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Making Modernity: Ideological Pluralism and Political Process in Zinacantán

Kristen Adler

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MAKING MODERNITY:
IDEOLOGICAL PLURALISM AND POLITICAL PROCESS IN
ZINACANTÁN

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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Albuquerque, New Mexico

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines political process and ideology in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, focusing on the Tsotsil-speaking community of Zinacantán. The complex interplay between constructions of tradition and modernity clearly indicates that Zinacantán is not the isolated, “closed corporate community” often portrayed in the anthropological literature. Rather, complexities that emerge from local narratives suggest profound ideological pluralism, e.g., liberal individualism alongside hierarchical complementarity. Through a focus on narrative and event, this work challenges received notions of tradition and modernity and demonstrates the diverse ways in which Zinacantecos are traditionalizing the modern and modernizing the traditional through reflexive communicative means. Although this research focuses on Zinacantán, it also takes into consideration the influences of the Zapatista movement, the “indigenization” of the nearby ladino town of San Cristóbal and broad patterns of shifting political ideologies. As such, this work is in dialogue with and contributes new perspectives to current debates pertaining to neoliberalism and globalization, particularly by problematizing theories that view globalization as homogenizing.
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Figure 1: View of Zinacantán from Santa Cecilia mountain / Sisil Vits
(Photos by Dan Cummings, unless otherwise noted)
When I arrived in Zinacantán to request permission for research, I stopped first at the tourist booth to ask the location of the municipal offices. Although I had previously visited the community with my language instructor, I was not sure I remembered the location of the offices. A young woman at the tourist booth pointed out the building and stood to accompany me. As we walked across the church courtyard she asked, “Está paseando? / Are you just having a look around?” (an indirect way of asking, ‘What are you doing here?’). I explained that I was studying anthropology and wanted to ask permission to do research in Zinacantán. She responded, “Sí, se puede. / Yes, you can.” Her confidence was reassuring, if a little surprising.

Upon arriving at the presidencia I was directed to speak with one of the civil officials, who I later learned was the Second Regidor. A group of men gathered around and I explained again why I was there. Another man joined the group and was introduced to me as the secretary. He and the Regidor spoke in Tsotsil and then the Regidor explained to me in Spanish that it was fine for me to live and study there. He proceeded to explain that I would want to understand “the life and movements” of the people and as we talked more he suggested I learn Tsotsil. I explained that I had already taken some classes, but still had a lot to learn. He agreed, stating, “It is not the same taking classes. You have to live together (convivir) to learn the language.” The Regidor
then accompanied me to the artesanas’ home across the street to inquire about living with them, to which they quickly agreed.

I was amazed at how easily I had been given permission and made arrangements to begin living and studying in Zinacantán. In part, I was surprised because I had just spent several months in the Zapatista community of Oventik, hoping to gain permission for research. In the end the community was unable to grant me permission – for good reason since, as I later learned, two publications based on ethnographic research had recently come to their attention that did not meet with their approval.

I was also amazed, however, that there was no question whatsoever as to why I wanted to study in Zinacantán. Zinacantecos have apparently grown quite accustomed to the presence of anthropologists and are well aware of what ethnographic study entails. I did get the impression that studying politics was a bit unusual, however, as most people assumed I was interested in costumbres, or traditional customs, specifically fiestas, religious cargos, myths and legends. Apparently I strayed somewhat from Zinacantecos’ expectations of anthropologists, but they didn’t seem to mind. In fact, people seemed genuinely interested in educating me. Once we got through the initial discussions about saint’s days and traditional clothing, people had a lot to say about politics.

This dissertation is based primarily on fieldwork conducted from August 2007 to July 2008. I spent part of this time in the Zapatista community of Oventik and also attended the International Colloquium in Memory of Andrés Aubry and the Zapatista Women’s Encuentro. I spent the remainder of the year – approximately seven months,
in Zinacantán. I returned for two short visits to conduct follow-up research in Zinacantán during December 2008 to January 2009 and again in July 2009, when my husband and I served as padrinos (godparents) for two boys who were graduating (the boys’ mother, Juana, helped me immensely with my research and became a close friend). However, my experience in Chiapas predates this fieldwork by nearly a decade. I first visited Chiapas in December 1998 to January 1999 as a volunteer on a school construction team in Oventik. I returned to Oventik twice during 2000 while working on my master’s thesis. Then in 2006 I spent two months in San Cristóbal studying Tsotsil at the Instituto Jovel. While these experiences do not figure directly into the ethnography presented here, they have helped to shape my understanding of politics in highland Chiapas.
Introduction

“Before the people were united. Now they are not. Now there are political parties. There are many political parties.”

- Petrona Perez Arias

On a chilly evening in February, I sat in the front room watching television with the family with whom I was living. Their house is located beside the municipal government building, one block from the main church – a prime location for staying up to date on the town’s activities, which is a pastime of which Zinacantecos are quite fond. As we sat watching the latest *telenovela*, a group of boys in costumes went running up the street. As they passed, the young children in the family ran to the door yelling excitedly, “Zapatistas! Zapatistas!” It was Carnival, an annual celebration during which young boys don scary costumes with monster masks and young men dress as monkeys, jaguars, or *negros* (small supernatural beings with black faces) as part of the traditional religious festivities. More recently, however, the young men have also begun to masquerade as Zapatistas, displaying innovative performances which blend tradition with modernity.

During the religious celebrations, which take place over the course of several days, the young men in costume engage in a variety of antics to amuse the crowd. On one such occasion, a young man in a monkey suit climbed a tall lamp post in front of the church and began throwing candy out of a plastic shopping bag. When the bag was empty he dug deeper, shook it around and finally threw it down in disgust, much to the amusement of the crowd. Shortly thereafter, a group of young men dressed as
Zapatistas, in camouflage and black masks, began dancing around and shooting large plastic cap guns in the air, once again drawing waves of laughter from the crowd.

In contrast with “Carnival” Zapatistas, “actual” Zapatistas are a group of (primarily) indigenous insurgents who have received international support in their struggles for autonomy. In Zinacantán, however, the modern and politically relevant image of “the Zapatista rebel” has been humorously incorporated into “traditional” celebrations of Carnival. Though Carnival is arguably a religious event, the integration of Zapatistas into ritual activities indicates that politics in Zinacantán permeate far beyond the official political realm.

This event also highlights the blending of tradition and modernity. Zinacantecos make no distinctions between traditional and modern – both are inherently Zinacanteco and their coexistence is not seen as contradictory or problematic. Such patterns are not uncommon among indigenous peoples, as Sahlins (2000:515) observes: “Since exogenous elements are culturally indigenized, there is not, for the people concerned, a radical disconformity, let alone an inauthenticity.” Local politics reveal patterns of strategic incorporation of tradition and modernity and, quite often, blur any distinction between the two. The complex interplay between tradition and modernity clearly indicates that Zinacantán is not the isolated, coherently integrated community often portrayed in the anthropological literature. In fact, Zinacantecos are intensely aware of the current political context in which they live and participate and frequently reflect on the varying opportunities and tensions brought about by political change.
**Background and Setting**

Zinacantán is located in the highlands of Chiapas, which is the southernmost state in Mexico. The community is about fifteen minutes by car from San Cristóbal de las Casas, often referred to as the ladino center of the highlands. Now, because of a new highway, Zinacantán is just over one hour from the state capital of Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Zinacantecos frequently travel to San Cristóbal and Tuxtla to shop, sell their agricultural products and carry out various other types of business (legal, medical, etc.). The town of Zinacantán is the *cabecera* (capitol) of the *municipio* (municipality) of the same name. The cabecera, referred to in Tsotsil as *Jteklum*, is the political and ritual center of the municipio. The municipio consists of forty-one communities, and, according to the 2005 census, has a population of 31,061, of whom 25,937 speak Tsotsil (Secretaría de Planeación y Desarrollo Sustenable 2006).

Chiapas is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse states in Mexico, in which 26.5% of the total population speak an indigenous language. This is the third largest percentage in the nation, behind Yucatán (33.3%) and Oaxaca (35.2%) (Secretaría de Planeación y Desarrollo Sustenable 2006). However, Chiapas has the largest percentage (24.9%) of monolingual indigenous speakers, those who speak an indigenous language only and do not speak Spanish (INEGI 2006). The most widely spoken indigenous languages in Chiapas are Tseltal, Tsotsil, Chol, Zoque and Tojolobal (see Figure 2 below).
Chiapas also has the highest illiteracy rate in the country (21.3%), and some of the highest poverty rates (INEGI 2006). This is particularly true in the highlands of Chiapas, which have significant indigenous populations. Furthermore, the municipios with the highest poverty rates also tend to have the highest percentages of indigenous language speakers. In Zinacantán, which is ranked as the twelfth most impoverished municipio in the state, 83.6% of the population speaks an indigenous language (Secretaría de Planeación y Desarrollo Sustenable 2006).

Prior to 2001, Zinacantán had been controlled by the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional/Institutional Revolutionary Party). The PRI, known as the “official” party of Mexico, was originally founded in 1929 as the PNR (Partido Nacional Revolucionario/National Revolutionary Party) and was then reorganized as the PRM (Partido Revolucionario Mexicano/Mexican Revolutionary Party), before eventually becoming the PRI. The party had its origins in the Mexican Revolution and was founded on leftist ideals (e.g., prolabor, agrarian reform, anticlericism), exemplified by the presidencies of Cárdenas (1934-1940) and Echeverría (1970-1976) – if not by many
others. The PRM, organized by Cárdenas, was “a party of workers and peasants with a socialist and class-struggle flavor” (Needler 1995:17). Once reorganized as the PRI, it became “a party of consensus, moderation, and stability” (Needler 1995:17).

There is little disagreement that the PRI functioned as an authoritarian regime, “using a highly successful combination of patronage, corruption, graft, and electoral manipulation” (Shirk 2005:ix). Accusations of election fraud were perhaps most pronounced following the 1988 elections when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of previous president Lázaro Cárdenas, united left-wing forces and offered a significant challenge to PRI control. In the end, the PRI was pronounced to have won the presidency, but “few observers believed that the official results were obtained without some ‘alchemy,’ i.e., rigging the figures in favor of the PRI candidate” (Needler 1995:29).

Eventually, in 2000, after more than seventy years in power, the PRI lost the presidency to the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional/National Action Party). The fall of the PRI was due in large part to its “reduced capacity to rely on clientelism and corporatism as a means of generating political support” (Shirk 2005:39). Because of severe economic decline during the 1980s, the PRI “could not afford to sustain itself through its traditional practices” (Shirk 2005: 39). This created an opening for opposition parties such as the PAN and the PRD.

The PAN, Mexico’s oldest surviving opposition party, was founded in 1939 by “a small coalition of entrepreneurs, religious activists, and professionals who were opposed to growing state interventionism, anticlericism, and the semiauthoritarian practices of the ruling party” (Shirk 2005:2). Although the PAN is generally viewed as a conservative
right-wing party, which, in fact, arose in response to the leftist policies of Cárdenas, Shirk (2005:57) argues that the PAN represents a type of conservatism unique to Mexico and distinct from the Latin American right in general. It has experienced increasing support throughout Mexico and continues to attract followers in Zinacantán, though less than either the PRI or PRD.

The PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) was organized in 1989 by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, following his loss during the presumably fraudulent elections of 1988. The PRD is decidedly leftist and, although it has yet to win the national presidency¹, does have a strong presence in several states, including Chiapas. In Zinacantán, the PRD won the municipal elections in 2001 and has held control of the local government ever since. There is little evidence, however, that Zinacantán has in fact become more leftist with the shift from the PRI to the PRD. In fact, it would be difficult to argue that Zinacantán has ever been leftist, as politics are conceptualized locally in very different terms.

Interestingly, political platforms hold little relevance in terms of Zinacanteco politics. Instead, people tend to choose a party based on social networks (kinship, ritual obligations, employment, etc.), which impact individuals’ access to resources. Cancian (1992:195-8) observes that political affiliation in Zinacantán is determined by a complex set of factors including wealth, occupation and connections to bureaucrats, as well as long-standing divisions within communities. The relative importance of each of these factors may shift in accordance with larger political-economic trends (Cancian 1992).

¹ Many argue that the PRD in fact won the 2006 elections and accuse the PAN of fraud.
Political affiliation in Zinacantán plays a crucial role in one’s access to resources because a majority of government resources are distributed according to party membership, so that presently, members of the PRD receive far more assistance than do members of the PRI. This practice is widely resented by members of the PRI but is legitimized as *costumbre* by PRD officials. This pattern has its roots in the Echeverría presidential administration (1970-1976), when government spending on development programs increased dramatically. Not only were unprecedented amounts of funding provided, but they were distributed directly to municipal governments, profoundly transforming the role of municipal president (Cancian 1992:46). Prior to the instatement of this grant program, municipal presidents in Zinacantán handled very little funding directly. For example, the previous president had an annual budget (in pesos) of about $5000, whereas his successor received $7 million in grants during his first year in office (Cancian 1992:47).

Cancian (1992:40) further notes that government funding was strategically distributed in order to dissuade “antiestablishment activity, including reported terrorist incidents and guerrilla camps in the jungle areas” that began during the 1970s. In response to the political unrest, the state government shifted its funding to areas that had not been involved (Cancian 1992:40). It seems likely that similar intentions are motivating current government spending in Zinacantán, i.e., funding is provided to discourage further support of the Zapatista movement. However, the fact that the state governorship is also presently held by the PRD likely contributes to the government funding Zinacantán receives.
Government development programs have contributed in part to the diversification of economic activities in Zinacantán, which consist primarily of agriculture, transportation, and tourism. Although there are other economic opportunities available to Zinacantecos, such as government jobs in education and health care, these are limited to individuals who are able to gain an education beyond secondary school. Therefore, most men still tend to work in agriculture, which in recent years has become dominated by the production of flowers grown in greenhouses. Women are predominantly artisans who sell their textiles to tourists visiting Zinacantán. Women also spend a considerable amount of time on household responsibilities. Most Zinacanteco homes are quite modern, technologically speaking, equipped with televisions, stereos and various electrical appliances, but the infrastructure to provide basics such as running water is still severely lacking.

As one of the poorest states in the country, Chiapas has been the subject of considerable attention from academics, journalists and politicians alike, due mostly to the recent Zapatista uprising. The movement became public on January 1, 1994 – the same date NAFTA was signed – when armed insurgents took control of several towns across the state. Many assessments of the Zapatista rebellion invoke romantic images of masked soldiers – indigenous women and men of small stature and immense presence, emerging from the steamy jungles or misty highlands of Chiapas and summoning opponents of neoliberalism worldwide to rally by their side. The result has been a somewhat utopian portrayal of the movement, which stands in stark contrast to the harsh realities of poverty and disease faced by indigenous peoples throughout Mexico.
Although the success of the movement is often debated, there is no denying that it has had a profound impact locally, nationally and internationally.

Zinacantán has remained predominantly non-Zapatista and at times the municipal government has been adamantly anti-Zapatista. There are several Zapatista communities within the municipio, but they maintain their autonomy from the government (including municipal, state and national governments). These communities have come into conflict with the municipal government at various times in recent years, most often regarding access to water. In public settings in Zinacantán the Zapatistas are often the source of jokes, such as during Carnival, but also occasionally during political meetings. During a number of conversations I had with Zinacantecos in private settings, however, people talked about the Zapatistas in ways that suggested they were sympathetic with the goals of the movement. Young, educated Zinacantecos have begun to adopt the rhetoric of the Zapatista movement when they speak about equality and the corruption of politics. Nonetheless, Zinacantán remains officially non-Zapatista, a fact that figures prominently in the municipio’s relation to the state and national governments.

Ethnography in Zinacantán

The highlands of Chiapas have been the site of ethnographic study for well over sixty years, beginning with a brief study supervised by Sol Tax during the early 1940s and, soon after, the Harvard Chiapas Project founded by Evon Vogt in the late 1950s. The
works that came out of the Harvard Chiapas Project have been fundamental in shaping anthropological views of the contemporary Maya.

Vogt was trained in the structural-functionalist tradition, but his work was also informed by the commonly held view that indigenous communities are in need of protection from the rapidly modernizing world. Consistent with this view is an emphasis on maintaining tradition and cultural integrity. For example, Vogt (1990[1970]:143-4) states, “At first glance, Zinacantan now seems completely caught up in the modern world... But a longer visit, especially during early morning hours or at night during the times when important annual ceremonies are being performed, soon alters and deepens these first superficial impressions.”

To recognize such aspects is of considerable importance, but to focus solely on these may obscure the complex realities of modern indigenous communities. Rus (2004) observes that the popular image of indigenous communities in Chiapas has been informed largely by ethnographies written before the early 1970s, which portrayed the Maya as “closed corporate communities.” Despite more recent studies that suggest indigenous communities have not, in fact, been isolated entities, this popular image remains (Rus 2004:200).

Through a focus on political process and ideology, this research aims to complicate this image. Further, it moves beyond early ethnographic studies of political structure by considering the situational aspects of politics, within and beyond political institutions, and the politics of historically specific events.
Previous studies of Zinacantán have portrayed the community as either a neatly bounded entity largely untouched by “outside” influences or as a passive victim of modernization. In contrast, I propose a more historical and situational approach that focuses on the complexities that emerge from local narratives, as situated within a broader political economic and sociohistorical context. As such, I propose that Zinacantán is not separate from the modern world, but instead is arguably both modern and traditional. Whereas deterministic approaches are limited to viewing modernization as either beneficial or destructive, I suggest that modernization be viewed as a set of complex processes in which Zinacantecos are actively engaged, while still maintaining various manifestations of their traditions.

These processes are evident in both the official and unofficial realms of politics, and exemplified through local narratives. The narratives on which I draw include commentaries by local political officials, as well as the traditionally excluded voices of women. In fact, much of the ethnographic data that informs this study focuses on women. This was not entirely a conscious choice on my part, but rather a result of cultural circumstances – women spend much of their time with other women and men spend much of their time with other men. I did, however, spend a considerable amount of time in the “male” realm of politics – at the local government offices and biweekly meetings of the local officials (at which I was always the only woman present). The relationships that I developed with local officials were certainly valuable, but nonetheless remained, in a sense, “official.” To look beyond official politics, it was
culturally appropriate for me to spend time and develop close relationships with women.

As such, this research fills a gap in the existing literature in that women have rarely figured prominently in ethnographies of Zinacantán. This research does not, however, offer any systematic gender analysis. The men who contributed to this research are all members of the PRD because it is the PRD that currently controls the municipal government. The women who contributed are predominantly members of the PRI because I ended up spending a lot of time with the group of women who work at the museum (and are all members of the PRI). Therefore, the views and opinions of these groups cannot be generalized to all men and women in Zinacantán. Nonetheless, the inclusion of women’s perspectives, even if limited, is important to broadening the scope of political analysis.

Although women do not “officially” participate in politics – other than being able to vote in elections – their narratives reveal a keen awareness of shifting political ideologies and demonstrate, somewhat unexpectedly, profound ideological pluralism. On the one hand, women index a commitment to liberalism (i.e., individual rights to education, land ownership, etc.) as a tradition integral to Zinacanteco life. On the other hand, women also indicate respect for traditional hierarchical structures of authority in ways that are surprisingly consistent with a liberal ideology. As such, women are traditionalizing the modern and modernizing the traditional through reflexive communicative means.
The integration of tradition and modernity into Zinacanteco political life is a historically specific process, which is presently linked to globalization. The ways in which individuals negotiate political ideologies locally offers insights into broader political processes, including the politics of ethnicity and indigenous recognition. To address these issues, I focus on three interrelated themes: official and unofficial politics, tradition and modernity, and pluralism.

To define tradition(al) and modern(ity) is no easy task. I take both to have multiple meanings and to overlap in complex and meaningful ways. A tradition can be many things, including a practice that is regularly repeated and holds some significance for the community or group participating; or an ideology or pattern of thinking (e.g., a Marxist tradition). Traditional, therefore, implies historical depth and continuity – though as Hobsbawm (1983) points out, traditions may be quite recent. So to refer to a particular practice as traditional may, in fact, obscure historical complexities – that is, social, political and economic changes.

For example, to consider corn farming in Zinacantán as “traditional” is somewhat misleading. As Cancian (1992) observes, political and economic changes have at times diminished, and at other times enhanced, Zinacantecos’ reliance on growing corn.

(B)etween the sixteenth-century Spanish Conquest of Chiapas and the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917, there was no consistent dominant or typical economic activity in Zinacantán. Constrained by laws and practices imposed by the Spaniards and their successors, Zinacantecos were traders, laborers, and transporters of goods, as well as subsistence corn farmers (Cancian 1992:17).
Cancian (1992:17-23) further observes that, due to changes brought about by the Mexican Revolution, “the shift to corn farming was consolidated by the 1960s. However, during the 1970s another shift occurred and by the early 1980s “diverse combinations of corn farming and agricultural labor with other occupations had shattered the considerable homogeneity that had characterized Zinacanteco economic pursuits two decades before” (Cancian 1992:26). Thus, Cancian’s (1992) work highlights the important point that traditions are in constant flux.

I have found the work of Edward Shils to be particularly useful in theorizing tradition, in part because his discussion of tradition and liberty (Shils 1958) is pertinent to Zinacantán, but also because much of what I observed and experienced in Zinacantán offers exceptions to the generalizations Shils makes about tradition and modernity (see Shils 1963; 1971). For example, while Shils (1971:144) notes that “‘new’ traditions emerge as modifications of existing traditions,” he conceptualizes such changes as stemming either from innovations in traditional beliefs or the ineffectiveness of traditional beliefs. According to Shils (1971:146, 155), innovations in traditional beliefs originate in “modifications introduced by intellectuals – theologians, philosophers, judges of superior courts,” whereas “deviations from traditional beliefs among the [non-intellectual laity]” result primarily from “the perception of the ‘unfittingness’ of the traditional beliefs, indifference to the traditional beliefs and animosity, either compulsive or expedential, against traditional beliefs.” Shils (1971:146) further suggests that the “creative powers” (of intellectuals) “cause the breakdown of the hitherto traditionally transmitted beliefs.”
The ways in which ideological pluralism in Zinacantán is managed offers a rather different perspective on tradition. Zinacantecos, and women in particular, make frequent reference to individual rights, such as education, literacy and private land ownership, without suggesting that the hierarchy of traditional authority is ineffective. Despite the creative incorporation of liberal individualism into Zinacanteco life, there has not been a breakdown of previous traditional beliefs. In an earlier essay, Shils (1958:164) in fact observed that tradition and liberty are not antithetical, arguing that liberty is sustained by traditions, both the traditions of liberty and the traditions that flourish outside the sphere of political liberty. Liberty lives in a context of order; and order, beneficial to liberty, is maintained by traditions of many sorts, some quite illiberal in their content.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that in Zinacantán liberal individualism is rendered consistent with hierarchical authority.

The term “traditional” can by used in reference not only to practices and beliefs, but also to describe entire societies. As Shils (1971:123) notes, “classifications of types of whole societies rests in various ways on the distinction between the ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ or ‘modern.’” In “folk or peasant societies” traditional beliefs are beliefs in the virtue of authority, of respect for age and the rightful allocation of the highest authority to the aged. They are beliefs in the value of the lineage and the kinship group and in the primacy of obligations set by membership in these groups. Traditional beliefs are deferential. They express an attitude of piety not only towards earthly authorities, towards the elders and ancestors but also to the invisible powers which control earthly life. Traditional beliefs enjoin ceremonial-ritual performances. They are particularistic in the sense that they recommend the primacy of obligations and attachments to bounded collectivities, above all the primordial collectivities of lineage,
tribe, locality, ethnicity and the cultural sublimations of primordial ties in linguistic communities and national societies (Shils 1971:137).

Drawing on Shils’ work (including Shils 1957), Geertz (1963) suggests that primordial ties may include assumed blood ties, race, language, region, religion and custom. Geertz (1963: 109) defines a primordial attachment as “one that stems from the ‘givens’ – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’ – of social existence.” While there has been some debate regarding Shils’ and Geertz’ intentions in their discussions of primordial ties, Smith (2001:53-4) argues that for Geertz primordial attachments rest on perceptions and beliefs, and that it is not the intrinsic nature of these attachments that makes them ‘given’ and powerful; rather, it is human beings who see these ties as givens, and attribute to them and overpowering coerciveness.

As such, traditions (or in Geertz’ terms, customs) are socially and culturally mediated, rather than natural, attachments.

Yet another approach to tradition is that of Hobsbawm and Ranger (2003[1983]) who suggest that traditions can be invented for political economic gain. While I find the notion of “invented traditions” useful (for example, see Chapter 7 on the distribution of government resources), it seems that with regard to ideological pluralism, something rather different is taking place. In this case, the incorporation of liberal individualism might instead be viewed in terms of “traditionalization,” a process identified by Bauman (2001:107) in which tradition is viewed “as a discursive and interpretive achievement, the active creation of a connection linking current discourse to past discourse.” Thus, in
Zinacantán, the modern ideology of liberal individualism is undergoing the discursive process of traditionalization.

Modern is perhaps even more difficult to define than traditional. For the purposes of this research, I consider modern to be something that is happening now, something contemporary or recent. As such, I assume traditions as they are presently practiced to be modern (as well as traditional). If modernity is broadly defined to have originated in Enlightenment thought, then ideologies such as liberal individualism, which is prevalent in Zinacantán, would be considered modern. However, as I suggest in subsequent chapters, liberal individualism has taken on traditional significance as it is rendered consistent with traditional, that is, premodern, ideologies such as hierarchical complementarity.

Because this research is in dialogue with classic ethnographies of indigenous Mexico, and particularly the work of Evon Vogt, it is important to consider the ways in which traditional and modern have been approached within anthropology. Maurer (2002:324) observes the following:

If, for 19th- and early-20th-century European intellectuals, modernity was experienced as a disruption of the moral and epistemological bases of social and political life, for contemporary knowledge it is the sedimented but unstable ground of social scientific practice. ... Anthropology's objects, constituting its disciplinary apparatus and achieving for it a place at the table of modern inquiry, would be the peoples who Europeans imagined had not undergone that same disruption. Anthropology's objects, the core of its self-constitution as modern, would be the non-modern.

