they know. And they try to understand them in their own terms to treat them properly according to the symptoms while not rejecting help from the traditional doctors. In some cases they also discovered the effectiveness of some Indian treatments and then recommended them to other patients. One example is the treatment of diabetes:

para la diabetes tienen unos preparados muy efectivos ... que quizá no la cura pero la controla de una manera total. Incluso cuando voy a Puebla me encargan el medicamento.

For diabetes they have some very effective preparations ... maybe it does not heal it but it controls it in a total manner. Even when I go to Puebla people ask me to bring the medicine (hospital doctor 3).

The acceptance of herbal remedies does not necessarily mean recognition of the value of Indian knowledge. Probably the acceptance of herbs is inserted into a wider ideology in Mexican culture which has grown recently in line with a worldwide tendency to re-value natural remedies. Popular medicine in Mexico has always used herbs to treat common diseases, and now is increasingly used by people who would not do so if it were just seen as an Indian practice or associated with people with little education. In the case of the Mestizos of Cuetzalan this is very clear. They probably know as much about Indian remedies that use local herbs, as much as many non-specialists Indians know. It is part of their culture, and they use the same local plants in their houses that are known to have healing properties, but they do not go to see the Indian healers who work in the hospital. According to members of the Maseualpac the majority of patients in their clinic are from Indian communities and a few Mestizos from other states, mainly from Mexico City and Guadalajara.

The people from Cuetzalan are more interested in other popular healers, not Indians. These have their own private consultancy rooms, separate from the Indians at the hospital, and they bring their medicines from other cities, or buy them from the sellers of popular medicines who go to Cuetzalan on market days. This attitude is clearly expressed by one Mestizo women who told me, “Yo voy con una yerbera ... es una señora que es muy buena, no es de las de allá abajo” (I go to see the herb healer ... she is a woman herb healer who is very good, she is not one of the ones down there). In this case she does not reject popular beliefs, which are similar to Indian ones. She rejects the people, the Indian group working in the place where Indians are treated. She would never go there because she is not Indian. She even mentioned on another occasion that she asked one of the Indian workers in her restaurant to buy some ointment sold by the Indians in the traditional medicine clinic because it is very good. This is only one example but signals well the dilemmas that the Mestizos of Cuetzalan have about this option being available in the town. It seems they prefer to ignore that it
is there, or consider it right if it is segregated, so that Indians have their health services
and the Mestizos their own. The Indian clinic is only recognised as important as a
source of ‘tourists’ coming to be treated by the traditional doctors. Another source of
tourists is students from different health schools who come to interview and learn from
the traditional doctors. One example appeared in a state newspaper that is read in the
town, about the participation of this group from Cuetzalan in the Fourth Reunion of
Traditional Doctors in the Cultural House in Puebla:

Así los médicos tradicionales se dieron cita para dar muestra de su ancestral
sapiencia y curar uno que otro dolor citadino

In that way the traditional doctors agreed to meet to show a sample of their
ancestral wisdom and heal some of the pains of the city life (La Jornada de
Oriente 28 of November 1997:9)

In this case the public recognition by the state authorities of Indians working in
Cuetzalan might act as a trigger for the Mestizos to think about them in a more receptive
way. Perhaps through this external legitimation the clinic may slowly become part of
the meaning of Mestizo culture, or at least they may recognise that it is shared.

The process of interaction between the two models overall shows different
forms of relationship that try to find the way to a better synthesis. However there is still
a conflict in process, since basic principles in each system are different and kept
separated. Thus the interethnic product is not yet the construction of one model that
weaves together knowledges from both cultures. Distinctions remain, and the
hegemonic model continues to try to reproduce an asymmetric structure, being merely
‘tolerant’ of the difference while not actually internalising the Indian perspective. It is
probably the case that to accept the alternative view would be risky for the hegemonic
model, since it might then question the rationality that legitimise the model itself. The
Indians for their part are able to accept some of the others’ views and transform them
into their own worldview if they provide practical and effective treatments. Whatever
they think is an improvement of the welfare of Indian communities is well received by
them, and appropriated to become part of the dynamics of the cultural matrix

Both projects — the indigenous radio and the traditional medicine — show some
of the potential their alternative view offers to Mexican society, especially if we
Mexicans recognise that the cultural matrix so much cared for and reproduced by
Indians is also part of “deep” Mexico (see chapter 1 and Bonfil 1987b). Indians are able
to accept different forms of knowledge and make them their own. They show us,
Mestizo Mexicans, how diversity can be interwoven to construct a multi-culture, which
through continuous transformations makes sense of the past as a living part of the

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present. For that reason the worldview of Indians, as represented in their basic understanding of health and disease, is an important knowledge that all Mexicans need to heal their future, to heal the wounds produced by colonisation and the denial of our Indian self.
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Conclusion
Healing the Nation

I had a dream. I was going on a trip looking for something. I arrived in Cuetzalan as if it was the first time and began walking around the town. It was full of people in the plaza, most of them Indians selling and buying in the market. In front of the church were some dancers and other people looking at them and waiting for the Voladores dance to begin. The pole was still lying on the ground. The only sound came from a radio, and I heard a voice in Nahuatl. I walked along the road and found the hospital. Nobody was there, just the paintings by Gregorio Méndez depicting a sick Indian man, almost dead. It was so scary that I just ran out. Outside I saw an Indian woman walking to the back of the building. I followed her into a little room. She was praying in front of a shrine with a bunch of herbs and flowers in her hands. She looked at me and said “yo puedo ver lo que la gente trae dentro” (I can see what people bring inside). I thought, then you can help me to find what I am looking for. Suddenly I was alone, feeling dizzy, watching diffuse images of coloured paper and books moving around. I felt sick, anguished and frightened.

When I awoke I knew the dream was related to my research, which I have lived as a kind of search. I began it 25 years ago, looking at Indian culture without knowing why it was so important to me. During the three years I worked on this research I became certain Indian culture is important to me because it represents part of my identity that I had not found, not even aware that it was important for understanding my Mexican self. The dream showed me that I saw Indian culture as an answer to my questions. For this reason Indian healing, represented in the image of the Indian woman praying and “knowing”, became so meaningful to me.

As someone who has lived all her life in the urban centre of Mexico I had to recognise how meaningful -- to myself as to every other Mexican -- is the Indian culture that is practised in everyday life in various rural areas. I knew I needed to get a broader view of culture and its relationship with society. By conceiving culture as a complex phenomenon that brings together meanings -- full of ambiguities and contradictions but also complementarities -- from different groups and times, I was able to explore, in different places and moments of history that are still relevant in the present, some important manifestations of differences as well as links between cultural practices, ideological expressions, political aims and economic needs. In this task I found very useful the conjunction of two concepts from different areas of knowledge, dialogue and fractals. The ideas of Bakhtin about language as a continuous heteroglossic and dialogic process of communication provided a useful tool to explore the dynamic force of the

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relationships in social structures. This approach allowed me to foreground the processes of interethnic interaction, rather than being seduced by the old ideas of static languages and cultures attempting to interact across fixed boundaries of fixed differences. By conceiving social structures in terms of fractals, following Mandelbrot, I was able to make constant links between and across different levels, from macro structures at the national level to micro structures at the level of communities, which otherwise, in classic anthropological research, are so difficult to bring together into a single theoretical scheme. This combination of concepts allowed me to relate different cultural, ideological and political manifestations in different places and historical moments. It allowed me to see the importance of Indians in the construction of Mexican identity and their relevance in the contemporary struggle for a democratic and just society. Other Mexicans have so strenuously denied Indians that the construction of Mexican identity needs to recover that part of it which was lost during colonisation in the past, which has still not been recovered in the present.

To do this research I sought out different events that were happening in Mexico -- in Mexico City, in Cuetzalan and Chiapas -- trying to understand the complexities of ideological manifestations in social practices and cultural products. I read images and written texts produced by Indians or about them, I interviewed different people and interacted with them to hear the Indian voices that have been systematically repressed. All these meanings were contained in narratives that wove together to construct a story which links meanings from different cultures to become the story of a multicultural culture, which is my culture and the culture of contemporary Mexico. During this process I learnt the importance of what Indians have to offer, something precious that is in our roots but is also still there in their struggles for recognition of their culture, in their demands for better conditions of life, in their everyday practices, in their beliefs and their worldview. I learnt that to understand Indian civilisation I needed to look at them with respect and openness to see, to hear, to believe. I learnt that what I see with my reason may represent something else, symbolise other ways of understanding. I learnt that my culture, Mexican culture, is sick because it has lost an important part of its whole by rejecting the Indian culture. To cure our culture then we need to understand and respect the Indian worldview.