The work of Evon Vogt is consistent with this description to a certain extent, but Vogt constantly struggled to reconcile the non-modern with the modern, or what he saw as
“ancient patterns with historical roots deep in the Maya past” and “current trends of change in the culture” (Vogt 1969:588). In this respect, as in many others, Vogt’s work is highly commendable.

Maurer (2002:324) observes that “after World War II...anthropology would identify the ‘barriers’ preventing nonmoderns from acquiring the moral and material goods of civilization.” This perspective is not at all characteristic of Vogt’s work, as he viewed the continuation of traditions as an asset, rather than an impediment. In fact, one of Vogt’s most important contributions to anthropology was his belief in and extensive documentation of the continued integrity of Zinacanteco culture. While I do not presume to offer the same level of detailed documentation as Vogt and his students, I hope to contribute to the legacy of the Harvard Chiapas Project by drawing on recent theoretical developments in order to offer new insights into contemporary Mexico.

In the highlands of Chiapas there has been considerable political change in recent years and in Zinacantán specifically this has meant the decline of the PRI and the subsequent rise of the PRD – historically a rather more left-leaning entity. This shift has occurred within an increasingly nationalist context, along with an emerging “neoliberal multiculturalism” in which the state is ostensibly attempting to embrace the country’s ethnic diversity. Indigenous peoples are thus renegotiating and reevaluating their positions, both within their own communities and at the national level. Although this research focuses on Zinacantán, it also takes into consideration the influences of the Zapatista movement, the “indigenization” of the ladino town of San Cristóbal and
patterns of shifting political ideologies. This research engages with recent debates regarding globalization and neoliberalism and may offer new perspectives on these debates by challenging received notions of tradition and modernity.

**Globalization at the “Margins”**

Considerations of globalization at the “margins” present a number of challenges. First, the notion of “margin” depends on one’s perspective. For example, from a global perspective, Zinacantán would clearly be considered marginal. However, if Zinacantán is the starting point, it becomes central, not marginal. For Zinacantecos the margins then become Tuxtla Gutiérrez (the state capital), Mexico City, Washington D.C. and beyond. People in Zinacantán understand that these places have an impact on their lives, but it is not the only, or even the most important, influence. Additionally, the term “margin” is problematic in that it carries implications of “marginalized,” which inaccurately portray certain groups as victims of globalization. Here again the issue of perspective is crucial.

Second, the explanatory power of globalization has reached a feverish pitch, so as to become nearly untenable. Every aspect of our lives can now be accounted for in terms of globalization, but to what end? As it turns out, globalization is not all encompassing but is, at most, fragmentary. As Tsing (2005:271) argues, “Globalization is not delivered whole and round like a pizza, to be munched and dismantled by the hungry margins. Global connections are made in fragments – although some fragments are more powerful than others.” To view processes of globalization simply in terms of
(global) cause and (local) effect reinforces what Tsing (2005:272) identifies as the false “dichotomy between global force and local response.”

To further complicate the matter, globalization has come to have many, often contradictory, meanings. It is viewed by some as homogenizing and hegemonic and by others as promoting cultural diversity. Some see it as universally improving standards of living, while others see it as widening the gap between rich and poor and increasing already widespread poverty. Those who view globalization as positive see the wonders of technology reaching into the farthest corners of the world to create a level playing field, or a “flattening” of the world (Friedman 2006). Vargas Llosa (2001:66) applauds globalization as a corrective to the evils of nationalism, stating, “Cries of Western cultural hegemony are as common as they are misguided. In reality, globalization does not suffocate local cultures but rather liberates them from the ideological conformity of nationalism.” One might argue, however, that although globalization has not “suffocated” cultural diversity, as many supposed it might, neither has it negated the influence of nationalism. To make such broad assertions about globalization ignores the complexities apparent in communities such as Zinacantán. In fact, much of the debate regarding globalization centers on the questionable assumption that a clear distinction can be made between tradition and modernity.

**Organization and Overview**

Chapters are divided into three sections: *Frameworks* (Chapters 1-4), *Events* (Chapters 5-6) and *Narratives* (Chapters 7-8). Chapter 1 addresses trends in early ethnographies of
indigenous Mexico, identifies the limitations of materialist and culturalist approaches and possibilities for moving beyond these constraints. Chapter 2 draws on Wolf’s (1997[1982]) insights into the historical complexities of highland Chiapas and utilizes his elaboration of modes of production to analyze the political economic plurality apparent in contemporary Zinacantán. Chapter 3 gives an overview of approaches to and perspectives on politics and summarizes a range of political ideologies prevalent in Mexico and in Zinacantán. Chapter 4 provides a sketch of political institutions in Zinacantán, as well as positions of power and influence outside of these institutions. It also looks at local conceptualizations of politics. Chapter 5 begins by looking at President Felipe Calderón’s visit to Zinacantán and the political implications of this event, then goes on to compare official recognition of indigenous communities by the government with the unofficial recognition by political activists. Chapter 6 looks at a very different type of event (two women who fought over access to tourists) and what this event suggests about local political processes and globalization. In discussing this event, I focus on the role of gossip in official and unofficial political realms. Chapter 7 draws on the linguistic concept of register to highlight the complexities of ideological pluralism in Zinacantán. Chapter 8 focuses on a personal narrative by a woman named Maruch, whose stories further complicate common assumptions about tradition and modernity.

Interspersed throughout the chapters are “interludes” which consist of excerpts from personal narratives by three Zinacanteca women, ranging in age from twenty-two to thirty-four years old. Two of the women, Maria Cristina and Juana, are artesanas and work at the museum a couple of days a week. I met Juana shortly after arriving in
Zinacantán when she stopped me to ask if I was going to see the museum. I was not, in fact, going to the museum, but thus began the conversation, which eventually developed into a close friendship. Juana is 34 years old and the mother of two boys. She divorced her first husband, the father of her eldest son, because “he drank and stole.” She eventually remarried a kind and honest man who manages a greenhouse, with whom she has a five year old son. Through my relationship with Juana, I spent time with Maria Cristina as well, since they work at the museum on the same days. Maria Cristina is twenty-two years old and single. She lives at home with her mother, brothers and their wives. The other young woman, Alejandra, I met nearly two years before when she was my (Tsotsil) language instructor in San Cristóbal and we have also established a close relationship. Alejandra is 28 years old and single. She lives with her paternal grandmother and aunt and now teaches high school English full time so that she can support them.

As with most of my research, these accounts were given in Spanish. Although I studied Tsotsil, both prior to and during my fieldwork, my conversancy remained very limited. Where necessary (such as in political proceedings), I recorded speech in Tsotsil and then hired or worked directly with native speakers to transcribe and translate the recordings into Spanish (later translating these into English). Aside from several elderly women who spoke little or no Spanish, everyone I interacted with spoke to me in Spanish. Of course this was convenient, but has no doubt shaped the outcomes of my research, including the particular ways in which people related their thoughts and

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2 I use the recently standardized orthography, in which “s” replaces “z”, “k” replaces “qu”, etc.
experiences. Nonetheless, I have attempted to take into consideration the various uses of Spanish and Tsotsil and draw conclusions accordingly.

With regard to narrative, I use this term broadly to refer to the accounts shared with me during interviews. Some interviews I conducted took a structured form in which I posed specific questions. The interviews in which the women’s life histories were gathered, however, were much more open-ended. I simply asked each woman to tell me about her life and then asked questions that arose in response to her account. These particular interactions might best be described as an “expressive interview,” which Kluckhohn describes (in reference to the work of Malinowski and his students) as “interviews in which the subject was clearly led to talk at some length with only an occasional comment or encouraging question from the ethnographer” (Kluckhohn 1947:107). Kluckhohn (1947:143) suggests that biographical data should be conceptualized in a manner which shows: (a) the organism moving through a field which is (b) structured both by culture and by the physical and social world in a relatively uniform manner but which is (c) subject to endless variation within the general patterning, due to special or idiosyncratic determinants which are introduced by “accident” or “fate.”

Here Kluckhohn is emphasizing the role of personality, but he raises the important point that while life histories may tell us much about a community in general, they are also uniquely individual. Labov (1997:413) suggests that narrative be viewed “as a theory of moral behavior and the narrator as an exponent of cultural norms.”

While I do not undertake systematic analysis (of structure or function), Labov’s (1997) work is nonetheless useful in considerations of narrative. Labov (1997:397)
defines a “narrative of personal experience” as “a report of a sequence of events that have entered into the biography of the speaker by a sequence of clauses that correspond to the order of the original events.” I did not find that my interlocuters in Zinacantán related events in chronological order, but did find that the “events that have entered into the speaker’s biography are emotionally and socially evaluated” (Labov 1997:397). For the purposes of this research, narratives serve as a means for considering what is culturally significant in Zinacantán, particularly regarding political ideologies.

Throughout the interludes, all of the women’s accounts exhibit certain similarities in content. Their stories are often characterized by misfortune and the recounting of one’s sufferings. Although these stories were elicited for the purpose of research, it seems that the narrative conventions on which the women draw are well known and widely utilized. During both the telling of their life histories and during our numerous “interviews” (informal discussions which I recorded), women consistently emphasized two themes: suffering and change. The two are temporally distinguished in that their suffering always took place “antes” (before), but not in the present because “now things are better.”

In Zinacantán, change is often attributed to the government bringing electricity and water, improving roads, and so on. These improvements make women’s daily lives considerably less difficult. Interestingly, the same tropes of suffering and change appear in the narratives of Zapatista women, but are attributed to different causes. While Zinacanteca women do not specify who was to blame for their previous suffering,

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3 This is a common phrase in Spanish used by Zinacantecas when talking about their own lives or the recent history of Zinacantán.
Zapatista women adamantly blame the government (*el mal gobierno*) and the capitalist system. Consider the following passages from speeches given at The First Zapatista Women’s Encuentro, which took place in the community of La Garrucha from December 28, 2007 to January 1, 2008 (audio recordings available online: http://zeztainternazional.ezln.org.mx/):

*El culpable de todos los maltratos es el sistema capitalista. Por eso sufrimos como mujeres y como pueblos. Pero ahora sentimos que no tenemos miedo, que ya no se va a volver a repetir lo que ha pasado antes.*

The capitalist system is to blame for all mistreatments. That is why we suffered as women and as pueblos. But now we feel that we are not afraid, that what happened before will not be repeated (Comandanta Saida, December 31, 2007).

*Desde hace muchos años, la situación como mujeres indígenas, estábamos olvidadas por los malos gobernantes y no nos tomaban en cuenta como pueblos originarios de este país México. Nuestras abuelas y abuelos han sufrido mucho la discriminación y el desprecio por ser indígenas.*

For many years, the situation as indigenous women, we were forgotten by the bad leaders and they did not take us into account as native peoples of this country Mexico. Our grandmothers and grandfathers have suffered much discrimination and contempt for being indigenous (Comandanta Laura, December 30, 2007).

*Voy a contarles y platicarles la historia de la clandestinidad y también los historias de viejitos cuando trabajaron en las finca. Nosotros como mujeres nos da tristeza recordar ahora lo que nosotras sufrimos, pero también mucho coraje. Pues estábamos en las finca*
(sic). No había por aquí, colonias. Era pura finca grandes, fincas cafetales y cañaverales, de puro patrones. No teníamos, nos tenían controlado. No podíamos hacer nada. No nos da ni siquiera un rato de descanso; era puro trabajo.

I am going to tell you and talk with you about the history of the clandestinity and also the histories of the elders when they worked in the finca. We as women, it makes us sad to remember now what we suffered, but it also gives us much courage. So we were in the finca. There were no neighborhoods here. It was only large fincas, coffee fincas, cane fincas, only large landowners. We didn’t have, they had us controlled. We could not do anything. They did not give us any rest; it was only work (Comandanta Lucia, December 30, 2007).

The Encuentro was organized into various themes, on which women from each of the caracoles spoke. One of the themes was entitled, “El antes y el ahora,” / “The Past and the Present” and another was “Cómo vivían antes y cómo viven ahora” / “How they lived before and how they live now.” Women in Zinacantán construct their own narratives in a similar way, by contrasting the past with the present, but with considerably different political views.

Whereas within the Zapatista movement women have frequent opportunities, such as the aforementioned Encuentro, to present their narratives in public to large audiences, the same is not true of Zinacanteca women. Although women in Zinacantán occasionally gather together in public settings, such as for meetings of the governmental

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4 Caracol literally means “snail” or “conch shell” but is used symbolically to refer to the five Zapatista communities that are open to visitors and are the sites of cooperatives, health clinics and schools. Each caracol also has its own JBG (Junta de Buen Gobierno / Committee of Good Government) that oversees these projects and is also responsible for the resolution of local conflicts.
program, Oportunidades, there is no public context in which women share such narratives. It seems, instead, that they are commonly shared privately with other family members. For example, when Maruch (whose narrative is presented in length in the final chapter) narrated her story, she spoke directly to her granddaughter, rather than to me, and made frequent reference to people and events of which her granddaughter had previous knowledge. When Maruch began her story, Alejandra, her granddaughter, instructed her to tell about “when they ran you out, just like when you usually talk.” Alejandra clearly knew her grandmother’s stories well, aside from a few details here and there that she had to clarify. We spent two days recording Maruch’s stories, which she narrated in Tsotsil since she does not speak Spanish. At the end of the second day Alejandra recounted the stories to me in Spanish to be sure I understood them. Although her version was somewhat abbreviated, it was incredibly detailed, indicating her prior knowledge of the stories, and confirming that these narratives are shared beyond the context of ethnographic research.

In addition to similarities in narrative style, the narratives also highlight the ways in which women engage with political ideologies. First, in varying ways they all express an inherent value on education. Maria Cristina laments the fact that she was not allowed to study beyond secondary school; Juana has attempted to become literate as an adult; and for Alejandra education not only allowed her to be independent, but, as she states, also served as a way to attain key aspects of mestiza identity. Second, despite the emphasis placed on education, an individual right, all four narratives reveal a focus on strong familial ties. Some of these ties are enduring, and those which are not
tend to be the source of much suffering. Third, suffering serves both as a recurrent theme and as a means by which to structure their narratives. It is the common trope through which one’s life experiences are expressed and shared. It also seems to be a way in which women, specifically, connect and identify with one another. (Although I did not request life histories from any men, I never heard a man recount any suffering he had experienced.) These narratives offer a closer look at life in Zinacantán, but also illustrate the ways in which women engage with a range of political ideologies.

This dissertation looks specifically at the cultural significance of politics. Whereas early studies in political anthropology focused on typologies (e.g., state vs. state-less; band, tribe chiefdom; etc.), this research looks beyond the political system to the situational and historical aspects of political process and ideology. As such, this research attempts to recognize the ways in which indigenous communities are actively modernizing tradition, specifically within the political realm.

This research is partly in dialogue with the classic work of Evon Vogt, but also engages recent debates on globalization. Tsing (2005:122) observes that “(t)he challenge to cultural analysis is to address both the spreading interconnections and the locatedness of culture.” My research focuses largely on ethnographic details that convey the locatedness of culture, but also highlight the complexities of spreading interconnections. Through a focus on event and narrative, I challenge received notions of tradition and modernity, question arbitrary distinctions between official and unofficial politics, and suggest that Zinacanteco “tradition” has long been characterized by pluralism.
I argue that both event and narrative are integral to understanding politics in Zinacantán. In his seminal study of gossip and religious hierarchies in Zinacantán, Haviland (1977:33) notes the relationship between event and narrative:

One is often able to elicit gossip in Zinacantan by asking with regard to a specific person whether there are slo’iltael (“stories about him”). Such a question prods Zinacantecos to recount parts of a man’s reputation that would be appropriate “stories” to “tell on” him – that is, to ridicule him with. In natural gossip contexts, however, conversation begins not with particular individuals but with particular noteworthy events, with unusual behavior.

The two primary events to be considered here include President Felipe Calderón’s visit to Zinacantán and a fight between two women over access to tourists. The visit by the president resulted in very little narrative, which in itself is indicative of the local (in)significance of this event. It is nonetheless useful for situating Zinacantán within a national political context. The fight, on the other hand, generated a considerable amount of narrative, some of which was gossip pertaining to the fight itself, but the narratives on which I focus relate to the responses of the local political officials, the processes of communal decision-making and the framing of local political factions. Zinacantecos’ narratives further highlight the ways in which globalization impinges on “local” political processes.

It is through such narratives that we also begin to get a sense for the ideological pluralism that challenges notions of tradition and modernity as separate domains. It seems that, despite previous portrayals of Zinacantán as inherently traditional,
ideological pluralism is not a recent occurrence. In fact, Collier (1973) noted similar patterns in her study of law in Zinacantán during the 1960s:

Zinacanteco law continues to flourish in a modern industrial state because able, articulate, and powerful advocates continually reiterate the ideas of social and cosmic order that guarantee its existence (Collier 1973:264).

Ideologies consistent with traditional hierarchies, as well as liberal individualism, seem to have been co-present for long enough that it is at times difficult to distinguish them. Therefore, I suggest that processes of modernizing tradition (and traditionalizing modernity) have been, and continue to be, integral to life in Zinacantán.
Part One: Frameworks
Chapter 1
Approaching Ethnography in Zinacantán

“There was a man who went to work and did nothing, only paid attention to the vultures that flew in the sky. That is how he passed every day. ‘Come down here, I want to talk to you,’ he told the vulture. ‘I can’t support my wife or my children, it would be better if you gave me your clothes,’ he told it. ‘And I will give you my clothes. I want to be like you who doesn’t suffer from hunger. But me I suffer from hunger, I don’t have anything to eat,’ he said.”

- Excerpt from Zinacanteco legend as told by Maria Perez Arias

One morning while I sat in the courthouse, watching a hearing regarding a marital dispute, a large group of tourists walked past. This was not unusual, as large groups of tourists are commonplace in Zinacantán. However, since the doors to the courthouse are always kept open, two of the tourists, a man and a woman, walked right in. I was sitting at the back of the room, as I always did, trying not to attract too much attention. The couple walked over and the man asked if I spoke English. He then proceeded to engage me in conversation, explaining that he and his wife were from Israel and that they were on vacation. I tried to be polite and answer his questions, but also wanted to be respectful of the court proceedings. He continued to ask me questions, about the court and what I was doing there, but eventually inquired as to what other villages might be worth visiting. I answered, “Well, Zinacantán is a good choice and there are also tours to Chamula.” “Yes, we have already been to Chamula and now Zinacantán,”
he replied, sounding rather disappointed. “You know, we went to Guatemala recently. We visited the Indians there and it was so much more authentic. We just went right into people’s homes and it was very primitive. Here they have cars and it is much more modern.” This well-intentioned tourist is certainly not alone in holding such notions about the authenticity of “primitiveness.” Anthropologists continually struggle to understand the complex relationship between modernization and tradition.

Classic ethnographies of indigenous Mexico have addressed these issues in a number of ways, but have tended to follow one of two theoretical trends: either a materialist/political economic or a culturalist/symbolic approach, broadly speaking. For early ethnographic research in Mexico, this divide resulted in markedly different portrayals, even of studies within the same community. The debates that arose around the studies of Tepoztlán by Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis, as well as later studies conducted under the auspices of the Harvard Chiapas Project, supervised by Evon Vogt, clearly illustrate the distinct variations between the two approaches. More recently, the debate has continued with regards to accurately portraying indigenous communities in the modern world and attempts have been made to bridge the gap between these two divergent approaches.

In their early forms, materialist approaches tended to focus on conflict, tensions and historical developments, but often overlooked local meanings and understandings. Culturalist approaches tended to portray communities as coherent, integrated wholes, which perhaps more effectively represented the local but often overlooked the broader context. Despite considerable differences in approach, there are two significant
similarities: each is, in its own way, deterministic and interventionist. Each emphasizes a set of factors that determine and shape social relations – for materialist approaches the focus is on market-based power structures, whereas culturalist approaches tend to focus on ideology, particularly as it pertains to ritual and cosmology. Materialists have tended to be more explicit about anthropologists’ role as advocate/activist, but culturalists have also supported intervention on behalf of indigenous peoples.

With regards to Zinacantán specifically, I argue that the community is neither a coherent whole nor thoroughly plagued by conflict and competition. While Zinacantecos value tradition, including the rituals and hierarchies that Vogt and others have so aptly described, they also value education, modern infrastructure, economic opportunities and political representation within the state and nation. Further, the community cannot be characterized as either entirely modern or entirely traditional because in fundamental ways it is both. These complexities are not adequately addressed by either a political economic or symbolic approach as they have often been utilized in studies of indigenous Mexico. In order to move beyond the limitations of determinism, I propose a more situational and historical approach that, while drawing on the strengths of both political economic and symbolic approaches, takes into consideration multiple ideologies, whether political, linguistic, or otherwise, which, as we see in Zinacantecos’ narratives, are complex. Further, taking a situational, rather than deterministic, approach reveals patterns of strategic action that challenge previous representations of Zinacantán and of indigenous Mexico more broadly.
This chapter addresses the emergent divide between political economic and symbolic approaches. Because Vogt’s work is exemplary of the early ethnographies of Zinacantán, I focus largely on his approach and also attempt to contextualize his work theoretically and historically. My own research engages with, but also challenges that of Vogt, by drawing on more recent efforts to move beyond the limitations of political economic and symbolic approaches. Here I propose a focus on events and narratives in order to offer new understandings of tradition and modernity.

**Bridging the Divide and Other Theoretical Alternatives**

Throughout the debates regarding culturalist and materialist models, it has become increasingly clear that both have apparent limitations. Attempts to overcome these limitations have included efforts, on the one hand, to bridge the divide and draw on both perspectives, and, on the other hand, to move beyond these approaches by developing new theoretical alternatives somewhere in between the two. Studies of sociolinguistics and language ideology have drawn on both perspectives, while others advocate an increased focus on events and narratives, particularly within ethnohistory and semiotic anthropology, but also through a (re)theorizing of the historical contexts of events.

Studies in language ideology, defined as “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989:255), have made significant advances in combining symbolic and political economic approaches. Further, “the topic of language ideology is a much
needed bridge between linguistic and social theory, because it relates the microculture of communicative action to political economic considerations of power and social inequality” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:72). Gal (1989:345) points to “an emerging concern with the symbolic, linguistic aspects of power, domination, and global political economy, reflecting a move as much by neo-Marxist scholars toward symbolism and discourse, as by symbolic anthropologists towards questions of power.” This shift represents a bridging of the gap between culturalist and materialist approaches.

In a study of codeswitching among three groups of bilingual Europeans, Gal (1987) effectively draws on symbolic and political economic models by situating local meanings attributed to patterns of language use within broader historical and political economic contexts. With reference to the relationship between local and global, Gal (1987:638) emphasizes that “although strategies of language choice are local conventions maintained by local social networks, they are nevertheless best understood as responses to a systemic context much wider than the local community.” However, “such systemic processes are also constrained by local historical contingencies and...patterns of language use are not simply a reflex of the group’s political economic position. They are part of the group’s actively constructed and often oppositional response to that position” (Gal 1987:650). Thus, considerations of symbolic aspects of language use challenge the notion of the “periphery” – which for Gal (1987) is more than a geographical designation – as passive recipient.

In an attempt to move “beyond symbolic anthropology,” Mertz (1985) proposes a focus on semiotic mediation. Rather than limiting analysis to the symbol, which
“exemplifies decontextualized, semantic meaning,” a focus on index allows considerations of “contextual factors” (Mertz 1985:2). The focus on index within semiotic anthropology resulted in an increased concern with events, as illustrated by the work of Merlan and Rumsey (1991) in Ku Waru, in which a singular event is used to elaborate the relationship between social structures and action. Through the detailed examination of this one event, the authors not only analyze local patterns of language use, but also the historical and, to a certain extent, the political economic factors impinging on the event.

The discussion of Bartók’s funeral by Gal (1991) provides another example of an event-based semiotic analysis. Only through reference to historical political developments can the discourse surrounding the funeral be understood. The rhetoric of the event, which was orchestrated by the state, ironically reflected the ideals of critical intellectuals which the state had previously attempted to suppress. “The semiotic structure of this discourse shaped not only the rhetoric of the funeral but, more broadly, the way educated Hungarians understood political-economic change” (Gal 1991:440). Thus, a careful analysis of this one event allows for a detailed consideration of complex historical processes.

In a further elaboration of his “ethno-ethnohistorical approach,” Fogelson (1989:135) observes that “events may be recognized, defined, evaluated, and endowed with meaning differentially in different cultural traditions.” Further, surrounding the event is “a residuum of cultural data” which includes “values, meanings, symbolism, worldviews, social structural principles, and other variables of cultural analysis without
which any event, real or imagined, cannot be adequately interpreted” (Fogelson 1989:141). The resistance to an event-centered history, as originally conceptualized by French historians of the Annales school, has given way to a rising interest in narrative (Fogelson 1989:140). Although “events do not generate the narrative . . . events are selected to cohere to story lines, frameworks, or plots that result in intelligible narratives” (Fogelson 1989:141).