It is impossible to sum up the Indian worldview here because of its complexity and historical depth (See Aramoni 1990, Lopez Austin 1980, 1994, Lupo 1995, Serge 1987, Pury-Toumi 1996). It deserves a book in itself and that was not my aim in this work. I will just present a synthesis of some basic principles that underlie my argument.

In the Indian worldview that still lives in the Nahuat region of Cuetzalan the human body is constituted by three elements that join to generate human life as a whole: the axis or tree of life (see Signorini & Lupo 1989). One is the tonal, the energy of life
that comes from the sun and enters the body through the head. It represents psychic and emotional activity and its force is carried in the blood. The second is the *iyotl* positioned in the liver, containing the passions and feelings. These two parts are related to the *yolotl*, located in the heart, whose function is to keep the whole in equilibrium. Its strength is distributed throughout the body and gives it form. Contemporary Indians also call it the *sombra* (shadow). The idea of integrity of the body is also present in the relationship between human beings and between them and nature: plants, animals, earth, water, sun, winds and all the spirits who own and care for them -- the *dueños* (the owners). The three elements are interdependent and at the same time linked with the surrounding world, linking biological and psychic bodies with cosmic forces. The vision of the cosmos as a whole is based on the indivisible unity of forces of nature and reproduction of humans. The equilibrium of the whole is essential to maintain the health of the individual, the community and the cosmos.

In this framework, the body, interdependent with the social and physical world around it, is exposed to a loss of equilibrium when one part of the self is damaged by external turbulence, from emotions, social conflicts or natural disasters and also actions of individuals which express conflicts produced in social interaction, with negative feelings such as envy, ambition, jealousy, anger. When equilibrium is lost people become sick, and it is said they have *susto*, *espanto* (fright), their *sombra* (shadow) 'falls down'. Once sick, people cannot fulfil their role inside the family and community, they stay outside the productive cycle and die socially. The inner equilibrium of the group is broken (Aramoni 1990:79). This kind of disease is in some ways a social illness but it affects the biological health of the individual and at the same time, because everyone is an important part of the collectivity, it also affects the social reproduction of the whole. In the same way, to maintain the equilibrium of the whole, they need to balance the dual elements that exist in nature. Important for health is the balance between hot and cold. This division is applied to all elements in nature, including qualities of the body, of plants, and natural and supernatural elements. Thus some herbs, some food, some prayers, some elements of nature, some saints are cold while others are hot. So interactions among them are able to restore equilibrium.

To respond to the vulnerability, to the breaking of harmony, Indians created a symbolic system, aligned to the effects of natural properties of some plants, to heal diseases, restore personal equilibrium, and reconstitute communal integrity. This symbolic system works to maintain the psychological and social stability of individuals and their social group. The specialists who manage that symbolic system are the *curanderos*, the healers. They have received the gift to "see", to "know" and to "communicate" with the ancestors and the divinities. They also know the qualities of the elements needed to restore the lost harmony. The whole symbolic system is deployed in
therapeutic practices, which include communication in dreams with the beings who live in Talokan, the sacred mountain where the whole world is replicated. The ancestors and the divinities live in Talokan and it is there that curanderos go in dreams to find the tonal, the shadow of the sick person which fell down and got lost. They call on the help of the ancestral parents, Talokan Tata and Talokan Nana and the divinities who live there (Salvador Jesucristo, María Nicolasa Trinidad, San Miguel, San Cristobal, the keepers of the water, the lightening, Mother Earth, etc). The prayers (some hot, some cold) that accompany the healing practice, named la limpia (the cleaning), are their means to reach Talokan asking where the shadow of the sick person is, calling it back with the permission and help of the dueños of Talokan. Through the treatment the curanderos try to restore harmony to social relationships, healing people to restore them to the collective dynamic. They not only heal bodies but restore society. The whole treatment process restores equilibrium and takes into account the condition and qualities of the state of bodies and minds, and social relationships with members of the community, which includes nature and supernatural beings (Briseño 1994a).

Some authors (Aramoni op.cit. and Serge op.cit.) interpret the disease of susto as a cultural response to the destruction of Mesoamerican society by the Spanish in the colonial period, and continuously reproduced since then. The equilibrium of Indian society was broken by the negative effects of interethnic interaction based on domination of Indian society. Indians opposed that rupture, the loss of equilibrium, by recreating a social symbolic system that allowed them to comprehend and act against the effects of that social disruption. This process of healing, of restoring the lost harmony, was managed by constructing new forms of social and cultural behaviour. In this way potentially destructive interethnic interaction generated Indian resistance, in various forms depending on specific interactions in the new conditions of social life. In each case Indian groups activated resources from their own culture and social organisation to adapt to the new conditions.

Specific strategies for interethnic interaction responded to particular conditions of the confrontation. Some regions, like Chiapas, have been exposed to such a level of violence for centuries that Indians were pushed into systematic confrontation, destroying the chances of a peaceful, or at least less destructive, development of interethnic relationships. The levels of exploitation in that region up to the present drove Indians to a state of war as the only way to force negotiations to begin. Other regions, such as Cuetzalan, were so marginalised (far from important commercial and political centres and with few lines of communication from prehispanic times to now) that violent confrontations were deferred until the 19th century, when waves of Mestizo migrants arrived to occupy Indian territory, sometimes armed with guns, at other times with Mestizos laws. This slow transformation of Indian culture far removed from
Spanish culture allowed them to develop an interethnic culture in conditions of negotiation, appropriation and refunctionalisation. These interethnic processes generated a stronger Indian position, in spite of the conflicts between Indians and koyomej for the control of the territory and the political and economic hegemony of the Mestizos. In both kinds of situation, however, the cultural response of Indians was generated around deep basic principles coming from their worldview, still alive in their culture in both Indian groups. In this context of instability in Indian society the institution of curanderismo (the Indian health system) was a useful basis from which to reproduce Indian culture, not as updated tradition, but as the cultural matrix, la costumbre, as a generative dynamic force for both continuity and transformation.

The process of healing, trying to restore a balance to the situation produced by the two antagonistic forces -- the Indian and Spanish civilisations -- was not activated by all groups, only by those groups which over the centuries maintained their Indian identity and cultural practices at the core of their social reproduction. The rest of society continuously distanced themselves from their Indian roots, tried to deny the effects of domination by self-rejection instead of resistance, and lost the opportunity that Indian culture offers and Spanish culture denies. In that way, by denying the value of Indian culture, Mexican culture denied also the need to reconcile the two sides of their identity. In this way they lost their health, by losing the means to restore their wholeness in constructing the new culture.

The Indian view of health and disease and forms of treatment became a helpful model for me to understand what I felt was wrong about my identity, and thus Mexican identity. Applying this theory to what I regard as the problem of Mexican identity I maintain that the unity of our culture was broken when one indivisible part of it -- Indian culture, our shadow -- fell down with the conquest. At that moment the violence of the confrontation and the defeat of Mesoamerican civilisation broke the equilibrium, destroyed the cycle of production in harmony with nature, stopped the process of restoration of social life in the context of inner conflicts, destroyed the spaces for the symbolic reproduction of society. Since then the rupture has become deeper and deeper. We Mexicans are sick of susto, we have lost the energy of a potential harmonious connection with our social group, the harmony of a relationship with nature, we have lost the pride of our unified self. The dissociation of our self-consciousness has produced the loss of our identity.

Throughout history Mexican identity has been constructed in different ways but the Indian part of the culture, its deep root which has helped us to not fall down, has been continuously hidden and denied. But it remains there as a fallen shadow; it is still there in our unconscious. If we try to deny it, rejecting the groups that persist in reproducing their cultural matrix because they are the living memory of our denied self,
Mexican identity will not grow, flourish, reproduce, until we pick up the shadow and restore it to the unity of our identity. This process of recovering the unity of Mexican identity also needs a belief in the power of meaning. It needs to recover the dynamic effect of symbols, so persistently present in the everyday life of Indian communities.

My contribution to this healing process is my whole narrative in this thesis. In it I recognise and declare the value of Indian culture as a creative solution for the future of our country. I show that Indian culture exists not in the past but in the everyday interethnic interaction reproducing la costumbre, the cultural matrix, what Guillermo Bonfil named Mexico Profundo, where Indians and Mestizos are joined even if we do not recognise it.

I also offer a ritual to heal the nation, one that I learnt by trying to understand the Indian voices and the voices from my inner self, expressed in my dream and my automatic writing.