A focus on events and narratives, both personal narratives and event-based narratives, offers insights into individual’s (and group’s) interactions with and interpretations of broader historical processes. By focusing on narrative, one might avoid the supposition that “determinate cultural forms are . . . effects of, or reactions to, imperialist domination, as if their supposed hegemonic or counterhegemonic functions could specify their cultural contents” (Sahlins 2000:507). Such an assumption “dissolves worlds of cultural diversity into the one indeterminate meaning” (Sahlins 2000:507). In contrast to such an approach, Sahlins (2000:513-14) points to the “indigenization of modernity,” which “undoes the received Western opposition of tradition versus change, custom versus rationality – and most notably its twentieth-century version of tradition versus development.” In contemporary ethnography, we can no longer assume these distinctions to be valid and the aim of this research is to challenge such arbitrary dichotomies.
**Early Theoretical Developments**

The division in theoretical approaches to early studies of indigenous Mexico is a direct reflection of historical developments within the field of anthropology. The 1920s saw a dramatic shift within anthropology. With the realization that “pure” cultures no longer existed (and arguably never did), anthropologists began to focus instead on culture change. Bunzel (1960:575) notes that by the 1930s

(a) whole field of study – culture change or “acculturation” as it came to be called – opened up. And as every new problem involves new methods the methods of field work changed. The preferred place of study was no longer the tribe where no ethnologist had ever been before, but rather one which had been well studied and on which there already was good material.

In 1936, Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton and Melville Herskovitz proposed a “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation”, published in the *American Anthropologist* (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovitz 1936). In this memorandum they defined acculturation in the following way:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.

(Note: Under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from culture-change, of which it is but one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation. It is also to be differentiated from diffusion, which while occurring in all instances of acculturation, is not only a phenomenon which frequently takes place without the occurrence of the type of contact between peoples specified in the definition given above, but also constitutes only one...
aspect of the process of acculturation.) (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovitz 1936:149).

Thus, acculturation is a specific type of culture change, which results from culture contact. This is precisely the situation anthropologists encountered in Mexico, after centuries of conquest and colonization.

The influence of evolutionary theory was notable in attempts to explain culture change and rural communities were to be characterized as either tribal or peasant. Kearney (1996:4) aptly identifies the creation of “the peasant” within anthropological theory:

[The] oppositional difference between modern and primitive was the axis upon which anthropology was initially constructed and practiced. No wonder, then, that the disappearance of the primitive implied a crisis for anthropology insofar as it was a kind of natural history based on field research. But the crisis was averted by the discovery of another type – ‘the peasant.’

In ethnographic studies of the Maya, however, the peasant did not replace the primitive, as such. To a certain extent, the primitive still existed, only in slightly modified form which came to be conceptualized as “tribal.” Thus, peasant and tribal were incorporated into an evolutionary model of clearly delineated phases.

Early studies of the Maya, particularly the work of Redfield, relied on unilineal evolutionary models, of which peasants were one phase. Redfield’s analysis focused on political economic orientations and, although ethnicity played a role, both indigenous and mestizo communities could be considered peasant. Redfield (1989[1960]:18)
viewed peasants as a phase between tribal and urban, in which “agriculture is a livelihood and a way of life, not a business for profit.” He defines peasants as follows:

We are looking at a rural people in old civilizations, those rural people who control and cultivate their land for subsistence and as a part of a traditional way of life and who look to and are influenced by gentry or townspeople whose way of life is like theirs but in a more civilized form (Redfield 1989[1960]:20).

It seems then, if we are to accept the assertion of “progress,” that the peasant is a transitional phase – that is, slightly more civilized than tribal societies but still less civilized than urban societies, toward which peasants apparently strive. Although Redfield focused on political economy, he also noted the importance of ethnicity and argued that indigenous communities are less peasant-like because they are more culturally distant from townspeople or elite (Redfield 1989[1960]:21-2), which presumably makes them even less civilized.

Wolf (1966:vii) also identifies the peasant as “a phase in the evolution of human society,” but his conceptualization differs in that he does not see evolution as unilinear. This view was influenced significantly by Julian Steward’s theories of cultural ecology and multilinear evolution. Steward (1955:21) focused on the processes of interaction between humans and their environment and refers to cultural-ecological adaptations as “important creative processes in cultural change.” For Steward, human evolution is not a matter of biology, but rather the interaction of physical and cultural characteristics; thus, biological evolution and progress cannot be equated.

Wolf has written extensively on peasants and has emphasized that the distinction between “primitives” and “peasants” is not the degree to which each is
involved in the larger society, but rather the character of that involvement (1966:3). Drawing on Marxist theory, Wolf notes that control of the means of production is fundamental. Thus, “the term ‘peasant’ denotes no more than an asymmetrical structural relationship between producers of surplus and controllers” (Wolf 1966:10).

Vogt, on the other hand, takes a slightly different approach to the peasantry, which is reminiscent of Redfield. Consider the following passage regarding field work in Zinacantán:

By the second and third seasons, it had become more and more apparent that Zinacantecos were not Catholic peasants with a few Maya remnants left in the culture, but rather that they were Maya tribesmen with a thin veneer of Spanish Catholicism (Vogt 1969:390).

It appears that Vogt had expected the Maya to be more peasant-like, that is, more involved in the larger society (and more civilized?). As did Redfield, Vogt draws on the dichotomy of peasant vs. indigenous, but in this case peasant and Catholic are linked, as are indigenous and tribal.

Vogt has been described as “a pragmatic eclectivist, who was never in the vanguard theoretically” (Rostas 1991:679). Although Vogt and Lewis were contemporaries and both were students of Redfield, Vogt tended to follow Redfield’s approaches more closely, rather than integrating the critical approaches typical of political economic and Marxist studies, which were becoming more common within anthropology at the time. Like Redfield, Vogt focused on change and continuity and viewed indigenous communities as highly integrated. It was the increasing influence of studies in political economy, particularly as later elaborated by Wolf (1966; 1997[1982];
that challenged this view and sparked a new debate regarding the ethnography of indigenous Mexico.

**Early Theoretical Debates**

Although Redfield and Lewis did not conduct their research in Chiapas, they did study a similarly rural indigenous community and the debate that emerged around their work is consistent with broader trends in Mexican ethnography. In 1926 Redfield conducted a brief study of Tepoztlán, a Nahuatl village located sixty miles south of Mexico City and fifteen miles northeast of Cuernavaca. Although the study addressed social relations, Redfield focused on “folk” culture, including stories and songs, as well ritual practices. During this study, Redfield also began to develop his well known folk-urban continuum, a theoretical framework that attempted to explain culture change.

Nearly two decades later, Lewis conducted what was intended to be a restudy of the same community, drawing on Redfield’s initial work, but whereas Redfield portrayed a community characterized by cooperation, Lewis found conflict, tension, and inequality. Lewis (1951) notes the extreme variation between their studies, observing the following of Redfield’s study:

> The impression given by Redfield’s study of Tepoztlán is that of a relatively homogeneous, isolated, smoothly functioning, and well-integrated society made up of contented and well-adjusted people. ...We are told little of poverty, economic problems, or political schisms. Throughout his study we find an emphasis upon the cooperative and unifying factors in Tepoztecan society (Lewis 1951:428).

Lewis found something quite different and notes that his study
emphasize[d] the underlying individualism of Tepoztecan institutions and character, the lack of cooperation, the tensions between villages within the municipio, the schisms within the village, and the pervading quality of fear, envy, and distrust in inter-personal relations (Lewis 1951:429).

These differences, as Lewis argues, are due only in part to changes within the village during the intervening years. More significant, however, were the differences in scope, method and theoretical orientation, such as Lewis’s “greater emphasis on economic analysis” which “reflects a fairly recent trend in anthropology” (Lewis 1951:431).

Lewis further argues that Redfield’s focus on folk culture and the folk-urban continuum would explain his emphasis on the formal and ritualistic aspects of life rather than the everyday life of the people and their problems, on evidence of homogeneity rather than heterogeneity and the range of custom, on the weight of tradition rather than deviation and innovation, on unity and integration rather than tensions and conflict (1951:432).

Here Lewis clearly identifies the crux of this debate, observing Redfield’s focus on ritual, homogeneity, tradition and integration, rather than on issues of heterogeneity, tension and conflict, which Lewis saw as more pertinent.

One further difference in approach was their varying views on the role of history and the ways in which to account for historical context. Redfield (1930:1) saw his study as historically based such that

(t)he formal institution, the explicit statement of program or policy, the bulk of contemporary documents, lie remote from the ways of the masses and record their history almost not at all. ...To learn and set down the ways of the folk, one
must encounter them directly and intimately; they are not otherwise to be
found. Ethnology is the form which any careful study of contemporary history
tends to take in Mexico.

Yet Lewis critiques Redfield’s work for its lack of historical context, arguing that it “only
incidentally considered Tepoztlán in its historical, geographical, and cultural context in
Morelos and in Mexico, and attempted rather to place Tepoztlán within the broader,
more abstract context of the folk-urban continuum” (Lewis 1951:432).

In a similar vein, the work of Evon Vogt has been criticized as ahistorical. Vogt’s
approach to culture change is similar to that of Redfield in that it is conceptualized in
terms of culture contact. Yet, while maintaining the predominance of ancient Maya
influences today, Vogt (1990[1970]:17) also acknowledges historical contingencies:

The Zinacanteco Indians of Highland Chiapas have drawn on their prehistoric
past, their four centuries under Spanish conquerors, and their current
confrontation with the modern world in fashioning their present way of life. The
unique culture they have developed helps them both in understanding and
coping with their particular environment and in carrying forward a vital and
meaningful way of life.

Vogt recognizes that contemporary Maya are “unique” and not simply remnants of an
ancient civilization. Of particular interest here, however, is the way in which the
relationship between modern and traditional has been conceptualized. Vogt represents
indigenous communities as set apart from the modern world, and yet is forced to
reconcile the very apparent indications of culture change.
Evon Vogt and the Harvard Chiapas Project

In 1957, after several trips to Chiapas, Evon Vogt began the Harvard Chiapas Project, which was to last thirty-five years. Although this was a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort, which also included projects from the University of Chicago, Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at Irvine, Vogt remained the most prominent figure and served as a mentor for hundreds of students. Of the project, Vogt (1978:12) states:

We have been interested not only in contemporary processes of change, but also in utilizing the ethnographic data to make inferences about the ancient Maya and to project forward and make predictions about the future of these Indian cultures as they become more significantly linked to the modern world.

The project was initially intended to conduct a comparative study of Tsotsil and Tzeltal communities and the overarching concern was to discover “the processes of cultural variation and change that had occurred and were occurring” among the contemporary Maya (Vogt 1994:351). When it began, the project was closely associated with INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista / National Indigenist Institute) and sought to analyze culture change brought about by the institution’s development programs.

Eventually Vogt recognized that his original comparative approach had been too ambitious and decided instead to focus only on Zinacantán, and later Chamula (Vogt 1994:185). Vogt also began to distance the project from INI and other governmental programs, realizing the need to focus on “basic research on the culture” (Vogt 1994:210). Although he sympathized with the Mexican anthropologists’ concerns with illiteracy, poverty, and disease, Vogt reasoned that it was “fundamental long-range
research that would ultimately provide deeper understandings of this complex and intricate culture” (Vogt 1994:210). Perhaps Vogt also realized the aims of government programs to bring about culture change (i.e., assimilation) were not consistent with his own research goals – to trace the traditions and cultural integrity of the contemporary Maya back to the ancient Maya.

Comparisons of the modern Maya to the ancient Maya are pervasive in Vogt’s works and clearly were pivotal in shaping his research. Vogt argued that the effective integration of Spanish and Mayan characteristics was due to the complex nature of ritual life in Zinacantán, which, in his view, allowed the maintenance of strong indigenous identity. For example, Vogt contrasts economic simplicity with ritual complexity and saw this as “a reflection of ancient Maya life in which economic life was relatively simple, but the ritual life in the ceremonial center was enormously elaborated with all kinds of specialists...” (Vogt 1994:183). In even the smallest details, Vogt saw continuities. Describing a water hole ceremony, Vogt stated: “the highest ranking shaman carried an ancient pocket watch and was forever checking his time with my watch. I was also continually asked by others what time it was” (Vogt 1994:180). Vogt (1994:180) continues from his field notes:

I did not see that any of this was functional; i.e., that the ceremony went any faster or was in any way scheduled by the watches. But there does seem to be...a deep fascination with time as measured by watches. I would suppose that this harks back to an ancient Maya concern with time.
Certainly Vogt was influenced by structural-functionalist theory, prominent within anthropology at the time, but also began to formulate questions regarding symbolic structure and meaning.

Although these examples may seem trivial, they illustrate not only Vogt’s developing theoretical orientations, but also the extent to which Vogt viewed the modern Maya as an extension of a prehistoric past. He saw evidence of the influences of the ancient Maya in settlement patterns, political organization, economic activities, social structure (i.e., patrilineages), and perhaps most significantly in religion, ritual and cosmology. Willey (1989:23) observes the following of Vogt:

He was always very much alert to and concerned with the ecological interface between culture and society and the environmental setting, but he was then, and has always been, convinced of the determinative importance of the values or ideology with which any human group addresses its environment.

Vogt’s conceptualization of ideology as determinative overlooked issues of economic and political inequalities, as well as the ways in which ideology (or more accurately, ideologies) change within modern contexts.

Willey (1989) further notes that Vogt’s assertions regarding the cargo systems – namely that the cargo system in Zinacantán closely replicates that of the Classic Maya communities in the adjacent lowlands – are not widely accepted within archaeology. Whereas Vogt’s argument is based on the assumption of a “vacant” ceremonial center through which cargoholders rotated, archaeological evidence indicates large urban centers in which power was held by hereditary elite (Willey 1989:28). Nonetheless, Willey credits Vogt with opening “a dialogue with Maya archaeologists in a way that no
ethnologist had done before” and, further, compares Vogt’s work to Redfield and Villa Rojas’ study of Chan Kom, stating that their “study was a brilliant tour de force in ethnology and social anthropology, but it was not historically oriented in the way that Vogt’s Zinacanteco research has been” (Willey 1989:29).

To a certain extent, Vogt did attempt to offer an historical account, albeit in the sense of long term trends rather than event-based analysis, but his approach has not been without controversy. The subsequent debates between researchers in the Harvard Chiapas Project have received a fair amount of attention in the literature. Noting various theoretical tensions within the Harvard Chiapas Project, Vogt (1994:363) states:

The main lines of tension we had between members of the project have been twofold: the differences in concept and method between those scholars who are, or hope to be, hardheaded scientists and those who are more humanistic in their operations, and the arguments between the Marxist materialists and the symbolic structuralists.

Vogt associates Frank Cancian, George Collier and John Haviland with the more scientific approach, noting their focus on quantitative data collection. For Cancian and Collier this data is largely economic and ecological, whereas Haviland’s focus is primarily linguistic (Vogt 1994:363-4). Those who have taken a more humanistic approach include Gary Gossen, Renato Rosaldo, and Kazuyasu Ochiai, whose research tended to focus on religion, mythology, cosmology, and worldview (Vogt 1994:364). Researchers such as Victoria Bricker and Robert Laughlin have combined the two approaches (Vogt 1994:364). Whereas these differences in approach brought about spirited debate, a
more serious line of tension arose when younger scholars adopted a critical Marxist approach (Vogt 1994:364).

This division was most apparent in the debate regarding the origins of the political and religious hierarchies. Vogt asserts that the religious hierarchy, at least, is of Maya origin, noting that the responsibility of providing “work” or “service” to the community (referred to in Tsotsil as abtel), “is probably related to the Ancient Maya idea of the ‘Year Bearer,’ especially since most of the positions are held for a year” (1969:246). Vogt notes certain indigenous characteristics of the political hierarchy, including the Tsotsil concept of “hyu’eletik” that “refers to men with special ability to meltsan k’op (settle disputes)” and who hold political power (Vogt 1969:284). However, Vogt does not explicitly address the hierarchy’s origins. He observes that the offices of the municipal government were established in 1899 and that over the years various positions have been added (Vogt 1969). Due to the way in which Vogt associates the two hierarchies, one is left with the impression that both are essentially Mayan in character, despite the considerable influence of the state and national government in the structuring of the political hierarchy.

Subsequent studies by Rus and Wasserstrom (1980) have contradicted this view. Drawing on ethnohistorical evidence, they demonstrate the significant changes that the civil-religious hierarchies underwent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Specific economic and political strategies of indigenous communities resulted in various reformulations of the hierarchies and it is such changes that challenge
assertions of ancient origins. Rus and Wasserstrom do not, however, deny the indigenous character of the hierarchies.

[Civil-religious hierarchies] cannot be explained away as a form of self-exploitation, of a self-sustained mechanism for paying colonial tribute in postcolonial society – still less as the socioeconomic backbone of closed-corporate peasant communities. On the contrary, faced with a dominant ideology which in the 19th century demanded that Indians accept their position as landless (or near landless) laborers, indigenous people – at least those who did not become mestizos – chose to put up the strongest ideological resistance of which they were capable. . . . Exploited as occasional or transient laborers, they responded as Indians, as members of native communities which were themselves being pulled apart into different social classes (1980:475).

This perspective offers a rather different view of indigenous communities than that proposed by Vogt. Rather than portraying political and religious hierarchies as essentially Maya, it argues that they must be viewed as historically specific forms of resistance to proletarianization.

In an attempt to account for the preservation of ancient traditions, alongside influences of modernization, Vogt relies on a functionalist model. Vogt himself notes that for his generation “the important task of the anthropologist was to engage in field research with a view to understanding the structure and functioning of a whole community or whole tribe” and historical considerations were secondary (Vogt 1994:350). Critical to this approach was the notion of “encapsulation” as a means for explaining culture change and continuity.

Vogt (1969:582) defines encapsulation as “the conceptual and structural incorporation of new elements into existing patterns of social and ritual behavior.” On
the one hand, this model effectively portrays the ways in which indigenous communities have maintained cultural integrity. On the other hand, it sets up a dichotomy between traditional and modern, thereby portraying indigenous communities as drawing on tradition as a means of coping in response to “outside” forces, rather than recognizing that indigenous communities are actively modern and engaged with the so-called modern world: “As Zinacantán approaches the twenty-first century, it presents an overall image of reproductive success, cultural vitality, and a generally successful, if somewhat uneasy, adjustment to the modern world” (Vogt 1990[1970]:145). Thus, indigenous communities are typified as qualitatively distinct and their integrity is conceptualized as stemming from a pre-contact phase.

**Commonalities in Approach**

Both materialist and culturalist models exhibit distinct types of determinism. Most, if not all, materialist approaches are inspired by Marxist theory of one sort or another. Of Marx’s work, Roseberry (1997:43) observes that it is “materialist, in its broad assumption that social being determines social consciousness and its more specific assertion that the forms and relations through which humans produce their livelihoods constitute fundamental, and determining, relations in society”. Although Marx did not overlook the “transforming capacities of human action . . . he nonetheless saw the real, material structures he had delineated as exerting a shaping power over, and setting limits upon, human action” (Roseberry 1997:43-4). Even those materialists who are not
explicitly Marxist assume the primacy of material structures in determining social relations.

For culturalist, or symbolic, approaches material structures are not considered significant to an understanding of social functioning. For example, of the Harvard Chiapas Project, Rus (2004:206) states, “the Zinacantecos’ role in larger economic and political fields and the penetration of those fields back into Zinacantán . . . were not so much excluded from consideration by the Harvard Chiapas Project as considered ‘off point.’” The “point” was to focus on cultural content, not external influences. This was accomplished, at least in the case of Vogt’s work, through a careful consideration of ideology as revealed through ritual and cosmology. Ideology, as such, was considered to be the only factor determining social relations.

In addition to being deterministic, materialist and culturalist approaches may incorporate, to varying degrees, an interventionist stance. The reasons for these interventionist tendencies may be due in part to the increasing influence of the “politics of recognition,” a term employed by Taylor (1994) to refer to the value placed on equality, along with the need to recognize the unique identity of individuals and groups. Taylor identifies two distinct facets of the politics of recognition: first, “with the move from honor [based on a hierarchical society] to dignity has come a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens, and the content of this politics has been the equalization of rights and entitlement,” and second, “the development of the modern notion of identity has given rise to a politics of difference. . . to recognize . . . the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from
everyone else” (Taylor 1994:37-8). These ideals, despite their inherent contradictions, have inspired a wide range of social movements, informed social and political policy and significantly shaped anthropological theory.

Materialists, or more specifically political economists, draw attention to inequalities inherent in the capitalist system and question the impact of development, particularly on poor, rural and indigenous communities. From this perspective, it is not enough that anthropologists be aware of larger political economic trends, but must also work toward progressing past their negative impacts. This view is consistent with that of Marx, who stated, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (cited in Roseberry 1997:25). In more recent iterations, researchers often point to the disappearance of cultural diversity as a result of the capitalist system. Nash (1981:412) argues that although variability still exists, it is within a narrowing range. Further, “the danger is . . . that the reduction of cultural variability limits the plasticity and adaptability that was the principle advantage in evolution” (Nash 1981:412). As a result, we are experiencing a “crisis of vanishing cultures in the present expansion of the capitalist system” (Nash 1981:417).

Materialists are not alone in advocating for indigenous cultures. In 1972, Cultural Survival was organized by a group of professors from Harvard University, including Evon Vogt, David Maybury-Lewis and Orlando Patterson. “The organization grew out of a concern with self-determination for indigenous people and the desire to help those populations threatened with ethnocide to achieve the economic means to maintain their way of life” (Nash 1981:415). Cultural Survival is just one of many groups, as Nash
(1981) observes, that seek to mitigate the adverse effects of development. “The work of these groups not only provides the richest documentation of the advance of the capitalist world system, but represents a commitment to resist that advance” (Nash 1981:415). This concern with disappearing cultures, characteristic of both materialists and culturalists, is reminiscent of salvage ethnography but with one important distinction: rather than merely documenting cultures before they vanish, anthropologists should advocate on their behalf, thereby preventing their disappearance.

**Recent Theoretical Developments and Debates**

During the 1960s and 1970s anthropology experienced a shift toward a more global perspective, which included a resurgence of political economic theories and critiques of the inward focus characteristic of symbolic anthropology. This shift, which had begun decades earlier, was due in part to the influences of WWII on anthropology in the United States, though British anthropologists had earlier begun to articulate the changes (Nash 1981:393-4). In 1940, in his presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown noted the increasing complexities and interconnectedness of the world’s societies (see quote in Nash 1981:394). The most profound impact of this theoretical shift did not occur until the 1970s, however, and for ethnographies of indigenous Mexico this meant an increased interest in revisionist studies, which were often historically based and sought to situate indigenous communities within a broader context.
The work of Wallerstein (1974) was especially influential during this time, despite receiving mixed reviews. Nash (1981) summarizes various critiques of Wallerstein’s model, including the assertion that there is only one mode of production and that those in the periphery are treated as passive recipients of the modernizing capitalist system. With regards to the drawbacks of world systems theory, Nash (1981) proposes that anthropology’s holistic approach can offer important insights. Specifically, it can “enable us to investigate the impact of development and change on populations and environment” but it “can also encompass the logico-meaningful integration with capitalist institutions” (Nash 1981:415).

Arguing in favor of the further development of anthropological political economy, Roseberry (1988) argues that political economy encompasses more than world systems theory or the various brands of Marxism. Further, the assertion that “subjects should be situated at the intersections of local and global histories” is a problem that “imposes on scholars who attempt to understand particular conjunctions a constant theoretical and methodological tension to which oppositions like global/local, determination/freedom, structure/agency give inadequate expression” (Roseberry 1988:173-4). The benefit of this type of political economy, which effectively situates subjects at the intersections of local and global histories, is that it offers “a fundamental challenge to those who discuss culture, history, and practice without sufficient consideration of class, capitalism, and power” (Roseberry 1988:179).

In a published commentary on cultural materialism, Sahlins (1976:298) offered the following critique:
The real issue is whether culture – as praxis or structure, conscious or unconscious, in verbal statement or social action – is to be understood as meaningfully constituted according to local logics which are not themselves *sequitur* to material advantage but, on the contrary, specify for any given society the nature of the utilitarian fact and its cultural effects. If so, then the material “causes” are *in that capacity* the product of a symbolic system whose character it is our task to investigate; for without the mediation of this cultural scheme, no adequate relation between a given material condition and specific cultural form can ever be stipulated.

From this perspective, material conditions are presumably not to be overlooked in favor of symbolic systems, but rather the two should be considered simultaneously.

Sahlins’ (1985; 2000) later theorizing of event-based studies offers a viable alternative to the divide between materialist and culturalist approaches. Sahlins (2000:296) identifies two types of historical accounts, both of which are political, including event-based (evenemential) analyses which focus on elites and a hierarchical idea of society, and structural analyses which privileges mass, general and institutional phenomena. In a critique of the opposition between event and structure, Sahlins (2000:301) proposes developing an anthropological concept of the event, in which “the historical significance of a given incident – its determinations and effects as ‘event’ – depends on the cultural context.” Sahlins (2000) argues that both internal and external events can be viewed from this perspective and that local and global forces are always at play. “The synthesis [of local and global] requires complementary processes of mediation: the devolution of the global forces to the terms of the local action and, conversely, the expansion of local actions to global significance” (Sahlins 2000:342).
Conclusion

In the highlands of Chiapas, indigenous peoples see no contradiction between tradition and change, custom and rationality, or local and global – to the chagrin of many tourists and the occasional politician, who want an “authentic” cultural experience and see nothing exotic about “Indians” with cars and cell phones. It seems then, that the characterizations by Vogt, among others, that portray Zinacanteco culture as an extension or development of a prehispanic past are limited. Similarly, more recent studies depicting changes in contemporary indigenous communities as a response to modern political economic trends overlook many aspects of tradition that Zinacantecos themselves value. That is not to say that the works of Vogt and his students are not useful, as these have proven to be invaluable resources in Mayan studies. In fact, as Rus (2004:225) observes of the Maya, ironically “many find that their own sense of who they are is more compatible with the older cultural anthropology model of a people who have endured by valiantly preserving their ‘essential’ culture through centuries of invasion by European ‘others,’ resisting by refusing to give up that which they inherited from their ancestors.”