Talokan Tata, Talokan Nana, Padre Jesucristo, Madre Santísima Tonantsin Guadalupe.

I am here, with my greatest respect to the ones you have protected for centuries, the ones who have reproduced the wisdom to maintain the harmony of this world. I am here hearing their voice, learning how to ask your help to find the lost shadow of Mexicans. It fell down centuries ago with the violence against your sons and daughters, "the men and women of corn", and have not been recovered because of the continual violence exercised by domination. I ask you to bring it back to heal the sickness of Mexicans and restore wholeness to our self-identity.

The pole of the Voladores, the axis mundi of the Indians, the shadow that fell down under the impact of domination (lying on colonial buildings or on the ground in my dreams) is slowly raised in the centre of Mexico, in the heart of Mexican culture. And the dance begins. After honouring the four corners of the universe, offering the dance to the natural elements that generate life, the fliers, quetzals, eagles or angels, fly down in circles, travelling along the thirteen heavens, travelling along the fractal levels of Mexican society, to reach the ground where the audience, all of us, wait to be healed by recovering the meanings of Indian culture and respect for those who for more than 500 years of discrimination, exclusion and violence have resisted with arms, with words, with symbols, the loss of Mexican culture.
Glossary

Alcalde de costumbres: Indian representative from the Nahua communities appointed by the municipal president to work for the continuity of Nahua traditions. It is a position inside the municipal structure and plays a role of mediation between the Indian communities and the municipal capital, which is usually ruled by Mestizos. This role is important for both groups to fulfil different needs and expectations from collaboration between Indians and Mestizos.

Altar familiar: An altar to honour the saints who protect the house and the family, very common in Indian houses. This altar is built up following a similar pattern as other fractal levels of spatial representation of their world view, such as road shrines, the town, Tlalocan, the cosmos. It includes the four corners of the universe and its centre. It represents the unity of human life and nature, and the union of masculine and feminine principles. It usually occupies an important site within the distribution of space in the house. On this altar the family put images of their favourite saints with votive candles and flowers. During the commemoration of the day of the Dead (1, 2 and 3 of November) it becomes a shrine to receive the ancestors, offering them their favourite meals and drinks.

Altepeltl: The word is usually translated as pueblo in Spanish or town in English, but its meaning used to be not only a spatial concept but an organisational one. In contemporary Nahua in this region the word is sometimes used but frequently is substituted by the loan word. Some examples can be found in the materials published by the Oral Tradition Workshop (Taller 1994). In the materials for Catholic masses in Nahua the word altepetl is used to mean people.

Atrio: The atrium, yard in front of the church, is an important social space for Indian cultural performances due to the fact that prehispanic public religious practices were performed in the open. The friars at the beginning of the spiritual conquest used open chapels to familiarise Indians with the Catholic rituals. Today, Indians regard the atrium as a sacred space, as legitimate as the church itself.

Ayate: Piece of fabric made with natural fibre from the maguey plant to carry heavy loads, hanging from the forehead. It is also used to carry babies in some regions of Mexico.

Bastón de mando: The baton of authority (tanautil) is a symbol, which signifies recognition of the authority of the one who receives it and by accepting it the person is committed to fulfil the responsibilities associated with the role of authority. It is usually included in the ceremony of change of authorities that is performed each year when community representatives are changed. This ceremony is frequently named cambio de varas (exchange of sticks).

Cargo: Load, duty. The word is used to name the responsibility that different people in the community take to fulfil the different duties needed in the political and religious organisation of communities.

Ceras: Beautiful ceremonial candles made with wax. They are more or less 1 meter high, decorated with wax flowers covered with different coloured metallic paper. They are especially prepared to decorate the church for fiestas.

Comunidades indias: This term has been controversial, especially because it may seem to interpret ‘community’ as a homogeneous, harmonious entity. For this reason some anthropologists prefer not to use it (see Warman 1985). However, Indian people usually use the term to refer to the locality where they live. In this sense it implies a
defined territory but also an organisational and cultural entity. In this work I consider the Indian community as a space constituted by members of the social group who have access to the use of the locality in which to live, to work, to be buried, to represent and be represented in the internal sociopolitical and religious organisation. In some ways it is a substitute for the word Altepelt, which used to have similar connotations.

**Compadrazgo**: Traditional link between families through the ritual participation in baptism or other cultural rituals. In Indian contexts this plays a strong role in becoming part of the family. The word is also used in another sense to refer to political alliances that create reciprocal commitments between the parties involved, as in the ritual relationship.

**Compadre/comadre**: Literally like a father, like a mother. Relationship between parents and godfather/godmother. This kind of link is created by the participation in ritual occasions, such as baptism, marriage or other traditional practices (eg rising of the cross after the buried of some person). The acceptance of this commitment creates a strong responsibility in relation with the ahijado (godson, goddaughter) and represents the recognition of a high moral authority. For example, in case of death of the parents, the compadres fulfil the role of adoption of the children that are their ahijados.

**Concheros**: Groups of dancers who reproduce some practices from prehispanic times. They regard themselves as legitimate heirs of Aztec culture. Participation in the group usually is transmitted through families. They dance and play in many religious occasions associated with Saint Patrons (see below) in different churches, mainly in the centre of Mexico. In the Zócalo of Mexico City one or more groups of Concheros dance for a living. The existence of these groups is considered a symbol of the continuity of ancient traditions in contemporary Mexican culture.

**Consejo de ancianos**: Council of men in the communities, usually the elders, who have authority inside the community. In Nahuat they are named Tatiacacas. It is a kind of recognition for past community work. They are highly respected and their opinions are regarded as wisdom to be taken into account in decisions the community takes in other levels of the sociopolitical and religious structure.

**Copal**: Mexican resin used as incense in every ritual performed by Indians. It is used in religious activities in churches or other shrines, in rituals related with the cycle of life (human and plants) in dances and in healing practices.

**Costumbre**: Although the word is literally custom it is used by Indian peoples to refer to the set of cultural practices, behaviours, beliefs and worldviews that form the core of their culture. The costumbre contains the principles to follow in their social action. I interpret it as the cultural matrix in the sense proposed by Bonfil (1987a) as the generative nucleus of cultural dynamics.

**Curandera/curandero**: Person who has the knowledge and ability to heal. There are different kinds of healers depending on their speciality. Those who work with bones are named hueseros, the midwife partera, and the herbalist yerbero. Others specialise in the knowledge of natural forces and in practices designed to protect crops. Their knowledge is acquired through transmission from another expert who chose that person, frequently using signs that are regarded as indicating the capacity to become a healer. Sometimes the signs appear in dreams, sometimes by the survival from natural accidents such as a lightening strike. It always involves a long period of training with a master.

**Faena**: Compulsory works that each family must give to benefit the collective. All adult men in the community usually carry it out once a week. Government buildings,
schools, sport courts, clinics, irrigation ditches and roads are usually built with the
faenas of all families living in the community. Sometimes when family members have
migrated from the community work is substituted for by paying for a day’s work, in
order to keep the right to be member of the community although the person lives outside
the town.

Fiesta: The word can be translated as party, festival, festivity but none of them cover
the cultural importance of the fiesta in Mexican culture. It joins secular with religious
activities, both regarded as sacred and very important to honour the Saints.

Flor de cucharilla: Flowers made with a kind of palm knitted to form flowers that
look like suns. They are used to decorate churches and mayordomo’s houses during
fiestas in all the communities of the region of Cuetzalan.

Gente de razón: Literally ‘people of reason’, this expression is commonly used to
refer to Mestizos as against Indians. The term comes from the colonial period and
makes an ideological association between speaking Spanish and thinking. It is still used
in Indian regions and has even been internalised by some Indians who reject their
Indianness by affirming they are “gente de razón” and hence do not speak an Indian
language and therefore are not Indians.

Guarache/huarache: Traditional sandals used by Indians. In this region they are
made from the soles of old tyres, tied with strips of leather characteristically knitted.
Only men use these sandals. The custom for women is to be barefoot. The use of
guaraches has been used as a marker of Indianess. It was used in the census of 1940
(see Valdez 1995) to identify people as Indians, contrasting with shoes to mark
Mestizos. At present guaraches/huaraches are in general use as a kind of sandal, but
there are still some kinds that are regarded as typically Indian.

Huipil: A kind of scarf that covers the breast and back of women, part of the Indian
traditional costume in Cuetzalan, woven from cotton in a waist loom using prehispanic
techniques. It is named quezquemeti in other regions, where the word huipil refers to a
blouse without sleeves. In this case it is used also on the top of the head covering the
traditional headdress to protect the person from the sun.