Nonetheless, with regards to the contemporary Maya, the limitations of culturalist/symbolic and materialist/political economic approaches, as well as the arbitrary divide between the two, cannot be disregarded. By drawing on more recent theoretical developments in both models and advancing these, this work takes a more situational and historical approach. This includes a focus on language and political economy through considerations of events and narratives. As such, we can better
explore the cultural significance of varying ideologies within contemporary indigenous communities, as well as the larger political economic processes to which these ideologies relate.
Chapter 2

Political Economic Plurality

“There isn’t any woman that doesn’t work. Her husband will make milpa and she makes many tostadas, with a tarp of corn. She hauls a lot of firewood [because] when she makes tortillas it takes a lot of firewood. After hauling firewood, she hauls water. Before! Not now...Now they make flowers. The men take their women, they will work with their wives. They go and work together. They work together, with their children, with their wife. They plant flowers, cut flowers, everything. Now it is much easier!”

- Petrona Perez Arias

Communities such as Zinacantán were portrayed in early ethnographies as isolated and steeped in tradition, which is, in many ways, an oversimplified portrayal. Scholars in political economic anthropology have challenged this view, arguing that a closer consideration of historical contexts reveals more complexities (Wolf 1997[1982]).

Zinacantan, Chamula, and other Tzeltal- and Tzotzil-speaking communities in the vicinity of San Cristóbal de las Casas in highland Chiapas have been studied intensively by American anthropologists since the 1940s. Most of these studies have dealt with them either as “tribal” survivors of the ancient Maya, maintained in relative isolation from outside contact, or as parts of a colonial Hispanic society preserved in encapsulated form within a modernizing Mexico. Tzeltal and Tzotzil, along with other Native Americans in Central America, however, were drawn early into the networks of mercantile expansion (see McLeod 1973), and they have participated actively since the nineteenth century in the commercial coffee and corn economy of the area and in the politics of the Mexican state. These involvements, in turn, have altered their agricultural adaptation, changed their class structure, and affected their political and ceremonial organization. Their continuing identity as inhabitants of “Indian”
communities is thus not a corpus of unchanged traditions maintained in unbroken fashion from a distant past. It is, rather, the outcome of a multitude of interrelated and often antagonistic processes set in motion by capitalist development (Wolf 1997[1982]:338-9).

It is the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, to which Wolf (1997[1982]) alludes, that has significantly shaped political economic plurality in contemporary Zinacantán.

**Modes of Production in Contemporary Zinacantán**

Drawing on Wolf’s modes of production, including capitalist, tributary, and kin-ordered, the complexities of the current political economic context in Zinacantán immediately become apparent. As Wolf notes, these three modes are not necessarily distinct nor can they be viewed as representing an evolutionary sequence (1997[1982]:76). Zinacantán is a case in point, in which all three modes of production are widely evident. There is no doubt that individuals participate in the capitalist system. The material markers – cars, televisions, DVD players, stereos, cell phones, etc. – are increasingly present. However, there are many, perhaps even a majority, who are not explicitly proletarians in the Marxist sense. On the one hand, there are those who sell their labor: teachers, nurses, government employees. On the other hand, there are many who combine economic strategies, many of which cannot be considered purely capitalist.

The major economic activities in Zinacantán presently consist of agriculture (mostly flowers and vegetables), transportation, and tourism. Although there is some overlap, economic opportunities are typically determined by gender. A small minority of
women have found employment outside of Zinacantán, as teachers or nurses, for example. However, an overwhelming majority of women in Zinacantán are artisans, weaving textiles that they then embroider with elaborate designs. In loosely Marxist terms, they own the means of production – a back strap loom and weaving supplies – and sell their products either directly to tourists or to other Zinacantecas who then sell to tourists. A few women even hire, or contract, others to make certain items and then pay by the piece. Some women also operate small stores located in their homes, selling groceries and household goods. Technically, these women could be considered capitalists, or perhaps petty bourgeoisie, and yet they are extremely marginal within the capitalist system. Additionally, women devote a considerable amount of time to household responsibilities: cooking, making tortillas, shucking corn, cleaning, washing laundry (by hand), caring for children and hauling wood (if the family cannot afford to purchase wood).

5 Women also make textiles for their own use, including clothing and household items.
Figure 3: Making tortillas

Figure 4: Weaving on a back strap loom
Figure 5: Embroidering textile woven on back strap loom
Anecdotal evidence indicates that a majority of Zinacanteco men earn their living primarily through agriculture. Greenhouses have become exceedingly common since the 1980s.

**Figure 6: Greenhouses**

Men who do not own their own greenhouses may find employment as laborers in the greenhouses of others or in transporting flowers throughout the region (including Mérida, in the state of Yucatán). Whereas greenhouses tend to be utilized for flowers (primarily roses), vegetables are typically grown in open fields. Those who own (or rent) enough land are able to hire laborers to work their fields. The most common crops are radishes, beets, cilantro, broccoli and cauliflower. These are either sold locally or in the nearby markets of San Cristóbal and Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Most families also grow corn and beans, along with chayote or calabaza (types of squash), on small plots for household
use. However, few families grow enough to provide for household needs year round and so must purchase additional produce to supplement what they grow themselves.

Figure 7: Greenhouses and vegetable plots
Perhaps the second most significant economic activity available to men is the transportation cooperatives, i.e., taxis that shuttle people back and forth between Zinacantán and San Cristóbal. In the town of Zinacantán there are 42 taxis and 4 combis. The taxis are standard 4-door sedans (typically Nissan), which seat four passengers, and the combis are older model Volkswagen vans, which seat at least seven passengers. The drivers are either taxistas, who own their own cars, or choferes, who pay to use someone else’s car. The men have organized a cooperative and thus have effectively eliminated competition between drivers. At any given time there are three taxis and one combi in line (with others waiting to get in line) and only leave once they are full. Rates are charged per person at 10 pesos for a combi and 12 for a taxi (although on January 1, 2009 these costs increased by two pesos, which, according to the posted
announcements, was due to the rising cost of gasoline). If someone is in a hurry or has an emergency, the taxi can be hired to leave immediately if the individual is willing to pay the full taxi fare.

![Parking area for taxis](image)

**Figure 9: Parking area for taxis**

In addition to agriculture and transportation, men also find employment in construction, education and government (for example as “cultural promoters” in institutions such as the Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígenas or the Casa de la Cultura)\(^6\). Positions in the civil (political) hierarchy (i.e., municipal president, judge, regidor) are another source of income, however, this case is somewhat complicated because men hold these positions for three years only, since there is no re-election, and then return to their previous professions. I was never able to ascertain the salaries paid to the political officials as this is not public knowledge and there appeared to be no official record. It is generally agreed, however, that the president is the highest

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\(^6\) These are government sponsored organizations whose aim is to promote cultural pluralism.
paid official and salaries then decrease according to the rank of the cargo within the structured hierarchy (i.e., lowest ranking officials are paid the least). Depending on the cargo and the responsibilities it entails, some men are able to continue with agricultural or other work while in office, whereas the two judges and other high ranking officials are required to devote all of their time to their political responsibilities.

Based on the above sketch it is apparent that the economy of Zinacantán does not fit neatly into any one of the modes of production identified by Wolf (1997[1982]). Instead, aspects of all three can be seen. The following examples of the economic activities of family units further elucidate this argument. Each case provides a brief outline of economic, political, as well as relevant linguistic, details.

**Case 1:** Juana is 34 years old, divorced and remarried. She has two sons, one from her first marriage and one with her new husband. Juana is an artisan by trade. She did not attend school and does not know how to read or write. However, she does speak Spanish, which she learned when she was young and had to help her father who worked as a merchant in Tuxtla. She spends several days a week either at the museum or at her stall beside the Casa de la Cultura, which she shares with her sister-in-law. At these locations, she displays her textiles for tourists to purchase, while she works on her weaving and embroidery. Juana’s husband, Antonio, works as the manager of a green house. The man he works for owns numerous greenhouses, as well as the local tortilleria. Antonio
often works 6 or 7 days a week, but this is not the only work he does. Antonio also holds a minor religious cargo, for which he is not paid. He did not choose this responsibility, but rather it is “obligatory.”

Juana’s sister-in-law, Elena, lives just around the corner. She is also an artisan and is part of the cooperative of women, along with Juana, who display their textiles at the museum on a rotating basis. Elena is 35 years old and is married with four children; two girls and two boys, ranging in age from 18 years to 6 months. Elena’s husband runs a small leather shop out of their home. He makes traditional leather sandals and bags, previously used by all Zinacanteco men but now primarily only by cargo holders. He sells these in Zinacantán and Chamula. Their two daughters (ages 18 and 15) both attend school; the oldest is now studying at a university several hours from Zinacantán and the younger is in secondary school, but both contribute to the household income through the production and sale of textiles.

Both of these families live in cinderblock homes (as opposed to adobe), have telephones and own vehicles. Both Juana and Elena participate in Programa Oportunidades, which provides a small stipend for education and household expenses. However, because they are members of the PRI, neither family receives any additional governmental support. Both families are bilingual (speak Spanish and Tsotsil) but speak only Tsotsil in the home. The children are all learning to read and write.
Spanish in school. The women speak Spanish in their interactions with tourists but only speak Tsotsil with one another.

**Case 2:** The Vazquez Hernandez family consists of the female head of household, Tinik, and her family: two adult sons, their wives and children, four of her five adult daughters, two of whom are single and two of whom are divorced and have their children living with them, for a total of 18 family members in residence. The younger of the two sons works for a greenhouse, transporting flowers to Mérida twice a week, thus he is often out of town. Though he does not hold any political office, he often attends political meetings – socializing with his friends who hold minor cargos and thus likely positioning himself to be chosen for cargos in the future. The elder son works odd jobs including construction and spends much more time at home, working on repairs and household upkeep. All of the women are artisans and have a very successful textile business. They have been able to make a number of connections with tourist guides (primarily through political affiliations) and so consistently have groups of tourists who come to their house to buy textiles, sample indigenous food and drink, and experience an indigenous home. Several of the women have traveled extensively (including to Mexico City and Guadalajara), at the invitation of wealthy patrons, to attend fashion shows and to display and sell their textiles. The women have other
sources of income as well, including a public telephone, a small storefront with soft drinks and cane liquor, called *pox* (which they make themselves) and they have recently started selling popsicles as well, both out of their home and at the elementary school down the street. All of the eight grandchildren have attended elementary but only the eldest male (21 years old) has continued his education. He is currently attending UNACH, an indigenous university in San Cristóbal but, according to him, his family does not support this and would prefer he find a job instead.

The family lives in a large compound, which consists of three kitchens (one for tourists, one at the back where the elder daughter and her two children cook and eat, and one main kitchen for the rest of the family) and five separate rooms around an open patio area. The front room and kitchen are made of adobe and all others are made of block (although when I last visited, their main kitchen was being rebuilt with block). They own several television sets and have a telephone in their storefront. Each of the two adult sons owns a car, although the younger son’s is much newer and he is clearly better off financially. The family owns a refrigerator and also a gas stove, which is rarely used since most cooking is done over a fire inside the main kitchen.

Tinik is the widow of a well respected religious official and the family continues to hold a prominent place in the community. Their home is located beside the presidencia and local political officials often come by
the house or stop at the store for a drink. Because they are members of
the PRD, the family receives a considerable amount of support from the
local government, including building materials such as concrete blocks
and rebar, as well as large plastic water tanks. They are also part of a
network of seven families who have exclusive access to a single water
source (a fresh spring). As a result they have water every other day,
which is uncommon in Zinacantán, where many families have water only
every five days. But in order to receive this water, these seven families
are responsible for an annual fiesta, the hosting family of which
alternates each year.

Language use in this family is rather complex. Spanish is
frequently spoken in the home due to the numerous interactions with
tourists. However, Tsotsil is the predominant language used within the
family and in interactions with neighbors and visitors. The grandmother
speaks no Spanish, although likely understands some. Her five daughters
(one of whom lives in a separate household but is divorced and spends
her days at the family home) are all essentially bilingual and are literate
at a basic level. The eldest son speaks limited Spanish and his wife speaks
almost none. The younger son speaks fluent Spanish and is married to a
young, ladina woman from Tuxtla, who spoke only Spanish prior to her
marriage at sixteen years of age. Now, ten years later, she understands
Tsotsil but does not speak it. The entire family, including her husband and two children, speaks to her in Tsotsil and she responds in Spanish.

**Case 3:** Alejandra is in her late twenties and lives with her aunt, Margarita, and her grandmother, Maruch, whom she refers to as her mother. Alejandra’s parents were divorced because of religious conflicts (mother’s family is Catholic and father’s family is Evangelical) and so at a young age she decided to live with her grandmother. Alejandra completed a bachelor’s degree in English and now teaches high school English in a Tseltal-speaking community nearly two hours from Zinacantán. She rents a room there but returns to Zinacantán on weekends and holidays. Her salary is the primary source of income for her family.

Alejandra’s aunt works as a *vocal* in the Programa Oportunidades. The position is obligatory, which, from Alejandra’s explanation, I understood to mean that she had been compelled by other women in the program to serve in this position, but she does receive a small stipend. Alejandra’s grandmother is approximately eighty years old and so receives two small pensions from the government. Alejandra and her aunt both weave and embroider (the grandmother used to as well), but only for themselves or other family members – they do not sell their
textiles. The grandmother and aunt both own small plots of land where the women grow corn, beans and chayote for household use.

The family lives in a small two-room adobe home with a separate kitchen, which was just rebuilt with cement block. Now that Alejandra is working they are able to buy firewood and no longer have to haul it from the mountains. The family does not have a telephone nor do they own a car, but Alejandra hopes to buy one someday.

Alejandra’s grandmother does not speak nor understand Spanish and uses few loan words when speaking Tsotsil. Her aunt does not speak Spanish but understands it and can also read it. Alejandra speaks, reads and writes Tsotsil, Spanish and English (and is currently learning Tseltal because she teaches in a Tseltal-speaking community). In their home, they speak only Tsotsil.

Alejandra’s mother’s family is wealthy and holds a prominent place in the community. Her father’s family is very involved in politics (PRD) and is also prominent in the community. Due to family conflicts, however, Alejandra’s household is not associated with this prominence. Despite limited familial connections currently, her grandmother remembers a time when things were different (excerpt from life history narrative, full version in Chapter 8):

Maruch: Well the grandfather of my mother, oooh, that old man was so rich. He was so good. That’s how my childhood was. Well, really the old man was very good...because of that my mother lit candles for him when she was alive. And I
began to become aware. I lit candles for him and would go to visit him. But that’s because he had his land where he planted corn. He had land...in Mexa Ton or Xila Ton, or what is the land called that is down there... by San Antonio. The old man had all that land.

Alejandra: San Antonio is there in the lowlands.

Maruch: Down there, yes in the lowlands. Yes...there, but the old man was rich. He had horses and other things. He went on horseback. You see, before there were no cars. It wasn’t like now, you see. There are only big roads, just big roads. No, there were only little paths. If you had a horse, you could...travel like him. He went and traveled, went to see his plot in Mexa Ton, went to check his land in Xila Ton, went to see his lands in...very far away. He had much land. That’s why before my mother had land.

**Case 4:** Cristobal is about 45 years old and is serving his first year as the Third Regidor Suplente (the lowest ranking of the political officials). He recently converted to Evangelism (refers to himself as Christian) and as such is the only political official who is not Catholic. He is married with nine children, all of whom attend school, although the eldest son has graduated and is now working in the United States. When his son returns to Zinacantán, however, he works with his father in their fields. Cristobal, who ownes “a little bit of land and also rents,” grows radishes, cilantro, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage. They grow only a little bit of corn and buy the rest. He hires laborers to help work his fields. It is difficult for him now that he has the added responsibility of his cargo. When asked about his work, he replied, “I like working in the fields. I am not accustomed to being here (in the presidencia).” In fact, Cristobal chose only to speak to
me about his work in the fields, rather than his political responsibilities. He considers himself a campesino. This is typical of political cargoholders, who must temporarily leave their professions while in office. Cristobal speaks Tsotsil, but is also very proficient in Spanish. However, he declined to be recorded during our interviews because, as he said, “I don’t know how to speak well...in Spanish.”

**Case 5:** Arturo is in his mid-twenties and is single. He lives with his parents and siblings, and their extended family lives in adjacent homes. Arturo recently opened a small store in the front room of his father’s house, which is conveniently located beside the elementary school and across the street from the main church and the presidencia. Arturo runs the store but his male family members also help out. The store offers primarily snacks and soft drinks, but also sells beer and cane liquor, as well as occasional fresh produce. There are a couple of plastic tables and chairs set up outside where customers can sit and socialize, with an exceptional view of the basketball court, as well as the activities at the presidencia and the church plaza. His most frequent customers, however, are school children who make small purchases and often stay to play foosball, congregating for hours around the table.

Arturo grew up and was educated in San Cristóbal. He attended university but did not finish his degree because he did not like formal
education – he tends to think of himself as somewhat of an outsider, on various levels. Arturo’s grandfather was a ladino who came to live in Zinacantán, eventually owning much of the land that is now the cabecera. Arturo’s grandmother, an indigenous woman from Zinacantán, worked as his servant and they were later married. Arturo speaks Spanish as his first language, as does the majority of his family, but now also speaks Tsotsil which he has started picking up since returning to Zinacantán. Arturo once mentioned that he had an aunt who continued to use indigenous clothing and always spoke Tsotsil, but by all appearances, the family is basically ladinoized, aside from the fact that they have moved back to Zinacantán and are considered to be members of the community (see Chapter 7). Arturo identifies strongly with his indigenous heritage and works hard to be involved in the community, participating in soccer leagues and, more importantly to him, is very active in reviving “traditional”, i.e., indigenous, games (juegos tradicionales). In fact, he has traveled throughout Mexico participating in large tournaments of traditional games. Arturo and his family are members of the PRD and so receive some government support, including building materials and water tanks.
Conclusion

From the preceding examples, it is clear that Zinacantecos participate in a capitalist mode of production in a wide variety of ways, and yet they are also involved in much work that is not explicitly capitalist. Thus, other factors must be taken into consideration to understand political economic activities. Kinship relations, for example, influence the organization of labor. In all of the cases discussed above, individuals perform work that benefits the family, whether compensated or not. Juana and her sister-in-law sometimes prepare food together or share food they have prepared separately and they help each other with childcare; Tinik’s eldest son is responsible for most of the household upkeep; Alejandra supports her aunt and grandmother with the salary she earns teaching; Cristobal’s wife supervises their workers while Cristobal is at the presidencia, and his sons all help with agricultural work; Arturos’ father and brother work in the store when Arturo is not around. Additionally, kinship ties influence access to resources, particularly land. Although land can be purchased, it is frequently passed on through family inheritance.

Access to resources may also be determined by one’s status within or relationship to political and religious hierarchies, which continue to play a prominent role in the lives of Zinacantecos. Furthermore, the ability to pursue economic activities may be limited by one’s obligations within a given hierarchy. For example, Antonio’s work in the religious cargo takes a considerable amount of time but is not compensated (or at least not paid). Therefore, time devoted to community responsibilities restricts individual’s capacity to generate income.
Religious authorities are not given an official salary and their responsibilities can be quite costly. Although the church does bring in revenue – particularly from entrance fees paid by tourists – it seems that these positions have experienced diminishing returns, as such, since there are no longer waiting lists and men must be sought out to fill the cargos. Nonetheless, the hierarchies continue and in a certain respect resemble the structure of tribute systems, although in this case labor takes the place of surplus goods.

A capitalist mode of production is clearly prominent within Zinacantán. Women produce and sell textiles; men, and to a certain extent women, produce and sell agricultural goods; both men and women run small storefronts, participate in wage labor or work in salaried positions. But even work that appears to be capitalist is often influenced by kin-ordered and tributary modes of production, indicating that the three modes of production are rarely kept distinct. Though it is clear that Zinacantecos participate widely in all three, they do so in ways that overlap, strategically blending various modes of production. Such patterns suggest that political economic plurality is integral to life in Zinacantán. While theoretical distinctions between modern (capitalist) and traditional (kin-ordered and tributary) may be useful in some cases, they are not reflective of the realities of political economic activities in Zinacantán.
Interlude – Juana

Juana begins the following discussion by recounting her early childhood, when she was living with her aunt, and addresses the ways in which women assist the men who hold religious cargos. (Women provide similar types of support for men who hold political cargos as well.)

Well, I was born there with my mom...yes...in about five years my aunt died. So there were only two people in the house. They are not married, they are single. And so, the one died and the other remained and I stayed with her, with my other aunt. There I grew up.

And your mother?
She lived separate. Yes. My mom is in my house and I stayed with the other aunt. Well, we lived close though. I just slept there at night and in the morning I am with my mom.

So, that’s how I grew up there. Because my aunt, well, she has...many, uh, cargos, because the mayordomos have to borrow people, to help some in the house and she goes. I didn’t like that, because I am a little more (unintelligible), like about thirteen years. Then I didn’t want to be with her there and I came to live with my mom, with my dad, at about fourteen, fifteen years...

And why did she have many cargos?
Because the mayordomos borrow people like, like to make tortillas, to make food, and my aunt goes. And I didn’t want to go.

And she isn’t married?
No, she is single. They like to have single women to make the food. Yes.

Ah, to help them?

To help. Because women with babies, they can’t really do it. So the single ones make it all. Yes, that’s how it is...that’s how I grew up with my mom and my dad at about thirteen years. There were seven of us. Five brothers and one sister. And then, I left...to...get married to a man (laughs). And I left there...
Chapter 3

Theorizing the Political: Typologies vs. Events and Ideologies

“Well, like always, it appears that they have all the power and everyone else does not. But we have learned in school, and I believe that, the function of politics is to serve the community, whoever that may be, children, men, women, elderly, everyone. [Just] because they are politicians they should not feel like they are better than everyone else. We are all equal. We should all improve the community. We should all help one another to move forward.”

- Lucia Eugenia Gomez Lopez

In an effort to broaden the scope of political analysis, this research looks beyond the political system to the politics of historically specific events. In subsequent chapters I consider events such as the visit by President Felipe Calderón and a fight that occurred between two women in Zinacantán. First, however, it is necessary to consider the ways in which anthropological analyses of politics have evolved and how politics in Zinacantán have been portrayed in previous studies. This discussion is followed by an overview of political ideologies prevalent in Mexico and in Zinacantán.

Ethnographic Approaches to Politics

In its classic form, political anthropology sought to establish the typology of political systems found in the societies of the world. The structuralism of the Oxbridge anthropologists of the 1940s “saw political structures as composed of the reciprocal relations between kin groups and territorial groups, between localized lineages and
dispersed clans, and between local and wider communities” (Vincent 1990:268). In its early phases, political anthropology was influenced by evolutionary thinking and typological systems such as band, tribe, chiefdom and state. Fried (1967) expanded on these by emphasizing the distinction between egalitarian and stratified societies, in which, in evolutionary terms, stratification indicates a more complex, advanced society.

Krader’s (1968) work, *Formation of the State*, offers one example of an evolutionary approach to political typologies. Krader (1968:2) argues that “the state has developed as mankind has developed: from simple beginnings to ever more complicated and formal social structures.” Krader (1968:7) identifies band societies, such as “Eskimos, Bushmen, [and] Pygmies” as “simple societies without the state,” whereas groups with more complex social organization, such as the Crow, the Kpelle and the Shilluk, are identified as “societies with institutions leading to the state.” Krader (1968) identifies two additional typologies, which include the “emergent state,” in which the polity and economy were not fully integrated, and “the state properly so-called,” in which “man concentrates his power over man in a single office” and the “monopoly of physical force by this office is absolute” (Krader 1968:8-9).

Another major work in the early stages of political anthropology was *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). Swartz, et al. (1966:1) identify this work as a “major benchmark in the anthropology of politics.” Vincent (1990:260) observes, however, that although the work was successful within the closed ranks of social anthropology in Britain, it was not well received elsewhere. It was criticized for its neglect of other social sciences, its misinformed critiques of political science, its
dichotomy between state and stateless societies and its lack of historicity (Vincent 1990:260-3).

After the publication of *African Political Systems*, there began “a trend – at first almost imperceptible, then gaining momentum in the late 1950s and early 1960s – away from the earlier preoccupation with the taxonomy, structure, and function of political systems to a growing concern with the study of political processes” (Swartz et al 1966:1). This trend was characterized by a focus on conflict and struggle, development and process and a “shift in emphasis from static and synchronic analyses of morphological types to dynamic and diachronic studies of societies in change” (Swartz et al 1966:3).

This dramatic shift in political anthropology can be attributed in large part to the widespread influence of Marxism and political economy. As opposed to previous approaches to politics, which relied on organic or mechanical analogies, this new approach viewed politics as “a field of tension, full of intelligent and determined antagonists” (Swartz et al 1966:8). Despite this shift toward political process, as opposed to political system, conceptualizations of what counted as “political” remained limited. In an effort to define “political,” Swartz, et al. (1966) characterize politics as public rather than private, goal-oriented and as involving differentials of power. Although these characterizations may hold true in certain situations, there are likely many cases that offer evidence to the contrary.

In Zinacantán, for example, there are many aspects of politics that are not explicitly public. The activities of political authorities, including assessments of actions
and decisions, are often the topic of (private) discussion when families gather for meals, and when women are preparing food or working on their textiles. These conversations are continued with friends and acquaintances and eventually the information makes its way to the political officials, who must take the community’s views into consideration when making decisions. Politics are not necessarily entirely goal-oriented either, but instead often exhibit aspects which are highly ritualized (Kelly and Kaplan 1990; Kertzer 1988; Moore and Myerhoff 1977). As for differentials of power, this of course would depend on how one defines politics. If it is assumed that politics are always public and goal-oriented, than it seems likely that issues of (varying) power will play a role; but if the scope of politics is widened, issues of power differentials are not so straightforward. They would likely vary by context and would depend on the individuals involved.