Juntas auxiliares: Administrative and political units which are dependent on the
municipal capital but have their own authorities. Usually they include one community
and a few small ranches.

Koyomej: Literally ‘coyote’, Nahuat word used to name Mestizos (singular koyot).
It is commonly used to name everybody who is not Indian but especially for those who
are taking advantage of Indian people as brokers or exploitative bosses. In Spanish is
written coyote(s), coyot or coyome.

Manovuelta: It is a reciprocal exchange system used among groups, to meet needs
that cannot be met through their own individual and family work force or resources.
The exchange can include work or products. Named in Nahuat tlaatopatzin.

Maseualmej: Nahuat word used as an identity name for themselves (singular
maseual). Literally it means the one who works and it is usually translated as
indigenous people. In Spanish the plural form is maseuales.

Maxtahuat: Traditional headdress used by Indian women in the region of Cuetzalan.
It was once worn as an everyday headdress but now is only used for ceremonies. ‘The
head is covered with the maxtahuat made with heavy purple and green woollen strings
[usually 7 of each colour] which is tied to the hair, then wound around the head as a turban (Merlo 1990:96)

**Mayordomía:** Function of the *mayordomo,* the person in charge of the care of the Saint. It lasts one year and involves the duties of preparing for the *Santo Patrón* celebration.

**Mayordomo:** Person in the community responsible for preparing activities to honour the Saints during *fiestas.* It is an important position in the religious structure of the community.

**Popoxkaxit:** Traditional censer of clay where the *copal* is burned for religious rituals. Its form is similar to a chalice and it is used in every ritual or ceremony performed by Indians.

**Regidor de costumbres:** The same position as the *alcalde de costumbres* -- and sometimes named the same --, but represents each community. His function inside the community is to promote the continuity of traditional practices, especially the dances for the *fiesta.* At the municipal level they collaborate with the *alcalde de costumbres* in the activities which include Indians.

**Santo Patrón:** Catholic saint who is considered the protector of the town. By custom each town has one principal saint and other minor saints. The main *fiesta* in the town is the day of the *Santo Patrón.* Frequently this occasion is associated with the Mesoamerican ritual cycle which coincided with dates of the Spanish Catholic calendar that also grew out of former agricultural pagan festivities. The *Santo Patrón* often replaced a major Mesoamerican deity when the friars Christianised the Indians.

**Sistema de cargos:** Form of organisation of the community reflected through the political and religious structure. Through this structure Indian communities carry out the different aspects of social, political and religious organisation needed for running the community as a whole.

**Sombra:** Shadow. It is associated with the life energy that enters into the body of a person and takes the form of the body. It is an important part of the unity of life, so when the shadow falls or is lost it produces illness.

**Susto/espanto:** Traditional disease produced by the shock of something frightening, traumatic. It frequently happens when crossing roads where there are bad winds or if people are frightened by falling into the water or encountering wild animals such as snakes or bulls. Another source of *susto* is associated with the invasion of private places without permission, such as the house plot or the family cornfield (*milpa*). The effects of this illness can be mild or strong enough to cause death. To treat this disease the *curandero* or *curandera* restores the energy of the sick person by means of rites, prayers and medical herbs. Community support in the treatment plays an important role in the recovery of the sick person.

**Talocan:** Sacred Mountain for the Nahua people. It is the place, which contains the richness of life, and seeds and water and the ancestors live there. It is a mythical paradise. Inside *Talocan* there is a duplicate world organised in ways similar to the outside world. It is regarded as the protector of the Nahua people where the souls of the ones who die go to continue “living” in contact with the living. The beings who live there are also members of the community.

**Tatiaxca:** Highly respected old man. See *Consejo de ancianos.*
**Temazcal:** Traditional steam bath used by Indian communities for healing and purification rituals. It is associated with the womb, having a rounded form with a small, low entrance. It plays an important role in the process of giving birth and in healing treatments. It is built with rocks, and heating stones and dropping water on them produces the steam. It is common to use medicinal and aromatic herbs to ritually flagellate the body of the person taking the bath.

**Tilma:** Cotton cloth used as a gown by peasants in Mexico. The word comes from Nahuatl and is used now in Spanish.