As Vincent (1990) observes, the typological approach to the ethnographic present gave way in the 1970s to increasingly empirical, and hence theoretically diverse, studies of ethnic and political resurgence associated with decolonization and globalization. Political anthropology’s “‘systematically structured knowledge’ came under assault, and an alternative anthropology of politics emerged, cultivating knowledge of a qualitatively different kind: diffusionist, humanist, historical, nondisciplinary, and above all, cosmopolitan” (Vincent 1990:4). It is this new political anthropology that informs my research.
Views of Politics in Zinacantán

Archaeological accounts of the (pre)history of the highlands of Chiapas tend to portray political organization in terms of levels of integration, that is, in degrees of isolation from major cultural centers. Many have asserted the marginal and backward character of the highlands of Chiapas (Adams 1961; Calnek 1988; Culbert 1965). Adams (1961:348) in fact states that “the central Chiapas plateau remained an isolated and backward region not directly influenced by any of the major Mesoamerican centers” and that there was no “significant penetration of the region by groups involved in inter-regional trading relationships.” Although evidence of militarization has been found, it is not clear if militarization was a result of mutual hostility between communities or external pressures (Adams 1961:348). Adams (1961:347) suggests “independent communities rather than regionally organized groups of communities were the dominant form of socio-political organization for the area and period.”

For studies of Mesoamerica, (pre)history is often characterized by the notion of “horizons,” which presupposes “regional cultural sequences as somewhat isolated territorial developments episodically punctuated by stimulating periods of pan-Mesoamerican influence” (Demarest 2004:18). Demarest (2004:18) instead argues “it is more probable that communication was continuous, intense, and unbroken between most regions of Mesoamerica from the beginning of the Preclassic era to the Conquest”. Of particular interest is Demarest’s metaphor of a “lattice of mutual communication and influence” which he employs in a critique of world systems theory:
Borrowed from modern political science, world systems theory has a tendency to shape views of ancient world regions into “core areas” and “peripheries.” While there were continuously interacting and coevolving cultures in Mesoamerica, there is no reason to assume a priori that economics was the principal force for interaction and integration, nor that “core areas” stimulated cultural advances elsewhere. Instead, here the Maya world is viewed as having been nested within a continuous lattice of mutual communication and influence between the various regional civilizations of Mesoamerica (2004:20).

Some studies (for example, Willey 1964; 1984) do suggest that “outside” influences were apparent throughout all phases prior to conquest. The focus, however, has been primarily on the Postclassic period, in which there is clear evidence for central Mexican influence, rather than earlier periods when such influence is less readily apparent.

Gasco (2005:80) observes that “(w)ithin the bounds of the state of Chiapas, the last decades of the Late Postclassic period were marked by complex economic relationships, shifting political alliances, episodes of warfare, and incursions by external hegemonic forces. Calnek (1988) similarly notes central Mexican influences in highlands Chiapas. The complexities of interethnic relations in Calnek’s analysis coincide with Demarest’s metaphoric “lattice.” For example, Nahuatl was spoken by high ranking principales and in some cases by entire communities and it continued to function as a lingua franca into the eighteenth century.

Calnek (1988) proposes that Votan, the leader of the conquering elite who descended from the Chan lineage of Cozumel, became a prominent figure in Chiapas. Although there is evidence of common ancestry with Mexican speaking groups, it appears that Votan and his followers did not speak a Mexican dialect. Votan established
control of “nearly all of highland Chiapas, a part of highland Guatemala, and some sector of the Soconusco” (Calnek 1988:10). After establishing control of this region, Votan returned to Valum Chivim (Cozumel) and possibly visited religious centers in Central Mexico (Calnek 1988:10). During this time (Postclassic period) a Mexican speaking group, referred to locally as the Tzequil, entered the highlands and attempted to gain control of the region. Upon Votan’s return, a new alliance between the two was established (Calnek 1988:10). “Consequently, there is reason to believe that the total cultural pattern observed at the Spanish Conquest derived from a merging of Central Mexican and Mayan culture some 200 years earlier” (Calnek 1988:12).

Zinacantán may have held a particularly prestigious place in the political organization of the region, based on the following observations:

Tzeltal and Tzotzil communities were linked for a time, at least, to the regional federation or state organization by Votan and Tzequil. The unusual prestige of Zinacantán, frequently named cabecera de los queleses (“head town of the Tzotziles”) (Ximénez 1929-1931:360) even though it did not politically control Chamula, may have reflected its prior role in a state of this type (Calnek 1988:12).

Whereas subsistence agriculture and limited craft specialization were characteristic of most highland communities, Zinacantecos were predominantly merchants. Calnek (1988:23) notes the existence of a “complex web of production and trade which linked virtually the whole of Mesoamerica at the time of the Conquest,” in which Zinacantán “functioned as regional intermediary.” “Commerce in this region seems to have taken two forms: (1) local exchange of salt, cotton, and whatever additional specialized
products (*petates*, pottery) existed, and (2) a very complex cycle of internal and external trade based on luxury goods” (Calnek 1988:21).

The presence of luxury goods, among other evidence, reveals the existence of a highly stratified class system. “More than a simple ‘prerogative,’ use of luxury goods functions as a symbol of social status – not only *identified with*, but *identifying*, persons of high rank. The class of consumers, consequently, was coterminous with distribution of authority over the region as a whole” (Calnek 1988:23). Calnek (1988:34-35) also identifies extensive terminology in Tsotsil and Tseltal referring to social rank of both high and low status, indicating complex social stratification. Oral narratives from Zinacantán, now in published form (SnaJtz'ibajom 1984) provide further indication of social stratification, with specific references to caciques and other powerful men.

In summary, earlier views portrayed the political organization of the highlands of Chiapas as isolated, and thereby simple, because in evolutionary terms the highlands were “behind” the more advanced cultural centers. These views have even carried over into notions of the contemporary Maya. Adams (1961:341) observes the following regarding the limitations of archaeological research in the highlands:

Un-endowed with stelae or corbelled architecture and characterized by no distinctive art style, it remains today a marginal and backward region haunted by vestiges of the colonial past which elsewhere in Mexico have been swept away. ... Yet it can be argued that for some purposes the relative backwardness of Highland Chiapas is not a deterrent but an inducement to archaeological study. For example, kinds of political and social organization may have survived there to be recorded in the accounts of the early conquistadores which in more advanced regions like
Central Mexico had been superseded and destroyed already in prehispanic times by newer, more complex institutional forms.

More recent archaeological accounts of pre-conquest politics, such as those previously discussed, offer a more complex portrayal than that of an isolated, backward region and focus on social stratification and complex patterns of interconnectedness between ethnic groups.

Classic ethnographic accounts emphasize issues of ethnicity to a greater extent than archaeological accounts, often distinguishing between “Indian” and “Ladino” political organization. Vogt’s (1969) study of Zinacantán provides a brief sketch of the organization of indigenous political officials, their responsibilities and sources of authority, as well as decision-making processes and relations between civil and religious hierarchies. The political system is not the focus of Vogt’s study, but his portrayal is consistent with early structuralist approaches to political anthropology. There is little consideration of politics beyond the official realm of elected officials. However, there is some indication that the civil hierarchy was in a constant state of change, as opposed to the religious hierarchy, which, according to Vogt, remained “much the same year after year” (1969:272). The causes of political change were attributed primarily to “external,” that is, ladino, influences.

In a study of Zinacanteco law, Collier (1973) takes a much broader approach to politics through a focus on social action. Collier (1973:20) identifies three major legal levels, including informal processes at the hamlet level, the town hall at the level of the municipio and outside of Zinacantán in the courts of the Mexican government, but also
points out that there can be considerable variation at each of these levels depending on specific social interactions. The analysis thus focuses on three areas: fields of social relations, legal language and the relationship between language and social structure (Collier 1973:244). Though Collier’s study does not address the responsibilities of political officials beyond conflict resolution, which at the time were their primary responsibilities, it nonetheless is wider in scope and reflective of the shift in political anthropology away from structural approaches that focus on political typologies.

**Political Ideologies**

Critical to any discussion of politics in Mexico is an understanding of the wide range of ideologies that influence political action. It is also important to consider the current, as well as the historical, relationship between the Mexican state and indigenous communities.

The ideologies and tactics of the Mexican government have evolved, from their denial of the indigenous peoples by the Científicos under President Porfirio Díaz in 1878; to the assimilation of the Indians by the integrating Mexican Revolution in 1910; to their incorporation into the Constitutionalist state in 1917; and their contemporary definition as but one component in “pluralism rooted in inequality” (Tresierra 1995:191).

The following overview is not meant to be exhaustive, or representative of all political ideologies currently present in Mexico or in Zinacantán. It is meant merely to provide a starting point for further analysis.
Hierarchical Complementarity

The other ideologies to be subsequently discusses are of a modern tradition – tradition here referring to a pattern of thinking. However, in Zinacantán there remains a commitment to an ideology (or perhaps ideologies) that precedes modernity. Taylor (2007:163) identifies this as hierarchical complementarity, a “pre-modern moral order” that “is organized around a notion of hierarchy in society which expresses and corresponds to a hierarchy of the cosmos.” Dumont (1970:20) notes the “modern denial of hierarchy” and argues that

   to adopt a value is to introduce hierarchy, and a certain consensus of values, a certain hierarchy of ideas, things and people, is indispensable to social life. This is quite independent of natural inequalities or the distribution of power. No doubt, in the majority of cases, hierarchy will be identified in some way with power, but there is no necessity for this...

The ideal of equality “represents a deliberate denial of a universal phenomenon in a restricted domain. ...[I]t is well to understand to what extent it runs contrary to the general tendencies of societies, and hence how far our society is exceptional” (Dumont 1970:20)

Collier (1973:36) observes the following of Zinacanteco cosmology and hierarchy:

   In Mexican eyes, the Indian officials in the civil hierarchy derive their legitimacy from the fact that they are duly elected and installed according to the laws of the state. Whereas this Mexican recognition gives the civil officials authority in
Indian eyes, other lines of legitimacy have been slowly developing as the civil officials have assumed ritual duties. In Indian belief, the present civil government is an imperfect earthly replica of the supernatural government made up of Ancestral Gods. This connection has been emphasized by a recent Presidente, who instituted flower-changing ceremonies for his staff of office, thus converting a civil symbol into a sign of recognition from the gods.

The flower-changing ceremonies to which Collier refers are an integral part of religious rituals. This particular ritual, adopted by civil officials, continues to be performed and takes place every two weeks at the president’s house. The wives of the civil officials cook a large meal for the occasion and the event has become fundamental to carrying out a successful term in office.

Collier (1973: 264) notes some additional ways in which the political structure is modernized (and traditionalized):

Zinacanteco ideas of cosmic order survive in the modern world because the present structure of the regional political system encourages ambitious Indians to convert wealth and expertise in handling Mexican officials into collecting Indian followers. And, having made such an investment, Indian leaders are committed to upholding the conceptual framework that legitimizes their authority.

In light of the ethnographic data on which the present study draws, it appears that it is not only “ambitious Indians” (inevitably male) who perpetuate a notion of hierarchy that corresponds to the cosmic order. Women also legitimize this ideology, both discursively and through their own interactions within hierarchical structures. Not only do women reveal a keen awareness of the workings of the hierarchy, a complex set of
cargos and positions of respect within the community, but also aptly engage in negotiations at various levels of the hierarchy (e.g., land disputes, divorce, requests for support). Somewhat paradoxically, it is notions of liberalism (education, private property, individual will) that often inform women’s negotiations within existing hierarchies.

**Liberalism**

Gray (1995:xii) identifies several variants of liberalism, but there are certain aspects which are common to all:

It is *individualist*, in that it asserts the moral primacy of the person against the claims of any social collectivity; *egalitarian*, inasmuch as it confers on all men the same moral status and denies the relevance to legal or political order of differences in moral worth among human beings; *universalist*, affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms; and *meliorist* in its affirmation of the corrigibility and improvability of all social institutions and political arrangements.

Within Mexico, egalitarian goals of liberalism did not recognize cultural difference, but instead were universalist, so that the indigenous communities were viewed as an obstacle that required incorporation (i.e., assimilation) into the nation state.

Although the “spirit and ideology [of liberalism] were already evident in several of the leaders of the War of Independence,” it was not until “after the achievement of independence in 1821 [that] the first formally liberal generation appeared” (Krauze 1997:13). “The liberal reform begun in the 1850s and consolidated in the 1860s was the
first great modernization project of the new nation” (Meyer 2007:273). Mexican Liberals “borrowed, in true Mexican style, from the fetishes and phobias of European and North American liberalism: the will to riches, freedom, order, democracy and science, and an end to tradition” (González y González 2006:239)

The first generations of Liberals viewed Mexico’s indigenous past as repugnant. José María Luis Mora, the father of Mexican liberalism, ridiculed “the myths of grandeur, prosperity and enlightenment surrounding the ancient Mexicans” (Krauze 1997:29). For liberalism to succeed, “Indians had to cease being Indians and accede to the status of ‘citizens’” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992:274). The existence of “an Indian world, with its own internal hierarchy of values and its own political and social orientation...could not be sustained in a modern nation-state because it meant having a nation within a nation” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992:275). A liberal state is based on the “idea of a democratic state [which] supposes a single people who are all to be equal before the law” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992:275).

The achievement of independence had little positive impact on indigenous communities, and instead led to the eventual dismantling of communal landholdings, in an effort to incorporate indigenous peoples into the nation-state. “Independence, which brought, in relative terms, an end to the European colonial presence, and which should have vindicated the indigenous peoples as the main victims, fostered instead the systematic elimination of their material base – land” (Tresierra 1995:193). During the porfiriato, the 35 year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, efforts to “combine privatization and industrialization...expanded the abilities of outside companies to demarcate and acquire
indigenous lands” (Dietz 2004:35). As a result, “by the end of the century most indigenous communities had lost the largest and most productive parts of their formerly collectively-owned lands and remained highly indebted to external agencies and/or companies” (Dietz 2004:35).

The role of individualism in Mexico’s liberal project created a number of conflicts. The idea of “an imagined and idealized society of individuals...implied the destruction, or at least the weakening, of the old corporate bodies – pueblos, churches, armies” (Guerra 2007:134). Although Mexican liberals sought to attain a nation of free and equal citizens, instead

the country was almost entirely in the hands of a class of white hacendados and of national and foreign investors. “The Mexican citizenry” was a ragged mass of peons, peasants, and workers, many of whom were practically slaves. Democracy was never effectively implanted. The country belonged politically, economically, and culturally to the few (Lomnitz-Adler 1992:277).

These factors led to the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent decline of liberalism as state policy. “The year 1810 marks the beginning of the liberal revolution, and 1910 began the end of the search for liberal models that followed each other throughout the nineteenth century” (Guerra 2007:129). Meyer (2007:272) does note, however, the “second coming of liberalism” (i.e., neoliberalism), which began in the 1980s “when the regime that had come out of the Mexican Revolution faced political decay and structural economic crisis.” Young technocrats within the ruling party “seized power from the inside and proposed a radical transformation of economy and society based on
principles they labeled as ‘social liberalism,’” the model for which “again came from North America, as did key international support” (Meyer 2007:272).

Of classic liberalism, Hale (2002:495) observes that “state interventions ostensibly are intended to ‘free’ the individual; in effect, they produce forms of consciousness that lead citizen-subjects to govern themselves in the name of freedoms won and responsibilities acquired.” Despite the negative impacts that liberal policies have had on indigenous communities, this consciousness remains prevalent and shapes indigenous peoples’ values and expectations. In Zinacantán this ideology is manifested in the widespread value placed on education, private land ownership and the expression of individual will.

**Neoliberalism**

Perhaps one of the most active and, depending on one’s point of view, either benevolent or insidious, political ideologies at work in contemporary Mexico is that of neoliberalism. Although there are many differences between liberalism, in its various manifestations, and neoliberalism, one consistency is the emphasis on the individual. Within neoliberalism, however, the focus has shifted somewhat from individual rights to the individual’s role in the market. “Under neoliberal inspiration, citizenship has begun to be understood and promoted as mere individual integration into the market...as a consumer and as a producer” (Dagnino 2003:4, 8). Hale (2002:486) gives the following definition of neoliberalism:
In the shorthand of oppositional political rhetoric and much academic analysis, neoliberalism stands for the cluster of policies driven by the logic of transnational capitalism: unfettered world markets for goods and capital; pared down state responsibilities for social welfare of its citizens; opposition to conflictive and inefficient collective entitlements, epitomised by labour rights; resolution of social problems through the application of quasi-market principles revolving around the primacy of the individual, such as assessment based on individual merit, emphasis on individual responsibility and the exercise of individual choice.

In Mexico, the role of the individual was clearly emphasized by the amendment of Article 27 of the constitution and the passage of the 1992 Ley Agraria (Agrarian Law), which effectively “ended land reform and brought a guarantee of property rights to private landowners” (Kurtz 2002:206).

There has been much debate over not only what neoliberalism means, but also what its effects have been. The “Washington Consensus” is a term coined by John Williamson to refer to the fundamental aspects of neoliberalism, including: fiscal discipline, reordering of public expenditure priorities (to include health care, education and infrastructure), tax reform, liberalizing interest rates, competitive exchange rate, trade liberalization, liberalization of inward foreign direct investment, privatization, deregulation and property rights. The following definition offers a somewhat clearer understanding of neoliberalism:

Neoliberalism is grounded in a system of economic, social, and political ideals that are right-wing versions of the modern, post-Enlightenment themes of rationality, democracy, and individual freedom. ... As with earlier liberal positions in classical and neoclassical economics, neoliberalism sees markets as optimally efficient means of organizing economies. State intervention, especially
in social-democratic forms, disturbs the natural tendency for competition, specialization, and trade to generate economic growth. So neoliberal economic policies favor an outward-oriented, export economy, organized entirely through markets, along with privatization, trade liberalization, and limited state budget deficits (Hartwick and Peet 2003:188-9).

Although neoliberalism is arguably associated with post-Enlightenment ideals, neoliberal policies are by no means limited to the right-wing. As Gray (2005:13) aptly observes, neoliberalism and Marxism exhibit certain parallels.

Because they were on opposite sides of the cold war it is often assumed that neoliberalism and Marxism are fundamentally antagonistic systems of ideas. In fact they belong to the same style of thinking, and share many of the same disabling limitations. For Marxists and neoliberals alike it is technological advance that fuels economic development, and economic forces shape society. Politics and culture are secondary phenomena, sometimes capable of retarding human progress; but in the last analysis they cannot prevail against advancing technology and growing productivity.

Regarding the neoliberal approach to politics and culture, Klein (2007:22-3) similarly observes that fundamentalist doctrines of corporatism (i.e., the contemporary free market) “cannot coexist with other belief systems; their followers deplore diversity and demand an absolute free hand to implement their perfect system. The world as it is must be erased to make way for their purist invention.”

Neoliberalism is crucial in understanding Mexico’s position in the global political economy, especially in relation to the United States – thus the popular adage (pre-neoliberalism, but nonetheless relevant) commonly attributed to Porfirio Díaz: “¡Pobre México! ¡Tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos!” (Poor Mexico, so far from
God and so close to the United States!). The United States has played a central role in engineering Mexico’s neoliberal transformation and has gone to great lengths, including massive bail-outs, to ensure its success. “Since the early 1980s [Mexico] had a political elite obedient to the transnational financial organizations in which American free-market doctrines were institutionalized” and American business and political elites assumed that “economic modernization for Mexico . . . [meant] assimilation into American business culture” (Gray 1998:46).

Neoliberal reforms were initiated in Mexico shortly after its suspension of debt repayments in 1982 (Kelly 2001:84) and were intensified in 1989 with the massive deregulation of agriculture (Snyder 1999:173). Initially the Mexican economy suffered severely from these reforms, “but by the early 1990s moderate growth had returned and Mexico was viewed as a model for economic reform worthy of emulation by other nations” (Kelly 2001:84). However the social costs associated with the reforms soon became apparent and eventually poverty and popular disapproval of the government became so widespread that when Carlos Salinas took office in 1988 he was forced to implement targeted anti-poverty programs (Kelly 2001:97).

These programs were organized under the auspices of PRONASOL (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad / National Solidarity Program), which came to be used as a political tool, rather than a means for social development. “[PRONASOL] was clearly politically motivated in that it skillfully allocated disproportionate amounts of resources to recover areas of strong center-left electoral opposition” (Fox 1994:166). The program was used to bolster support for the PRI and “(a)necdotal evidence suggests that the
poorest of the poor in rural areas (who tend to have relatively little political power) are not the primary beneficiaries of PRONASOL projects” (Kelly 2001:91). Kurtz (2002:308) similarly argues that “for PRONASOL to have embodied a truly effective form of social and human capital formation, it would have had to be severed from the discretionary political control of the PRI. ... Unfortunately, the governing party was incapable of this degree of neutrality, and the program was frequently used in a clientelistic fashion.”

It is often argued that one of the drawbacks of neoliberal policies is the reduction in government spending, especially for social programs. As Kelly (2001) observes of Mexico, these cutbacks have profoundly impacted the rural poor. Critics of neoliberalism focus on the general failure of economic policies and point to widespread increases in poverty, which is especially true throughout Latin America. In a study of the agricultural sector in Mexico, Kelly (2001:97-8) argues that not only has poverty increased over both the short and long term, but “prospects for future gains in poverty alleviation in the agricultural sector are not promising.” Gray (1998:48-9) observes that neoliberal policies in Mexico “enhanced economic and social inequalities in what had long been one of the world’s most unequal societies,” widening the gap between rich and poor and shrinking the already tenuous Mexican middle-class.

**Patronage**

Patronage, also referred to as clientelism\(^7\), is a well established tradition in Mexico based on relationships of exchange and unequal distributions of power between the

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\(^7\) I prefer the term patronage, rather than clientelism, which carries the connotation of a passive recipient.
patron and client. Interethnic relations are often based on patterns of patronage, so that indigenous people solicit the patronage of prominent wealthy ladinos, often through ties of compadrazgo. Although these ties are integral to social relations throughout Mexico, of more relevance to this discussion is the role of patronage in politics. “Patron-client relations are a widespread phenomenon permeating the formal structure as well as the workings of the Mexican political system... [so that] clientelism appears as an inescapable practice that determines political actions” (Casar 1995:190). As a result, “a wide range of political systems, including many that hold regular elections, oblige the poor to sacrifice their political rights if they want access to distributive programs” (Fox 1994:152). Mexico is notorious for its corrupt elections based on widespread tactics of vote-buying, often based on patterns of political patronage. Neoliberal policies of targeted anti-poverty and development programs are also often based on relationships of patronage.

In its early elaborations, clientelism was conceptualized largely in functionalist terms. Before becoming a topic of focused study, “observations about clientelism . . . [could] of course be found throughout the ‘conventional’ literature on Latin American politics and society – in discussions of landlord-peasant relationships, of caudillos, personalism, and in analyses of ‘corruption’ in bureaucracies, business firms, and political organizations” (Kaufman 1974:285). As the concept became more fully developed, a body of literature emerged that conceptualized clientelism as “distinctive

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8 Compadrazgo is a complex practice that creates vast social networks, but simply put is a ritual relationship established between parents and godparents.
from these earlier analyses...in its stress on the possible functional aspects of such relationships” (Kaufman 1974:285).

In a (structural-) functional analysis, based on dependency theory, Rothstein (1979:33) offers the following assessment of patron-client relations:

From the workers’ perspective, clientelism yields access to some of the benefits of industrialization. From the capitalists’ perspective, patronage is a way of parring down the number of beneficiaries of jobs and distributing token benefits while at the same time assuring political support and a disciplined labor force.

The purpose of Rothstein’s analysis is to “link the goals and resources of actors at the local level to the broader national and international structure of capitalism in Latin America” (Rothstein 1979:26).

Auyero (1999:327) argues, however, that “an ethnographic and relational approach to the clients’ views shows that the trope of political clientelism is often the product of what Bourdieu labels a scholastic point of view, an externalist and remote perspective.” Further, “this view from afar constructs complex relations and lived experiences as mere exchange of resources, thus losing sight of the specificity of the clients’ and brokers’ practices” (Auyero 1999:327). In reality, clients exhibit diverse understandings of their relationships with patrons and brokers, which are often conceptualized as collaboration rather than manipulation, and challenge the stereotype of a “‘captive’ clientelist electorate” (Auyero 1999:326). Without overlooking inequalities and abuses of power, it is important to recognize that clients are not only aware of their positions but also utilize relationships of patronage in ways that are
personally or communally beneficial, particularly to gain access to government development and assistance programs.

**Indigenismo**

Portrayals of indigenous communities by the Mexican state have often been contradictory. On the one hand, “(t)he positive ethnic image of indigenous peoples, that of ancient glory, has been articulated in the celebration of military, artistic, scientific, and (reconstructed) architectural achievements of the pre-Columbian empire” (Nagengast and Kearney 1990:63). On the other hand, “(t)he glorious image of the pre-Columbian past. . . contrasts with the second version of indigenous tradition. . . [which] evokes backwardness and or primitivity as a basic trait of indigenous peoples” (Nagengast and Kearney 1990:64). It is these conflicting ideologies that inform state policies, referred to in Mexico as indigenismo.

Indigenismo has a rather complex, and at times sordid, history that is closely linked with the processes of nation-building, but that continues to be salient today. As Field (1994:243) notes, “Indigenismo in the past has characterized anti-hegemonic intellectual currents in Mexico... But it may have played a more significant role in serving as a means for political and economic elites to appropriate indigenous cultures for nation-building ideologies that end up maintaining the subaltern status for indigenous peoples.” In fact, indigenismo originated with the Mexican Revolution and the need to develop an identity distinct from that of Europe. As a result, “indigenistas claim the
transcendence of a ‘Mexican soul’ that is distinct from the ‘European’ or ‘North American’ soul” (Lomnitz-Adler 1992:278).

On the racial front, the revolution provoked a reappraisal of the Indian and of the mestizo. The mestizo – not the creole – became the official protagonist of Mexican history, and Indian culture and the Indian past were revalorized in a movement which became known as indigenismo. ... Instead of seeing Indians as a nation encompassed by a Europe-oriented nation, indigenistas chose to see Mexico as the product of a clash between two independent and opposed nations, that of the Spaniards and that of the Indians. The new hero in the epic of Mexican nationality became the mestizo, who was physically both Indian and Spanish, and whose spiritual qualities avoided both the atavisms of Indian culture and the exploitative nature of the European (Adler-Lomnitz 1992:277).

The goal of nationalism was progress and unity, which required racial assimilation – turning Indians into Mexicans (i.e., mestizos) (Mattiace 2007:197). The efforts were widespread and, according to Dietz (2004:41), “all development projects implemented since the thirties in the indigenous regions of Mexico were part of [indigenismo].”

Anthropology has played a significant role in the development of indigenista policies. As Lomnitz (2005:169) observes:

The institutional infrastructure of Mexican anthropology was firmly linked to the diverse practices of indigenismo, including bilingual education, rural and indigenous development programs throughout the country (concentrated in the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, INI), and a vast research and conservation apparatus that was housed mainly in the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). Mexican anthropology...was charged with the task of forging Mexican citizenship both by “indigenizing” modernity and by modernizing the Indians, thus uniting all Mexicans in one mestizo community. In Mexico this is what was called indigenismo.
“Of all Latin American countries in the twentieth century, the Mexican state created the most robust set of indigenist institutions,” such as the CNC (National Peasant Confederation), which focused on Indian assimilation and the INI (National Indigenist Institute) which “was created to deal with Indians who were not likely to assimilate” (Mattiace 2007:198). The INI “played a crucial role in mediating the tensions between the idea of Mexico’s noble indigenous past and attempts to assimilate present-day indigenous peoples into national (that is, mestizo) life while at the same time preserving those indigenous characteristics that were ‘culturally and socially valuable’” (Mattiace 2007:199). Mattiace (2007:200) further argues that “the state took over ‘ethnic administration’ after the revolution, [thereby] supplanting the figure of patron-landowner with its own version of paternalist ‘protection.’”

Similarly, Tresierra (1995:190) notes that “*indigenismo* is manifested through guardianship. It is welfare-oriented and even paternalistic toward the indigenous peoples.” While this does provide limited education, health care, support for cultural development and the defense of indigenous rights, “other dimensions of *indigenismo* are also articulated in formal processes: education becomes a tool for cultural assimilation; health care is provided only up to the point that it yields a political dividend to the government; the defense of culture becomes folkloric” (Tresierra 1995:190). Although indigenous organizing in protest of indigenista policies has recently increased, the Mexican state continues with many of the same approaches, now incorporating them into neoliberal programs.
Neoliberal Multiculturalism

During the late 1980s, “assimilation – the dominant orientation of indigenist policy making for decades – gave way to multiculturalism” (Mattiace 2007:202). For the first time, indigenous peoples’ rights were constitutionally recognized, but “institutional changes regarding Indian rights have been largely symbolic” (Mattiace 2007:202). Nonetheless, multiculturalism is increasingly being adopted by the Mexican state as a facet of its continuing neoliberal program, not only through the rhetoric of pluralism and the recognition of indigenous rights, but also through development and assistance programs. Hale (2002:487) argues that within neoliberal multiculturalism, “proponents of the neoliberal doctrine pro-actively endorse a substantive, if limited, version of indigenous cultural rights, as a means to resolve their own problems and advance their own political agenda.”

That multiculturalism has become a neoliberal strategy is not surprising. Dagnino (2003) notes a similar process with regards to notions of citizenship:

The participation of civil society as a mechanism for the extension of citizenship has spread all over Latin America in the past decade. In recent years, however, it has been appropriated and stimulated by the state as part of a strategy for the implementation of neoliberal structural adjustment. Thus, such participation is taking place in the context of a perverse confluence between, on the one hand, the participatory project constructed around the extension of citizenship and deepening democracy and, on the other hand, the project of a minimal state, which requires the shrinking of its social responsibilities and the gradual abandonment of its role as guarantor of rights.
Similarly, Speed (2005:33) recognizes multiculturalism as part of the larger neoliberal project, “which encompasses both economic restructuring and new governance practices, including the devolution of state responsibility for mediating social conflict to civil society.”

Certain indigenous communities, such as Zinacantán, are the recipients of considerable governmental assistance – agricultural subsidies, sustainable development programs, health clinics, building materials for homes and public works, supplemental income for the elderly and women with children, to name just a few. At first glance, it seems somewhat paradoxical for the government to increase funding for such projects when neoliberal reforms are characterized by a reduction in social spending. However, as previously noted, the extreme measures taken in neoliberal reforms eventually required targeted anti-poverty programs, which were used as political tools. The increase in social spending in communities like Zinacantán may be attributed in part to this pattern, but there are likely other mediating factors related specifically to the multiculturalist aspect of neoliberalism. These include the integration of indigenous communities into the free market economy and the limiting of collective organizing.

In reference to the indigenista policies of the Mexican state through the 1980s, Tresierra (1995:201) observes:

An effort is made to assimilate the Indians not because they are considered culturally inferior, but because their labor power and their control over natural resources (such as land, forests, subsoil minerals) need to be harnessed to serve the economic project of the state. Cultural considerations, whether recognition or attack, fit within the state ideology as a strategy to justify its policy. Ultimately indigenismo is an ideology intended to support the state’s economic
strategy with respect to the indigenous peoples and the natural and economic resources.

The same could be argued of multiculturalism, which has recently replaced indigenismo. The aim is no longer overt assimilation, but rather the recognition of cultural diversity, ostensibly to promote a pluralist society but more likely for further integration into the free market economy. As Speed (2005:34) observes, “(multiculturalism thus cedes rights to indigenous people, but with the effect of remaking them as subjects less likely to challenge neoliberal economic and political policies frontally.” Further, neoliberal multiculturalism has brought about a shift in the relationship between the state and indigenous communities. Of the Cucapá in northern Mexico, Muehlmann (2008:35) observes that “the very characteristics that, in the past, formed the basis of the Cucapá’s subordination – ‘backward’ customs, a lack of fluency in Spanish, and isolation from modern conveniences – have now become the very characteristics that the state requires to recognize their rights.”

Neoliberal multiculturalism also challenges indigenous peoples’ attempts to organize collectively and within the wider society. “Concessions to multiculturalism...bring about (rather predictably) the fragmentation of society into multiple identity groups with few perceived common interests, and a decline of cross-cultural class solidarity and struggle, which had a greater transformative potential” (Hale 2002:494). In Chiapas, the influence of the Zapatistas has likely impacted patterns of government spending. Non-Zapatista communities such as Zinacantán may be receiving additional governmental assistance in an attempt to discourage further support of the
Zapatista movement and foster divisions rather than collaboration. This, however, is not how Zinacantecos view the support they receive. Rather, they tend to be ambivalent toward government programs, but nonetheless expect the government to provide “apoyo” (support). This expectation is reflective of the long-standing custom of patronage characteristic of Mexican social relations.

**Conclusion**

Ethnographic studies of politics are never straightforward, in part because politics are never straightforward, but also because anthropologists continue to struggle with adequate means for describing politics. Attempts to theorize politics in terms of history rather than typology have opened political anthropology to more interesting questions, but have also created new challenges. Without the arbitrary limits of locale and circumscribed traditions there is the risk of obscuring analytical focus. Nevertheless, I hope to broaden the scope of anthropological inquiry into the political, considering the politics of historically specific events and ideological pluralism.
Interlude – Maria Cristina

In the following passage Maria Cristina addresses issues of patronage. Due to the hardships her family faced, her mother was unable to find padrinos (godparents) for her children’s baptisms and so had to rely on family members to serve in this role.

When I was born, I don’t remember (laughing)! They say that when I was six months old, my mom told me, that I was very sick. Yes, when I was six months old, my mom was sick and my dad gave me milk to drink, that...not that kind, there are various types of milk. Since my dad drank a lot, he could not pay for the milk and changed it so I don’t know what kind of milk he gave me. I was going to die then. Yes, that’s what my aunt was telling me. My mom was going to die and me also. And they cured me when I was one year old. My mom, she took me to the clinic here, she says. And she looked for a curandero for me. I was cured like that. That’s just what my mom told me that, that “You were not going to live because you wanted to die,” she told me.

And did they cure your mom also?

With a curandero. Yes, with a curandero, since her brother is a curandero. Since my dad drank a lot, he didn’t take care of my mom well. Only my grandmother and my aunt. Yes, and so, so, I grew up...

What illness did you have?

Well, it gave me diarrhea. I don’t know how bad. It gave me a bad stomach, with the milk they gave me. Since that year my mom didn’t give me milk. With that, I got sick with
the milk that my dad gave me. I grew up, little by little. When I was one year old my dad wasn’t there. He divorced my mom. Since my dad drank a lot, they got divorced. He left but, who knows where. Nooo, I had a little brother that, he doesn’t know who his dad is. I was a year old when my dad left. When my little brother was born then, he wasn’t there. He left, and came back. My aunt told me, “Come to my house because your dad is going to come,” she said. “And who is that?” I told her since I didn’t know him. “Your dad,” she told me, and I went and he didn’t come. He didn’t come there (laughing). My mom scolded us when we went to my aunt’s house, because she doesn’t want us to talk to my dad. He drank a lot, she says. Yes, “He drank a lot. I don’t want you to go to talk to him,” she says. “He hit a lot,” she says. Yes, so…I grew up, and I was born on my dad’s side. We grew up there in my grandmother’s house. We didn’t have birth certificates since he took it all. I didn’t have a birth certificate. My mom got new ones in the presidencia, since he took everything. I don’t know if my brothers have them or not. And...before, since my mom didn’t have money, I didn’t wear sandals. I went barefoot. My younger brother also, when he was little, he didn’t have sandals. He walked barefoot since she didn’t have money. My mom just looked for money. She goes to wash laundry, make tortillas, yes, in order to sell in San Juan Chamula (quietly).

Where? In Zinacantán or in San Cristóbal?

My mom? She goes to make tortillas. She goes to sell in San Cristóbal, in Chamula. Yes, she goes to sell there. So, we grew up little by little...since there are five of us. And my mom doesn’t know how to support us. And my mom raised us like that, washing laundry, making tortillas... And when they baptized me I was five years old. Yes,
my brother was three, and, she didn’t look for a padrino, for other señores. She told my uncle. And he baptized us. In San Juan Chamula they baptized us. Because she says that here it takes more money. So there you don’t need more money. Yes. He baptized us there.
Chapter 4
Structures and Perspectives of Zinacanteco Politics

“Here there is no government. There is the president and the regidores, but no government.”
- Maria Cristina Hernandez Gonzalez

This research emphasizes the need to look beyond the official realm of politics, broadening anthropological inquiry and redefining what constitutes the political. However, in order to do so, it is also necessary to understand formal political structures as well. This chapter provides a brief sketch of political institutions in Zinacantán, but also addresses positions of power and influence outside of these institutions. The subsequent section addresses some of the ways in which Zinacantecos themselves conceptualize politics, offering, in a sense, a native theory of politics. Through a consideration of key terms in Tsotsil, local understandings of politics as conflict begin to emerge.

Structures of Political Authority in Zinacantán

The municipal government consists of elected officials referred to most commonly (in Spanish) as autoridades (which I have translated as officials or authorities, and use these terms interchangeably). These are political, or civil, officials and comprise a hierarchy separate from that of the religious officials, who are generally referred to as autoridades tradicionales. The civil officials include the following:
Presidente Municipal – Municipal President
Síndico Propietario – Proprietary Síndico
Síndico Suplente – Alternate Síndico
Primer Regidor Propietario – First Propietary Regidor
Segundo Regidor Propietario – Second Propietary Regidor
Tercer Regidor Propietario – Third Propietary Regidor
Cuarto Regidor Propietario – Fourth Propietary Regidor
Quinto Regidor Propietario – Fifth Propietary Regidor
Sexto Regidor Propietario – Sixth Propietary Regidor
Juez Propietario – Proprietary Judge
Juez Suplente – Alternate Judge
Primer Regidor Suplente – First Alternate Regidor
Segundo Regidor Suplente – Second Alternate Regidor
Tercer Regidor Suplente – Third Alternate Regidor
Tesorero Municipal – Municipal Treasurer
Comandantes (2) – Commandants (2)

Figure 10: Civil Officials

This list includes the seventeen positions generally considered by community members to be part of the civil hierarchy.\(^9\) Each of these positions is held for three years. Men may move up the hierarchy and in almost every case have held lower-ranking cargos, such as *agente* of their home community or as members of a range of committees at the community or municipal level, prior to holding these higher-ranking positions. In

\(^9\) Official government documents do not include the juez, juez suplente, tesorero or comandantes.
addition to these positions, there are also twelve *mayoles*, or *policías tradicionales* (traditional police), who assist the elected officials (as well as the religious officials). They serve shorter terms and rotate so that there are typically only six on duty at any given time. There are also two *agentes* or *representantes* (the position is the same but the names vary by community) elected for each of the forty-one communities in the municipio of Zinacantán. All of these men, as well as any others who are interested, attend the *junta* (meeting) held in the *presidencia*\(^{11}\) (the building that houses government offices) every other Sunday.

The responsibilities of each position vary considerably and have changed as the political structure has become more bureaucratic. Whereas the president was previously responsible for resolving local conflicts, this now is the official responsibility of the *jueces* (judges). The judges preside over the *juzgado* (court) and are assisted by two ladino secretaries (one female, one male). Court hearings are attended by the traditional police, who may be called upon to retrieve additional witnesses as necessary or to provide security in the event that conflicts escalate. Generally several of the regidores also attend court hearings alongside the judges. The regidores only occasionally become involved in the proceedings and seem to serve more as witnesses.

As the relationship between municipal, state and national governments has changed, so have the president’s responsibilities. The president is required to live in Zinacantán, even if he is from another community, but he spends most every day

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\(^{10}\) There are also, on average, 2-3 state police officers stationed in Zinacantán (more when political dignitaries visit). All of the officers are ladinos and most are from Tuxtla, but reside in Zinacantán while on duty.

\(^{11}\) The *presidencia* is also referred to as the *ayuntamiento* or in Tsotsil as *kavilto* (from Spanish *cabildo*).
traveling to San Cristóbal or Tuxtla Gutiérrez for official business. His primary responsibility is to manage ("gestionar") governmental resources, which have become quite significant in recent years. He is also required to attend religious celebrations and to preside over biweekly meetings. In addition, the president is still expected to serve a de facto role in conflict resolution and community members often seek him out at his home for private counsel.

Each of the regidores has a set of responsibilities specific to their position. The First Regidor is responsible for overseeing public works; the Second Regidor oversees transportation (the municipio owns a number of vehicles and is responsible for providing transportation not only for civil officials but also for religious officials); the Third Regidor oversees the Programa Oportunidades and women’s demands; the Fourth and Sixth Regidores are responsible for sports and athletics (basketball tournaments are quite popular); and the Fifth Regidor coordinates civil protection in the municipio.

Men claim that they do not choose to serve in these positions, but rather are chosen by their respective communities. The election process differs from that in cities, as the Second Regidor explained, and is in accordance with usos y costumbres. 12

They are elected according to usos y costumbres. That is, to be in accordance with usos y costumbres, it is not an election...no one self-elects, like in the cities. Because in the cities, well, they propose... “I am going to be the candidate for president. I want to do this and that.” In the cities it is different. Just one party can have two or three pre-candidates. They have their pre-campaign and everything. Then there will be one candidate elected. There, the parties

12 Usos y costumbres literally means “practices and customs” and refers to the traditional means for conducting politics in indigenous communities – of course, what constitutes “traditional” is constantly being redefined.
compete until there is one winner. But not here, in the municipio. It is usos y
costumbres [because]...when the time arrives, the day when they will be
elected, all of the communities convene in a general assembly – in plebiscite.
The forty-one communities of the municipio are there. All of the communities
are there and all of the residents come. Then, there they will decide which
community will occupy the presidency, which community will get the síndico,
the first regidor, the second regidor, the third…and so on until the suplentes.
But it is by community. After this, once they have decided which community will
have each of the carteras, you could say, then each community leaves the
general assembly in order to choose, to elect which person will have that cargo,
who will occupy that cargo. Then, after half an hour or an hour of selecting, all
the communities return. Then they submit the name of who their candidate will
be and they start forming the list of candidates (planilla). And from there they
begin to compete with the other party. There is no pre-campaign, there are no
pre-candidates. Rather there is only one and he is elected through the assembly.
It is not, “I want to do this! I want to do that!” No! It is through a role that the
community plays. That is usos y costumbres.

During elections, people vote for a party rather than individual candidates and the party
that wins then controls the municipal government. Men are chosen because of the
respect they have earned within their communities, as well as their performance in
previous cargos. One woman explained to me that “if it went well and the people like
how they passed through the smaller cargos, then they become juez, presidente,
síndico, whatever. But [only] if the people view them well. If he treated the people
poorly they won’t accept him.”

Quite often men do not want these positions. It is a burden and requires that
they leave their previous employment. Men can refuse to accept the responsibility, but

13 Cartera here refers to the political offices.
this rarely happens. Juan, the Second Regidor, explains why he accepted the cargo even though he did not want it:

I have not wanted this cargo. My community, by their confidence, they named me to fulfill this cargo. But I don’t like to be here. I don’t like it. Yes, I don’t like politics, but nonetheless, the people involved me in this. I have to comply also because if I don’t comply with the decision of my community well, I lose their respect and they won’t consider me for subsequent cargos. Therefore, I accept the cargo.

By mentioning that he would not be considered for future cargos, Juan hints at the possibility that, although men may claim to not want the burden of serving in a cargo, it is in fact desirable.

One afternoon I sat on the patio of the presidencia with Juan, a couple other regidores and several mayoles. One of the mayoles passed around mangos and we all chatted and joked as we ate. The conversation was lively and lighthearted, but eventually turned more serious as we began discussing work. Juan commented on his responsibilities as regidor in contrast to those he had as a teacher:

When you are with the kids the day passes very quickly. I look at my watch and it is already 11:30, then again and it is 2 in the afternoon and classes are over. Here it is very different. Here you get bored very easily. I don’t mean to make fun of my job but sometimes there is not much to do. And as a teacher you have free time. After two in the afternoon you are free. You have to prepare your lessons for the next day but you have time to rest. And on Saturdays and Sundays you don’t have to work. But here...here you are never free. Just when I am about to eat someone calls and I have to leave my food and attend to them. But this work is very important. It is important to serve our community because if we won’t do it, who will?
Although Juan laments the burden of his cargo, he also recognizes the importance it holds for the community. Cristobal, the Third Regidor Suplente, expressed similar sentiments, stating, “It is difficult to work in the campo and have a cargo. I prefer my work in the campo. . . . I am not accustomed to being here.” But Cristobal takes his cargo very seriously and was at the presidencia nearly every day, even though he was not required to be. His commitment was especially noteworthy considering the challenges he faced as the only non-Catholic official (Cristobal self-identifies as “Cristiano”). As such, he was still required to participate, along with the other civil officials, in various rituals carried out by the religious officials of the Catholic church.

Figure 11: Biweekly junta

The biweekly juntas, or political meetings, are ritualized in their own way and, although they are less explicitly religious, still exhibit important symbolic components.
Tambiah (1985) notes, as have many others, that the distinction between religious and secular is of little relevance. This is certainly true in Zinacantán where there is a constant blurring of sacred and secular. For example, in the sala (large conference room) where the juntas are held there is a large shrine along one side of the room. The shrine is set on an altar built into the wall for just this purpose, and is decorated with pine branches, pine needles, flowers, and candles set along the bottom (see Figure 14). Another example is the biweekly banquet held on Saturday afternoons at the president’s house. All civil officials attend and the ceremony is overseen by traditional healers and musicians. Civil officials must also select a traditional healer who guides their actions while in office.

In a discussion of ritual performance, Tambiah (1985:18) notes the importance of the ratio of words to action, noting that some rituals may emphasize words whereas others rely “more on the display of conspicuous visible material symbols”. The meetings in the presidencia rely largely on words, although there are also important visible symbols present. For example, the seating arrangement of the civil officials is always by rank, although some variation is allowed to accommodate additional attendees. The officials sit behind long wooden tables on a raised stage at the front of the sala; the men in attendance sit in chairs arranged neatly in rows on the floor. The president always sits approximately in the middle, with the síndico to his right and the president of the PRD directly to his left. The regidores sit on either side in ranked order and if one is absent those on the end move in to fill the spot. Similarly, if one arrives late those on the end move down to open a seat for him.
Before the meetings start, the officials and agents all gather outside of the presidencia. The officials often sit, in rank order, on long wooden benches along the front of the building. As the agents arrive, they approach the seated officials and either shake hands, if the individuals are of similar status, or engage in a touch and release form of greeting (the man of greater status lowers his head so the man of lesser status may touch the back of his hand to the other’s head).

The agents then congregate in groups around the front of the building, occasionally buying peanuts or other snacks from the vendors who circulate. Although the meetings are scheduled to begin at 9am, they typically start much later – anywhere from one to two hours later. The officials eventually walk inside and upstairs to the sala, which signals the start of the meeting.

Figure 12: Presidencia (agents congregate out front before the start of the junta)
The meetings always begin with a “roll call” of sorts, but individual’s names are not called. Rather, the names of the forty-one communities that make up the municipio of Zinacantán are called and the agent (or representative) for each community answers when his community is called. This tends to deemphasize the role of the individual and gives the impression that the community is symbolically present. First names are never used in addressing individuals within this context. The president is addressed simply as “presidente,” the secretary as “secretario” (or occasionally only as “secre” when addressed by other officials) and the agents are addressed by their title, such “Agente Bochojbo Bajo.” After the síndico has completed the roll call, the president begins the meeting.

Meetings are structured around turn-taking cycles of discourse and consensus building. The president, the síndico and the president of the PRD party tend to speak the most. Occasionally the first or second regidor also speaks but the others remain quiet throughout the meeting. The officials take turns by passing the microphone or by reaching for the microphone when they want to speak. When an issue has been raised that requires a decision, the men at the head table (the civil officials) make their statements and then remain quiet, while the men in the audience talk amongst themselves, typically quietly with those sitting closest to them. Eventually one man in the audience may address the officials, sometimes standing to do so. Other men in the audience may then take turns addressing the officials. Occasionally the officials will converse before responding, but typically either the municipal president or the
president of the PRD will respond directly to the agents’ comments and the cycle continues. After sufficient discussion, the president will call for a vote and audience members who agree will raise their hands to signify such. Votes may be taken three or four times throughout a meeting. The votes appear to be largely symbolic since they are not actually counted and always comprise at least a large majority, if not all, of the men raising their hands. It seems that the vote is taken only after a general consensus has been reached and the vote simply makes it “official” or confirms that everyone is in agreement.

Finally, at some point during the meeting, the mayoles on duty carry in cases of refrescos (soda – in this case very sweet, cheap soda in plastic bottles) which are then passed out to every person in attendance. There is a wide array of ritual contexts in Zinacantán in which it is customary to give offerings or gifts of this kind. Previously cane liquor (pox) was most commonly given but has come to be replaced by soda, especially Coca-Cola. (For more on ritual behavior in Zinacantán, see Vogt 1969; 1976).
Figure 13: Officials with ponchos, pañuelos and leather bags

For the meetings, civil officials wear embroidered ponchos and a long triangular pañuelo (scarf) with tassels in the front and back. They also carry handmade leather bags traditionally used for carrying bottles of cane liquor (but now are often used for notebooks, planners, etc.). When meetings coincide with religious celebrations, the officials add several key items to their usual dress, including woven hats with long, brightly colored ribbons and a black wool wrap worn folded over the left shoulder. According to the Second Regidor, this is the traditional clothing of Zinacanteco men; few wear it anymore but as officials they are required to do so. These additional items are not worn during the political proceedings, but instead are left on the large altar near the entrance of the room.
Those who are not considered part of the official hierarchy, for example the president of the PRD and the secretary, do not wear the same items, although may choose to wear an embroidered poncho, over a dress shirt and slacks. While the president of the party sits at the head table with the other officials and usually wears a poncho, the secretary does not. He always dresses in professional Western clothing – slacks, dress shirt, sweater. He also wears eyeglasses, which are uncommon. He does, however, participate in the meetings occasionally, reading official letters in Spanish, for example, but stands behind the men seated at the head table.

In a study of politics in Oxchuk, a highland Tseltal community, Siverts (1981) notes that even after efforts were made to instate more indigenous people in municipal government positions, the position of secretary remained occupied by a ladino. Siverts (1981) suggests that this was in order to allow ladino influence in local administration.
and because few indigenous were literate. Vogt similarly observed that during the 1960s in Zinacantán, a ladino served as secretary “with the rationalization that none of the Indians know how to read and write well enough to keep the official records” (1969:280). However, Vogt also noted that a number of Zinacantecos did in fact know how to read and write and one served as secretary for some years (Vogt 1969:280). When the present secretary described the structure of the civil officials to me, he included himself as third in the hierarchy, after the president and síndico, and emphasized that he can sign for the president in urgent cases. According to community members, however, the secretary is not part of the civil hierarchy. It appears then that although the role of the secretary has changed, and is now occupied by an indigenous man from the cabecera (who is bilingual and literate), the position still remains separate from the “traditional” hierarchy and this separation is indexed in part by wearing Western clothing.

A majority of the administrative positions, such as court secretaries or employees in the office of public works, are occupied by ladinos who live in San Cristóbal and commute to Zinacantán. Although these positions do not officially hold much power, they can be influential. For example, one of the recent municipal presidents was accused of using government funds (apparently substantial amounts) for personal use. It was rumored that the man who is in charge of the office of public works was involved in the scandal and also profited considerably.

It is not surprising and perhaps even expected, that there are positions of power in addition to those of the elected officials, which are referred to as caciques or líderes
(political bosses or leaders). Vogt (1969:285) notes that previously caciques drew on kinship connections (including ritual ties through compadrazgo) but increasingly came to rely on “their ability to speak Spanish and cope with the Ladino world and their relationship to the management of the ejido” to gain positions of power. Vogt (1969) discusses in detail the rise of one cacique in particular, Mol Marian, whose early success was due in large part to his ability to write and, through his position as head of the central ejido committee, remained in a powerful position for most of his life.

According to Elena, a woman in her mid-thirties, who is a member of the PRI and works at the museum, such men continue to play a prominent role in community affairs, although their influence has diminished to a certain extent. Previously these political bosses would decide who would be president and would tell the community how to vote. Now it has changed because, according to Elena, people are more educated. But these influential men continue to manipulate local politics, in some cases strategically switching party membership.

Yes, I think that there are still leaders (líderes). For example now, well, the PRIlistas lost because the PRDistas began a party. There are other leaders there also that, they did the same as before. “You are going to vote here.” By force you had to vote. ... [Some changed to] the PRD and they continue just the same (laughs). Although they changed parties the men are the same. They are the same ones that are planning things.

Elena further explained that the role of the leaders, or political bosses, depends in part on the president. If the president is weak, the leaders have more power and vice versa.

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14 Communally owned lands that have been expropriated from large private holdings.
The leaders, if they tell you no, then you won’t do it. And if they tell you yes, you will do it, what they say. Yes, that is how the three years of the presidency was passed. There was a president of the PRD that won, but the president didn’t know how to read or write, or speak. So there had to be a leader that governed him. So just, if he tells you, “You will sign [this].” “Oh, all right.” He signs and doesn’t know what it is. That is why the leaders remain. ... They have more power than the officials. Yes, they have more power. If it wasn’t like that, the president could just tell you yes or no, you sign something or all that. But it would be a little bit difficult because, six years ago, or something like that, there was a president from the PRI and he, well there was no leader because he was a good president. He knows how to read, knows how to write, knows how to manage everything. So for example, this stall, we asked for these awnings and he gave them to us. Yes, he supported us. And everyone who went to ask for something, one thing, he supported everything, and gave everything. It went well. Yes, the president governed well. But, it was some years later, he died. Maybe they killed him because the leaders didn’t like that, how he governed.

Whether or not this ex-president was actually murdered is of course uncertain. The rumors still indicate, however, that the community was well aware of the leaders’ disapproval of the president’s actions while in office. Distributing valuable resources throughout the community means that less goes to the leaders and, as Elena noted, “The leaders want their payments, their money, just so that they can eat! Ha!”

**Conceptualizing Politics: Views from Zinacantán**

“No, the Zapatistas don’t like politics. That’s what they said when they went to Mexico [City]. They only want... they want peace. They don’t want to fight,” Rosa told me. The distinction she makes between politics and peace is one commonly expressed in
Zinacantán, where politics are often associated with conflict. When I asked Rosa, “What do people here think about the Zapatistas?” she explained:

Well sometimes... they don’t understand. No, they don’t really understand. Some do, but some don’t understand what peace is. The Zapatistas want things to be calm. They don’t like politics. They want to work together but no... no, [here] they don’t like it. They join together but then it is abandoned. Now [it is] one part PRD, one part PRI. They are very divided. The Zapatistas don’t have political parties.

Rosa is expressing a common frustration with the current state of political affairs in Zinacantán, which is often viewed as rife with conflict. When discussing these issues, Zinacantecos portray the conflict as a recent occurrence, arguing that before the community was not divided as it is now. They relate the conflict to the development of local factions and the rise of the PRD. Considering the wide array of Tsotsil terms (see Figure 15 below) that connect politics and conflict, however, it seems that, although these specific conflicts are recent, such conceptualizations of politics are not.

In an article entitled, “Minimal Maxims: Cooperation and Natural Conversation in Zinacantan,” Haviland notes that “language not only reflects but also contributes to – indeed, constitutes – social organization” (1988:81). Haviland further notes, “not only do Zinacantecos interact largely through speech, but they also express many aspects of social life in terms of speech” (1988:81). For example, “Good times are characterized by lekil lo’il ‘good conversation’; good friends lek sk’opon sbaik ‘talk well to each other.’ A problem is successfully resolved ta lekil k’op ‘with good words.’” (1988:81).
Ideas relating to politics also seem to be expressed in terms of speech, but with an additional focus on conflict. The terms listed in Figure 15 were elicited through interviews and informal discussions. I would generally ask, “How do you say ‘la politica’ (politics) in Tsotsil?” and would then ask for further clarification on what the given term meant because there is no one term in Tsotsil that means politics. I received a number of different responses to this question, but the most common was sa’ k’op (to look for conflict). I would then follow up by asking if there were other terms in Tsotsil related to politics. The range of terms illustrated in Figure 15 gives an idea of the ways in which politics are conceptualized.

The term k’op, which appears in many of the phrases relating to politics, has a vast number of meanings that are determined by context. Stross (1989:215) notes that the phrase k’op is frequently used to refer to various “speech acts, events and situations”. In fact, Stross has identified 416 such phrases in Tseltal, which is closely related to Tsotsil, that incorporate the term k’op (1989:226-39). Stross further notes that “(a)lone or augmented, it can be applied to the largest number of speech situations and speech genres. It is at once very general and ambiguous alone and highly productive and specific in combinations” (1989:215). Bricker (1989) draws on Laughlin’s (1975) Tsotsil dictionary, as well as her own fieldwork in Zinacantán, to contrast k’op, or formal speech, with lo’il, or informal speech, and notes significant structural differences between the two, with k’op characterized by the use of couplets.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tsotsil term</th>
<th>Local definition(s)</th>
<th>Literal definition(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sa’ k’op</td>
<td>politics; to look for conflict; people are fighting</td>
<td>to pick a fight, stir up trouble, quarrel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sa’ – to look for k’op – word, language,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>affair, matter, situation, argument, dispute, war, curing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k’opetik</td>
<td>politics</td>
<td>Languages; problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meltsan k’op</td>
<td>bad people <em>(mala gente)</em> or that people are angry and so the juez has much work</td>
<td>meltsan – settle dispute, set one’s affairs in order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>k’op – word, language, affair, matter, situation, argument, dispute, war, curing ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jmeltsanej k’op</td>
<td>those who resolve problems, officials (judges, president); if judges can’t resolve problems people go to the president</td>
<td>Indian lawyer; native authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k’opetik skuenta jlumaltik/</td>
<td>politics; problems in the community</td>
<td>k’opetik – problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k’opetik ta jlumaltik</td>
<td></td>
<td>skuenta/ta – for j lumaltik – Zinacantán; our land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Note: lumal can also mean ritual speech]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jmeltsanej k’opetik</td>
<td>those who resolve problems</td>
<td>Native authorities who resolve problems in Zinacantán</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skuenta jlumaltik</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jtsonvanej</td>
<td>politics</td>
<td>“leader”; one who brings people together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>majbail</td>
<td>politics; conflict</td>
<td>maj – hit, strike, beat, flail bail – ritual discourse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 15: Tsotsil terms for politics**

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There are implicit references to speech in the local definitions given above, such as engaging in and resolving disputes, but references to conflict are more explicit, at least in the ways these terms are defined locally. It appears that politics are often conceptualized in terms of problems (and resolving these problems is the primary responsibility of the civil authorities). It should be noted, however, that not everyone in Zinacantán agrees with this view of politics. While discussing this with the director of the Casa de la Cultura, he said people often see politics as “puro pleito” (pure conflict) and used the Tsotsil phrase “totil jsa’ k’op,” which he translated into Spanish as “papá del pleito” (literally “father of conflict”). He was adamant, however, that there is much more to politics and reasoned that conflicts are a result of land disputes or not having enough food and money for people to adequately support themselves.

The conceptualization of politics as conflict is perhaps related to the previous political structure, which has changed considerably but likely still contributes to community members’ perceptions of local officials. In Collier’s (1976:136) extensive study of law in Zinacantán, she notes that the president usually acted as chief judge and was assisted by twelve civil officials who served in groups on alternate weeks. Now the court is presided over by two judges, officially referred to as “Jueces de Paz y Conciliación Indígena.” The traditional police are now under the authority of the two judges and the president does not hold any official role in the local court, although, as previously noted, he is still expected to participate in conflict resolution outside of the juzgado.
Collier (1973:91) also notes the relationship between language and ideology, stating that “ideology provides a language for justifying behavior, for explaining behavior, and for directing future behavior. She observes that the term k’op is frequently used in reference to disputes and “its specific meaning must be derived from context because it is used with various verbs to form idioms” (1973:94). For example,

-lahes k’op means ‘to end a dispute’ and -meltsan k’op means ‘to conduct a hearing.’ To -lahes k’op is to ‘beg pardon,’ and the term applies to both the ceremony for begging formal pardon and for the begging-pardon sequences that take place in a hearing. It is thus concerned with two-party negotiations. But –meltsan k’op is a three-sided affair. Literally ‘to settle a dispute,’ it refers to a hearing conducted by a hmeltsanej k’op, ‘a mediator’ (Collier 1973:94).

Collier (1973:99) further notes the unique ways in which conflicts are resolved, particularly that mediators do not have to be fair or impartial, but rather their job is to produce a compromise. Vogt (1969:290) similarly observes that decision-making in Zinacantán bears little resemblance to the kind of parliamentary procedure...to which we have become accustomed in the Western European-American political world. Rather, the process of decision-making is based on various rank orders according to age, sex, and position in the hierarchies of authority, and the procedure of endless talking and discussion among interested parties until a consensus is reached.

When I asked Petrona, who is approximately sixty years old and a member of the PRI, “What does the government do?” she replied:

What does it do? It is for the people, the drunks, they fight, they kill each other... Only men make complaints there! If a man wants to leave his wife, or if
a woman wants to leave her husband or look for another husband, we go there to make a complaint. That’s why there is a president. . . . Everything that the people say, or the people discuss, we make our complaints there. If a woman or man has many offenses, they put them in jail. They have to work, women have to work, there in the park when there are people there on Sundays or there is a fiesta, the woman has to work. And men also have to work, everyone has to work.

Whereas younger Zinacantecos, and civil officials, identify the president’s primary responsibilities as obtaining financial support and managing government resources, Petrona emphasizes his role in resolving conflicts. She also notes the role of speech in the process of making complaints – “everything that people say (dice), or the people discuss (platica)” is considered by the officials.

Although women are very aware of what goes on politically, politics are widely considered to be a male domain, which is also related to the idea of politics as conflict. Juana stated, “Men don’t solve problems very well. We, as women, we don’t want problems, but men just continue with conflicts and problems. There are always problems in politics.” Whenever I asked how women participate in politics, the answer inevitably was, “They vote.” In subsequent discussions, however, both men and women would often elaborate on additional ways that women participate in politics. For example, the Second Regidor observed that women participate by supporting their husbands. In the case of the presidente municipal, his wife occupies the cargo of presidenta of DIF municipal, Desarrollo Integral de la Familia. Yes and there a secretary and coordinator, or something like that, participate. Yes, but women participate there. And for most of the regidores,

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16 Integral Family Development, a nation-wide government assistance program
women only participate when we have a change of flowers in the house of the president because we have an altar there, in the house of the president. There they care for it, and for the *baston de manda* (governing staff), which the *autoridad municipal* always has. So we have it there in the house of the president. And he has his *nicho* (wall niche) also and that is when women participate in each changing of the flowers...cooking, making tortillas, food, coffee. Well, they participate there, the wives of the regidores, the president, the síndico, all of them.

Aside from voting and supporting their husbands, women’s official participation in politics is limited. This is not to say, however, that women are not knowledgeable about political affairs. Occasionally women become directly involved and will solicit the president with specific requests or encourage him to resolve certain conflicts. However, women are also involved in more subtle yet potentially more influential ways such as gossip and story-telling. Gossip, in fact, plays an integral role in local political processes because in Zinacantán, “what people are saying” matters (see Chapter 6).

**Conclusion**

Official politics in Zinacantán consist of a complex hierarchy of civil authorities. Each position carries a specific set of responsibilities, which have changed over time. Previously, the president was responsible for settling disputes, but now must oversee the fiscal aspects of the municipal government. Many Zinacantecos, however, continue to view the role of civil officials as primarily one of conflict resolution.

Politics in general are often associated with conflict, as reflected in the wide range of Tsotsil terms linking the two. The divide between the PRI and the PRD that
characterizes contemporary Zinacanteco politics is a recent occurrence, but notions of conflict seem to be fundamental to local conceptualizations of politics, indicating the mutual influence of tradition and modernity.
Interlude – Alejandra

Here Alejandra discusses family disputes that were eventually settled by the local officials. The dispute was essentially a custody battle (in Western terms) and the officials resolved the dispute by allowing Alejandra, who was five years old at the time, to decide with whom she wanted to live. The authority of the local officials was respected and Alejandra remained with her paternal grandmother.

Well, then, Kris, I am going to tell you from when I was four years old, four and a half. What I remember... now I am understanding that my parents, they didn’t have a good marriage. My mom as, the daughter of... rich parents will be different, no? They separated, got back together, separated, got back together. Then, the moment arrived in which, from these separations, reunions, separations, reunions...my sister is born. There were four of us – me, my brother, and my other sisters. My little brother was born, but he was stillborn. Then, maybe a year, a year and a half, they went on like that. Then I was born. Then, from there, they separate again, the same thing continues. My mom keeps returning to her [parents’] house. Then, my dad, the moment arrives in which he says, “No, I...reached my limit,” no? But unfortunately, my dad loves my mom very much. He loves her, but excessively. He got married [again]. His second wife was in Sok’on. Then my sister was born, Amelia, the third [child]. But what I remember is that [my mom] sent me to wash diapers...they sent me to wash clothes, clothes that, for example for a four and a half year old was difficult, no? Then, I swear, the moment arrived when I
didn’t even want to go home! Why? Because I couldn’t wash the diapers very well. They are those white diapers, Kris, made of cloth. You would put the detergent in and they’d stay blue! The stains would stay, they wouldn’t come out, and so it was. And there was another girl there that worked in my aunt’s, my uncle’s house, and she says, she comes with my mom, “Look, your daughter, she doesn’t get the detergent out.” And my mom would get mad. The only thing I remember about my mom is that she would hit me, she would scold me, and I, ay no, how terrible! I don’t think I was a saint (laughs)! So, that’s why... it happened when my little sister was born. My dad came to see, well, he came to see my mom and all that, having two wives but...he is happy, no? He came to see us, well I say us. He came to see my mom. Well then, one of those times, my dad takes me to my grandmother. But I think I was here, well, all morning [and] I think that, I like it or... I don’t know. Then around four, five, my dad came back. He takes me in his arms and carried me. He leaves me at the door [of my mom’s house] and says, “Go in.” My dad left me in the door. He says, “Go in.” But I swear, I didn’t go in. He went to visit his cousin, then came back and says, “What are you doing here? Go in.” “No, I don’t want to.” “Go in.” “No, she is going to hit me. She is going to scold me.” But he says to me, “No, just go in.” No, I swear, Kris. I didn’t move at all. Well, he didn’t leave me there, he took me back [to my grandmother’s] and I was happy. Then from then on, I didn’t want to return. He says to me, “Let’s take you to your mom.” “No, it’s just that no.” And I stayed. My mom recuperated from...from, giving birth. She regained her strength, and she goes to the presidencia. Someone was sent to call my family in order to return me. And then (laughs), they take me, no? And they say, “How old is she?” “Well she is already five.”
And then, “If we can, we are going to ask her, no? The girl can decide. She is already five and can decide.” Then they ask me, the autoridades ask me, “Which, with which one are you going to live?” and I was with my dad, but crying, really horribly. It was terror, [because of] my mom. And then, the autoridades understood, so “No, it doesn’t matter señora. No, we can’t force your daughter to return to you. She is going to stay with her father.” Then my mom got angry. I imagine also sad, no? So she had to accept it.
Part Two: Events
Chapter 5

Calderón’s Visit: The Politics of Indigenous Recognition

“The autoridades told us that El Calderón would come to visit the museum, but just like always, they say something will happen and it never does.”

- Juana Gomez Perez

The Mexican state’s recent shift toward (neoliberal) multiculturalism has been accompanied by widespread public relations campaigns that have brought increasing media attention to indigenous communities. High-ranking political officials visit indigenous pueblos, serving in the role of benevolent benefactor, inaugurating new public works or handing out basketballs or blankets amidst great fanfare. This chapter will address one such event in which President Felipe Calderón (who is a member of the PAN) came to visit Zinacantán. Interestingly, this event generated much anticipation and discussion in advance, but little was said about it after the fact. Nonetheless, the event is indicative of contemporary political ideologies such as patronage and neoliberal multiculturalism. Along with an increase in “official” recognition of indigenous communities, there has been a shift in “unofficial” perspectives as well. This trend can be attributed in part to the growing political awareness and activism in Chiapas and is manifested, in part, in patterns of dress and language use associated with an ideology of activism.
**Calderón’s Visit**

On April 7, 2008, President Felipe Calderón visited Zinacantán, after various cancellations and postponements. The local officials were initially expecting him in early February but his trip to Chiapas had apparently been delayed. He was then scheduled to visit on April 6, but postponed again because he went first to Chamula and thus did not have time to come to Zinacantán until the following day. The purpose of his visit was to inaugurate a new government-sponsored health clinic, which had been finished months before and sat empty, awaiting the arrival of the president.

![New health clinic prior to inauguration](image)

The clinic is located beside the museum and the day before the president was expected to arrive (the second time), the women were informed that the president would also visit the museum. We spent all day cleaning up in preparation for his visit,
since the museum was in poor condition. The museum sits on a lot about an acre in size, so much of our time was spent picking up trash and raking dead grass and leaves that had accumulated over the years, then burning it all at the back corner of the lot. Once we finished, the museum looked considerably better, aside from the large hole in the thatch roof, that is. Unfortunately, the next day we found out that President Calderón, or “El Calderón” as he is referred to locally, would not be coming until Monday. But no one seemed terribly concerned.

By early Monday morning, it was clear that his arrival was imminent. There were caravans of military police patrolling the streets of Zinacantán and people began to make their way toward the new clinic. The road to the clinic was blocked off and a security checkpoint was set up, much like those in U.S. airports – metal barricades to form properly functioning lines, tables for inspecting bags, receptacles to deposit bottled liquids, and three metal detectors. From there, spectators anxious to see the president walked a short distance down the dirt road to the clinic, where more security officers stood at the entrance.

Although I had cleared the security checkpoint with no issues, explaining who I was and why I had a camera, I was questioned extensively and verbally harassed by the security officers at the entrance to the clinic. I was told no one could enter with an unauthorized camera and that I would need permission from the federal government, while locals streamed by with cameras and cell phones in hand. I was told to leave and was escorted out. I asked the young man who escorted me if I could return without my camera and he said yes. So I went to my car, left my camera and went back. Again I
passed through the security checkpoint with no problems but was stopped by the same officers at the entrance. They asked why I came back and I explained that I had been told I could return without my camera. A lengthy discussion ensued while I stood waiting and locals continued to stream in, staring as they passed. Apparently unable to determine any sufficient reason for me to leave, I was allowed in. I did not see one other person stopped or questioned by those officers. I was, however, the only “gringa” (or “gringo,” for that matter) there, and I could not help but think that they did not want me ruining the photo op of the president amongst the indigenous.

When the president finally arrived, nearly two hours later than scheduled, he walked down the back road to the clinic, accompanied by Juan Sabines, the state governor (PRD), and an elderly man who was even lighter-skinned than Calderón and Sabines. Accompanying these three men were the municipal president and several other local civil officials. All, including Calderón, Sabines, and the elderly man with them, wore the traditional clothing of Zinacanteco autoridades: poncho, pañuelo and a straw hat with long ribbons down the back. Calderón shook hands with people along the road as he approached, then proceeded to join the religious officials of Zinacantán, who stood in the middle of the crowd, engaged in traditional song and dance. Calderón awkwardly attempted to join in the dancing then quickly shook all the men’s hands – interrupting their dancing – and abruptly left the circle of dancers. Calderón was given a tour of the clinic, which was narrated via microphone by the (ladina) director of the Centro de Salud (Health Center). Shortly thereafter, Calderón gave a brief speech, which was translated into Tsotsil by a man who accompanied Calderón. The speech began as follows:
Buenas tardes amigas y amigos de Zinacantán. Buenas tardes señoras y señores... Como ustedes saben, vengo de inaugurar esta clínica que hoy pongo en manos del pueblo de Zinacantán, de sus comunidades. Que esta clínica que va a poder atender a toda la gente y darle las primeras atenciones que necesita...

Good afternoon amigas (female friends) and amigos (male friends) of Zinacantán. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen... As you already know I come today to inaugurate this clinic that today I put in the hands of the people of Zinacantán and its communities. This clinic will be able to attend to all people and give them the best treatments that they need...

Calderón concluded his speech by noting that the goal of his government is “vivir mejor” (to live better). He mentioned that the government will provide support (apoyo) to plant trees in place of corn, give subsidies for corn, provide schools for all children and the opportunity to move forward. Calderón then reiterated the goal of “vivir mejor,” stating the following, “Vivir mejor. ‘Lek kux lejaltik,’ como me dice el presidente municipal, es el objetivo de mi gobierno.” Interestingly, the Tsotsil reference is entirely omitted from the transcript of the speech that is posted on the official presidential website (http://quetzalcoatl.presidencia.gob.mx).

Calderón wrapped up his speech, attempting to acknowledge the local officials but forgetting the Tsotsil term of reference:

President Calderón: Les agradezco mucho el estar aquí. Saludos a todas las señoras, especialmente a las mujeres, a los señores, y felicito además a los músicos, a los mayordomos, a las autoridades, como se llaman...?

17 Although the pronunciation was barely intelligible, the president was using a variant of the phrase in Tsotsil, ‘lekil kuxlejal,’ which has many meanings including, to live well, to live in peace, to live free of deprivation.
President Calderón: Tradicionales, pero como se llaman?
Translator: (unintelligible)
President Calderón: Moletikes? Moletikes y mayordomos? A los moletikes, los mayordomos, a los músicos, por esta música tan bella, a que yo no había oído...así, y que los felicito.

President Calderón: I thank you all for being here. Greetings to all of the señoras, especially the women, and the señores, and I also congratulate the musicians, the mayordomos, the officials, what are they called...
Translator: Traditional
President Calderón: Traditional, but what are they called?
Translator: (unintelligible)
President Calderón: Moletikes? Moletikes and mayordomos? To the moletikes and mayordomos, to the musicians, for this beautiful music, which I had not heard...as such, and I congratulate them.
After concluding his speech, Calderón started to depart, shaking hands with people in the crowd as he left. He then returned to the microphone to give a final announcement:

Por ahí alguien me comentaba que la costumbre era que el que ganaba, el que gobernaba, gobernaba para los de su partido. Entonces, aquí ha habido mucha confusión. Se piensa que al ser yo del PAN, nada más voy a gobernar para los del PAN. No es así. Yo, como esta clínica está para los de cualquier partido, tengan o no tengan partido, cualquier religión, no hay distingos en mi gobierno. No debe de haber distingos en ningún gobierno, ni en el federal ni en el estatal ni en el municipal.

Y yo sé que así vamos a gobernar el Alcalde, el Gobernador también está igual. El apoyo es parejo sin distinción de PAN, PRI, PRD. Y en mi caso, en mi gobierno también el apoyo es parejo. Cualquiera que sea, PAN, PRI, PRD o ninguno, y así

Someone commented to me that the one who wins, the one who governs, governs for those in his party. So, there has been much confusion here. People think that since I am PAN, I will only govern for those of the PAN. It is not so. I, like this clinic is for whatever party, those who have a party and those who don’t, whatever religion, there are no distinctions in my government. There should be no distinctions in any government, not at the federal level, not at the state level nor at the municipal level.

And I know that this is how we will govern, the mayor and the governor both are equal. Support is given equally without distinction between PAN, PRI, PRD. And in my case, support is given equally. For anyone that may be PAN, PRI, PRD or no party, that is how it will be in my government and I am sure that is how it will be here in Chiapas and here in Zinacantán. That is the clarification, friends. Thank you. Good afternoon.

Upon concluding this subtle admonition of local political practices, Calderón left the clinic, shaking hands with people in the crowd as he, and his entourage, walked back up the dirt road toward the center of town. Some of the spectators began to filter out, but many lingered, as if expecting something more to happen, though nothing did.
The Official Politics of Ethnicity

After Calderón’s visit, there was little discussion of the event itself, which surprised me. I would have thought a visit by the President would generate more talk. The women at the museum reflected on the fact that the local officials had said the president would come to see the museum, but he left without doing so. Juana observed, as indicated in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, that this was typical. The political officials often say that something will happen and it never does. But they had nothing else to say about what, from my perspective, seemed to be an important event. Based on Zinacantecos’ reactions, it seems that events such as this are of little consequence to their daily lives. The resources the community receives in conjunction with such visits seem to be of much more importance.
The expectation of receiving support (*apoyo*) is reflective of relationships of patronage, as is the selective recognition by political dignitaries. Indigenous communities are strategically recognized in ways that bolster the façade of multiculturalism. In this particular case, there is no doubt that Zinacantán was in serious need of a new health clinic. The previous clinic was severely limited in the services it could provide – it was understaffed and, by all appearances, underfunded. However, that the new clinic sat empty for months calls into question the motives for government sponsorship. It seemed, at least to me, that the inauguration was more important than providing health care services and Zinacantecos also expressed frustration that the clinic sat empty for so many months.

Consider also the photo of Calderón giving his speech in Zinacantán (Figure 17), in which there is a group of indigenous women standing in the background. A number of these women are not from Zinacantán, and so will not have access to the health clinic, but nonetheless were brought in from other communities to participate in the inauguration. I do not know for certain why these women were brought in and so could only speculate, but the photo does seem to indicate that their presence was strategic. The president is portrayed amongst a diverse, albeit somewhat ambiguous, group of indigenous peoples.

It is not unusual for the bestowal of government support to be accompanied by media coverage, particularly when a political dignitary is present. In a paper on Mexico’s reforestation programs, Mathews (2009) observes a similar event to the inauguration of the health clinic in Zinacantán. Mathews (2009) notes that President Calderón has
enthusiastically participated in tree planting campaigns and on Arbor Day alone traveled to four states to plant trees. On one of these occasions the president was photographed with (presumably) indigenous peoples and both he and they were wearing what appeared to be “traditional” clothing.

Figure 19: Calderón at a tree planting ritual held in a Mazahua community
The media coverage of this event (posted on the Reforestamos México web site: http://blog.reforestamosmexico.org/) gives no explanation of who the people in the photo are, other than to note that the president and various other political officials visited a Mazahua community. The article does, however, offer a detailed account of the indigenous ritual held in honor of the president and the tree planting campaign. The journalist who wrote the article observed that community performed a “ceremony based on three rituals” to welcome the government officials, including a ritual of initiation in which the Mazahua “Supreme Leader” (“Jefe Supremo”) made reference to the four cardinal points, a ritual of planting a tree in which it was entrusted to the sacred mountain and the dance of the deer to recuperate this animal’s habitat (Sordo 2008).

In both cases, including the president’s visit to Zinacantán and the tree planting campaign, who the indigenous people are is of little significance. For publicity purposes, it is sufficient that they are easily identifiable as indigenous. This manipulation of indigeneity further complicates the political ideologies at play. It is reflective of the Mexican state’s enactment of neoliberal multiculturalism, in which indigenous culture is ostensibly recognized but also, often subtly, further incorporated into the free market economy. It is also consistent with continuing systems of patronage in that the president is portrayed as a beneficent patron and indigenous communities are thereby rendered indebted to the Mexican state. Thus, the “official” recognition of indigenous

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18 For example, when Calderón visited Zinacantán, he commented on trees being planted instead of corn, which would arguably make people more dependent on corn imported from the United States as part of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).
communities is rarely, if ever, straightforward and is complicated by a range of ideologies, which are variously drawn upon.

**The Unofficial Politics of Ethnicity**

Sitting in my first meeting of the political officials in Zinacantán, I could not help but notice that one of the officials wore very nice, expensive looking Western clothing. This man, in his crisp maroon button up shirt, slacks and shiny black cowboy boots, seemed out of place. More San Cristóbal de las Casas, I thought, noting that his style of dress matched what I had seen in the nearby, larger and arguably more urban town. He did wear a traditional poncho but somehow still didn’t quite fit in. Even before they had taken their seats at the head table, I noticed the incongruity. As the men filed into the auditorium space, the political officials, in their long-sleeved white cotton shirts, ponchos, and tasseled scarves, took their seats, placing their leather bags on the table in front of them. But the man in Western clothing, with none of these accouterments, strolled toward his seat, pausing along the way to greet men he knew. Was he Zinacanteco? Indigenous? He spoke Tsotsil fluently and was well received by all the men he greeted, but he smiled a big smile, laughed easily and spoke just slightly, but noticeably, louder than the other men. He seemed like a politician. For the first few weeks I thought he was the municipal president, in part because he appeared to run the meetings, speaking more than any other official, but also because I heard him addressed as “Presidente.” Eventually I learned, however, that he was actually the president of the PRD party – not an elected official and not a member of the traditional hierarchy.
So, what was the significance of his wearing Western clothing, rather than that typical of local officials? I could not help but think of Alejandra, a young Zinacanteca woman who would not wear her glasses in the town limits in accordance with traditional modes of dress, but upon leaving town, to go shopping in San Cristóbal or travel to her job in a nearby community, changed into jeans and store-bought shirts. However, we see the opposite trend in San Cristóbal, where it is more and more common to see young ladinas wearing “traditional” indigenous clothing such as hand-embroidered blouses. These patterns are indicative of the shifting meanings of indigeneity.

The politics of indigeneity have changed considerably in Chiapas and throughout Mexico in recent years. As Vogt (1990[1970]:144-5) observed when returning to Chiapas in the late 1980s:

I discovered that for the first time large numbers of Highland Chiapas Indians are living in the principal market town of San Cristobal Las Casas (sic) as Indians. In previous decades Indians came to the city, but upon arrival, immediately began the process of “Ladinoization.” They learned Spanish as rapidly as possible, changed clothing so as to be dressed like working class Ladinos, and abandoned most of their Indian customs.

The causes of these changes are complex and likely include the influence of grassroots organizations and more recently the Zapatista movement, but also neoliberal multiculturalism on the part of the Mexican government. Upon returning to Chiapas, Vogt (1990[1970]:144) observed an “improvement in the morale of the Zinacantecos.”

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19 Alejandra is the only Zinacanteca I know who does so, although I imagine others who work as teachers, nurses, etc. likely do so as well.
which he attributed to the influence of INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista / National Indigenist Institute) and the programs begun during the 1950s “to aid oppressed Indian communities” (Vogt 1990[1970]:144).

In Chiapas, this shift has taken many forms and, despite continued racism and discrimination, there is an increasing tendency to idealize the indigenous (such as the example of the Israeli tourist I discussed in Chapter 1) – a pattern that is by no means new, but rather is taking on new meanings. These new meanings are evident in patterns of language use and, especially, language mixing. Just as the conscious choice of clothing illustrates a complex mix of modern and traditional identities, patterns of language use do not neatly coincide with labels such as “indigenous” and “ladino.” That is, in everyday interactions one rarely encounters the use of a “pure” language. Rather, patterns of language mixing are readily apparent and so terms such as “Spanish” and “Tsotsil” are relative.

Although bilingualism has always been present, the meanings attached to ladinos speaking an indigenous language are changing. Previously, ladinos who spoke some Tsotsil or Tseltal may have done so for economic or other more practical reasons, such as research or governmental work. For example, a taxi driver from San Cristóbal told me that he speaks Tsotsil because his parents are merchants. “Si quieren comunicar con los indígenas, tienen que hablar su idioma. / If they want to communicate with the indigenous, they have to speak their language.” He spoke respectfully of indigenous people and commented that he preferred life in a pueblo, where he had grown up, as opposed to life in San Cristóbal. This is likely not characteristic of all ladinos, nor is their
speaking Tsotsil always well received. While discussing a nineteenth century “dictionary” of Tsotsil written by a Catholic priest, one of my language instructors in Oventik commented on the incorrect conjugations. He said that it is quite common for ladinos to make such mistakes and sometimes native speakers will humorously mimic ladino speakers by using only second-person conjugations, thereby insulting ladinos’ attempts to speak Tsotsil.

More recently there has been a shift in the patterns of indigenous language use by ladinos. Evidence of this shift is particularly apparent among young political activists, a rapidly growing subset in San Cristóbal. Although indigenous youth participate to a certain extent, it is predominantly ladinos and internationals who are attracted by numerous NGOs and volunteer opportunities, as well as by a lively social scene characterized by its emphasis on activism and social awareness. The use of Tsotsil is one way of signaling one’s solidarity with “the movement.” The following examples illustrate:

While I was eating an afternoon meal at Casa del Pan, an organic vegetarian restaurant in San Cristóbal, two ladino men struck up a conversation with me. One is the editor of a local magazine. While we chatted, a young indigenous woman and her two small children came through selling flowers. One of the men said to her, “K’usi cha pas,” which in Tsotsil means “What are you doing?” She looked at him questioningly, but did not respond.

Next door to the casita my husband and I rented in San Cristóbal was a practice space for musicians. Because of the style of architecture in San Cristóbal, we could hear every sound from our neighbors’ houses and beyond. Live music is quite popular in local bars and so the rental of a practice space proved to be a decent business, at least judging by the number of people practicing. One
particular group, a rock band of sorts, practiced a single song over and over, which consisted of the Tsotsil lyrics, “K’usi abi, k’usi abi, k’usi k’usi k’usi abi,” / “What is your name, what is your name, what is what is what is your name.” Judging by the pronunciation and simplicity of the lyrics, the musicians were presumably ladinos who had picked up and incorporated this Tsotsil phrase.

One evening I sat at a bar called Perfidia, one of the various bars in San Cristóbal that cater to the activist social scene. While I chatted with the bartender, a young man came out from the kitchen, putting on his jacket to leave, and the following exchange ensued:

Bartender: Chabat xa? Are you leaving?
Man: Chibat xa. Chivay xa. I am leaving. I am going to sleep (placing his hands together and laying his head sideways on them, indicating sleeping).

Bartender: ?
Man: Okob. Tomorrow.
Bartender: Okob to. Until tomorrow.
Bartender: Hasta luego. Later.

Shortly thereafter I asked the bartender if he spoke Tsotsil and he replied, “A few phrases.” I asked if the other man spoke Tsotsil and he said “Yes, but his mother language is Tseltal.” When I asked the bartender, who was from Guadalajara, how he had learned Tsotsil, his answer was, “I just listen to how they say some words.”

One does not even need to frequent the bars and clubs, hostels or volunteer offices to see this blending of language. You could simply walk down the streets of San Cristóbal to see ample evidence of the alternative views characteristic of this emerging political
scene. Stencil and graffiti art abound in great variety, particularly linguistic varieties (see Figures 20–23). All of this suggests the employment of indigenous languages in creative and meaningful ways. No longer necessary merely for mercantile success, ladino employment of Tsotsil is multifaceted – indicative of complex, though still idealized, relationships to the language.

Figure 20: Anti-capitalists
Figure 21: The (female) soldier must look forward.

Figure 22: Resistance toward a new dawn
Figure 23: Writers Crew

Figure 23 is of particular interest regarding issues of language use. The mixing of Spanish and English is immediately apparent (Eskritores Crew), but the spelling of “Eskritores” indicates a more complex pattern. The use of “k,” which officially does not exist in Spanish orthography, has become increasingly widespread. It is used in place of “c” and also “qu.” Although it is unclear why this shift has occurred, one possible influence is the standardization of the Maya languages spoken in Chiapas (although the influence of English is another possibility for the increasing use of the letter “k”).

Tsotsil was standardized during a conference of indigenous linguists in 2000, though previously, in 1997, state agencies had called for a forum on the analysis of writing in Tsotsil (Antonio de la Torre López, personal communication). Tsotsil was formerly written using either the Spanish orthography or various orthographies used by
American researchers, including missionaries working with the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The two most notable changes in the standardization were the replacement of “c” and “qu” with “k,” and “z” with “s” (so that, for example, “Tzotzil” is now spelled “Tsotsil”). The following email provides an example of the ways in which the Tsotsil orthography is used for certain Spanish words:

Kris, hola nuevamente. Ya fui a ver a la familia kon quienes te estabas kedando, pude hablar con la mama de pascuala y te da las gracias por pensar en ellas. También me dijo ke la linea telefonica en zinacantan esta fallando, razon por la cual no te puedes comunicar con ellas. Este problema es pasajero y la señora (mama de pascuala) te pide ke estes comunicada con ellas.

Por otra parte, lucy perdio tu correo electronico, llego a mi casa a pedirme tu e-mail no se lo pude dar esa noche porke lo tengo guardado en mi correo. Espero ke no te moleste porke al rato se lo envio, se ve ke necesita comunicarse contigo.

Kris, muchos saludos a los dos y ke su vida este llena de exitos

(August 8, 2008)

This is an email from Alejandra, a young indigenous woman who is well educated and has been teaching for a number of years, including Tsotsil lessons in San Cristóbal and now English at an indigenous high school. Her choices of spelling (kon ~ con; kedando ~ quedando; ke ~ que; porke ~ porque) are clearly intentional, as she is well aware of standard conventions. The mixing of language (and orthographies) is not only
perpetuated through the ladino employment of Tsotsil but also through active synthesis by native speakers.

Although the politics of indigeneity are clearly changing, this certainly does not mean that interactions between indigenous peoples and “outsiders” – which of course is an arbitrary distinction – are a recent occurrence, only that the meanings attached to these interactions are shifting. When anthropologists, such as Evon Vogt and his students, began research in Zinacantán, they learned Tsotsil and wore indigenous clothing. This was for the purpose of research, but was similar to more recent trends in that it also was an attempt to better identify with the indigenous people with whom they worked. Vogt, who established close relationships with prominent ladinos as well, was quite aware of ethnic tensions and the careful negotiations that research in this context required (Vogt 1994). Now, however, the use of indigenous language and clothing by activists signals a particular political stance, which is, generally speaking, anti-capitalist, anti-globalization and in solidarity with indigenous peoples. It is such shifting political ideologies that are shaping the current political context and of which Zinacantecos are keenly aware.

**Conclusion**

El Calderón’s visit to Zinacantán illustrates not only the complexities of the politics of ethnicity in Mexico and Zinacantán, but also the wide range of political ideologies at play. These include patronage, liberalism as well as neoliberal multiculturalism, and the currently shifting forms of *indigenismo*. I suggest that the building of a health clinic
reveals a commitment to liberal individualism, i.e., individual rights to health care. However, the intention to encourage loyalty and establish indebtedness, heightened by the president’s own presence, is consistent with patterns of political patronage. This is especially relevant in Chiapas where the left-wing PRD has a much stronger presence than does the right-wing PAN, which is Calderón’s party. But of particular interest is the emphasis on indigeneity. The president attended the inauguration dressed as a traditional Zinacanteco political official, signaling his respect for indigenous culture, as well as the state’s commitment to multiculturalism. However, the particularities of indigenous culture are irrelevant, which Calderón’s various gaffs and the media coverage make apparent.

Both official and unofficial perspectives incorporate the adoption of indigenous cultural traits, including certain items of clothing and the (minimal) use of Tsotsil or other indigenous languages. Both are also a form of multiculturalism, but for different purposes. Official recognition of indigenous communities is characteristic of neoliberal multiculturalism – that is, the selective and strategic doling out of resources as a form of patronage, coupled with attempts to further incorporate indigenous communities into the market economy. Unofficial recognition is also used strategically, but is often meant to signal an ideology of political activism. Both official and unofficial recognition of indigenous culture are reflective of (and shaped by) the multiple ideologies at play in contemporary Mexican politics.
Interlude – Maria Cristina

Maria Cristina spoke at length about her struggles to gain an education (which is, I suggest, reflective of an ideology of liberal individualism), despite economic constraints and her family’s opposition. Although she wanted to continue her studies, she was only able to finish middle school.

I finished sixth grade. From there, I entered la técnica\textsuperscript{20} and I told my mom, “I am going to enter.” “No,” my mom told me, “What for, if you’re not going to finish, if you are going to get married there.” There are a lot of girls that don’t finish. When I went to register I didn’t tell my mom. No, I didn’t tell her. It was already a month since I went to register. “And why won’t you let me go?” I told her. “Aaaah,” she said to me, like that. “But are you going to finish?” “Yes, I will finish.” But then I didn’t ask for any money from my mom. I just looked for money for the expenses, to study. Yes... so when I finished the three years, I told her... They looked for padrinos for me and then they spent almost none of their money. [Then] I wanted to go to TELEBACH\textsuperscript{21} also. And she didn’t let me because it’s at night. My mom, she gave me permission, but my brothers didn’t. They didn’t go to school since my mom didn’t have, doesn’t have money, doesn’t have the means. That’s why she didn’t let them go. Yes, two went but only finished third grade. Since we don’t have money, they went to work. Yes, and then they only finished the third grade of primary school and, from there, they didn’t study any. Only two of us studied – me and

\textsuperscript{20} La técnica is a type of secondary school, similar to middle school in the United States.

\textsuperscript{21} TELEBACH is the name of the preparatory school located in Zinacantán, commonly referred to in Spanish as “prepa” (preparatorio). It is roughly equivalent to high school in the United States.
my brother. I finished secondary and my brother also finished secondary. I wanted to go
to TELEBACH but they wouldn’t let me. “You are going to work in the house,” they told
me and that was it. And I did the work and did my weaving. That’s why I didn’t study and
they didn’t let me since it was at night. Yes, besides it’s very isolated at the school. Yes,
“Why are you going to go alone? Don’t you see that the girls are just looking for
boyfriends? (laughs) That’s how it is at night! You’re just going to look for a boyfriend.”
“Some do want boyfriends, but not me,” I told them…yes…
And you, do you have a boyfriend?
(shakes her head)
You don’t want one?
No. I don’t want to get married yet. No. What for? If they just…just, women suffer…when
the men drink, and when they have a child, they suffer more.
So, you don’t want kids?
Yes, I do. But who knows, when…Yes, I had a boyfriend, three years ago, I had one. I met
him at school. Yes...(laughs). He studied at TELEBACH and I was in la técnica. He is not
from here. No, he is from over there, from Nachij. He studied here. That’s how I knew
him, and his house is close to my house. I met him there (laughs) and he told me, “Are
you still going to study?” when I finished sixth grade. “Yes.” When I finished primary
school, he finished secondary. We were boyfriend and girlfriend for three years…but now
he’s married. Yes, he got married a year ago...
Chapter 6

The Women Who Threw Rocks: Official and Unofficial Politics

“‘Why does the president do this?’ they will say about us. ‘What the president is doing is not good. He raised the price of tourist entrance fees,’ they will say about me.”

- Antonio Conde Vazquez, Municipal President

This chapter begins with a discussion of recent political changes in Zinacantán and the ways in which these relate to (inter)national political trends. The remainder of the chapter takes an in depth look at one particular event (a fight between two women), highlighting the role of gossip in local politics and questioning distinctions made between official and unofficial political realms. I consider official politics in Zinacantán to consist of the activities of the civil authorities while serving in their roles as community representatives (e.g., biweekly juntas and other meetings of local officials, meetings with state and national officials, including in Zinacantán, San Cristóbal and Tuxtla Gutierrez, welcoming official visitors to Zinacantán). Unofficial politics include more “behind the scenes” activities in which politics are being discussed and here I focus on gossip.

Through considerations of local narratives relating to political events, I take a view of politics that encompasses more than just the official arena of elected authorities, thus moving beyond the early emphasis in political anthropology on
typologies of political systems. I further consider how these local processes relate to the larger political context within Mexico and beyond. As such, this chapter considers the ways in which Zinacantán, a community at the “margins,” engages with processes of globalization.

From the Margins and Beyond: A Closer Look at Political Context

“*That mess left its mark... on this post, look. A bullet passed through there,*” Elena explained to me, pointing to the metal post beside us. “*Yes, everyone came over here, they gathered here. So the PRIistas were gathered there in the center. And the PRDistas came from the other side up there. And when they heard the shooting, they started to run. They came over here; some fell down...and from the Casa de la Cultura some entered there, and over into my house since I live close. Oooh, it was horrible! Yes, that day was horrible. It was an Ash Wednesday. Here at this corner one died. They shot him in the head.*”

Zinacantán is not known to be a violent place, but these events have certainly left their mark, as Elena observed. This account, about two young men who were shot and killed in a confrontation between the PRD and the PRI, was the story most commonly recounted to me when inquiring about local politics. The split between the PRD and the PRI became official in 2001 when the PRD won the municipal elections. Judging by local narratives it is the most significant aspect in current Zinacanteco politics but also reflects larger trends within and beyond Mexico. Zinacantecos are well aware of these (inter)national trends, which play out locally in diverse and complex ways.
Zinacantecos attribute the recent division in their community between the PRD and the PRI to a range of factors. Although accounts vary somewhat, it was generally agreed that the rise of the PRD was due to a problem within the church, or what the Second Regidor referred to as a “political-religious” conflict:

It was a political religious (político-religioso) problem, that’s how the problem emerged. When this change occurred, I was also here in the presidencia (then controlled by the PRI). I had a cargo as Comisario de los Bienes Comunales. And the people separated because there is a group of people that excavated something, there across from the main templo. A group of agents, the municipal agents from the communities, came to talk with the president to see if he knew anything about the excavation by those in the templo. And the president said, “I don’t know anything.” But they were not convinced. They started to investigate until they came with a document that the president had signed. The people felt disdained. So, the president remained with his templo and his sacristanes and we went with the other side. And from there ten communities separated, including Paste’ and Nachij, which are large communities with a lot of inhabitants. That was the change, which began with ten communities, but it started before, growing and growing, until now we have a presence in all forty-one communities. Now the majority is with the PRD. ... So, little by little the PRIistas were changing . . . well, politics . . . or color! From green, white and red [PRI colors] to yellow [the color associated with the PRD].

While the Second Regidor condenses the process of change in his account, he offers implications of the complexities involved. Prior to the excavation, the PRD had slowly, been gaining momentum, due in part to the influence of two large communities which hold prominent roles in local politics. Once community members heard about the church’s excavation, they began circulating rumors (reminiscent of local legends of
buried treasure), that the president and religious officials had profited from the items they unearthed. The rumors quickly became widespread, and consequently, support for the PRD grew.

Zinacantecos (at least those with whom I spoke) generally agree that the problem began with the church, but some also attribute the rise of the PRD to the influence of the Zapatistas who at one point formed an alliance with the PRD. Although this certainly had some impact, it does not entirely explain the rise of the PRD, as there are many in Chiapas who support the PRD but remain adamantly anti-Zapatista. Collier (1999:114) notes that in Apas, a community in the municipio of Zinacantán, young men who had gained financial independence through wage labor were able to challenge the PRI elite and persuaded “a large faction of dissident peasants to join the rival Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).” Support for the PRD grew as Zinacantecos became increasingly disenfranchised with the PRI officials’ mismanagement of government funding and the promise by the PRD to end this practice (Collier 1999). Harvey (2001:24) argues that the increasing support for the PRD in southern and western Mexico is “related to regional histories of opposition, negotiation, and accommodation with the federal government and the PRI.” Similarly, Zinacantecos’ accounts of the rise of the PRD indicate an acute awareness of the interplay between local, regional and (inter)national factors, exemplified through local narratives and gossip surrounding one particular “political” event that took place during my fieldwork.
Gossip has long held the interest of anthropologists, not only as an important form of communication but also for the significant role it plays in politics. Gluckman (1963:307), in fact, identified gossip as “among the most important societal and cultural phenomena we are called upon to analyse.” Gluckman (1963:308,312) suggests that gossip “is a culturally determined process” that varies depending on a group’s “specific histories and their situations in the larger society.” Gossip may also reinforce group unity and morality (Gluckman 1963). Whereas Gluckman (1963) argues that gossip is restricted to – and thereby identifies – group members, Paine (1967) suggests that gossip transcends group boundaries and transmits information about people outside of an individual’s ‘we’ group. “Patron-client, landlord-tenant, producer-consumer, etc., are examples of relationships where communication across ‘we’ group boundaries is necessary, and in a political life the same is true between members of opposing political parties. Gossip is a very general, and important, way of obtaining this information: sometimes it is the only way” (Paine 1967:282).

The particular role that gossip plays can vary considerably depending on historical context and the specific interaction. As van Vleet (2003:510) argues, “attention to the micropolitics of particular interactions as well as to broader historical and social contexts is critical” to analyses of gossip, especially in relation to national discourses. Generally speaking, gossip may serve as a form of moral evaluation (van Vleet 2003), a “weapon of competition” (Haviland 1977a), a means to resist “master-
narratives of development” (Crain 1991) or a way to consolidate political power (Brison 1992).

In Zinacantán gossip occurs in a variety of contexts, regarding a wide range of topics. Zinacantecos gossip about the activities and indiscretions of their neighbors and extended family members. Artesanas keep especially close tabs on one another, noting the numbers of tourists who visit other women’s homes and speculating on the number of textiles other women have sold. Gossip about religious and civil officials is also widespread.

Haviland (1977b) has noted the significant role of gossip in shaping the reputations of Zinacanteco men who serve in municipal cargos.22

Gossip propagates information about people’s cargo histories and performance through a huge volume of conversation about cargos and cargoholders. Complementing this conversation is correspondingly extensive knowledge about other people’s cargo careers on the part of almost every Zinacanteco man (Haviland 1977:102).

Though only men hold cargos in Zinacantán, Haviland (1977) argues that women are the primary source of gossip:

Even though the town hall where disputes were settled was in a distant part of the village, by the end of the day accounts of virtually every case had filtered back to the compound. Women on routine errands were the vehicles of this talk (Haviland 1977:26).

22 Haviland’s study focuses in part on gossip pertaining to the religious hierarchy, but the argument can easily be extended to the political hierarchy – which Haviland himself demonstrated in a later essay (Haviland 1998).
Men also gossip on occasion, but due to the nature of their daily routines, which contrasts with those of women, they have fewer opportunities to do so (Haviland 1977:27).

The particular type of gossip on which I focus is that pertaining to the activities of the civil officials. Though the men who serve in these positions are frequently the topic of gossip, they are also, often purposefully, the recipients of gossip. As Haviland (1998:64) observes:

Zinacantecs quite consciously create political and affective ties via gossip. They gossip both to prospective allies and to prospective enemies. They tell stories to civil officials, both in and out of court. They rehearse stories, and they rework them, interactively tinkering with wording, deciding what to leave out or what to emphasize. And they are aware that the evaluative moral of a given incident can be altered dramatically, from one telling to another.

Though individuals undoubtedly use gossip strategically and often for personal gain, I argue that gossip is also used collectively and, as such, plays a vital role in local political processes.

Various scholars have pointed to the importance of considering native theories of gossip (for example, see Haviland 1977b; van Vleet 2003). Haviland (1977b:38) has noted that although there is no Tsotsil term that equates to “gossip,” “Zinacantecos talk, and talk about talk, in ways that suggest a definite theory of the properties of talk, the motives that underlie it, its consequences and dangers.” In Zinacantán, a “‘native theory of gossip’ concerns: (a) the separation of public from private (privileged) information; (b) the question of truth versus hearsay; and (c) the general ethics of telling tales on
people” (Haviland 1977b:39). Political gossip – that is, gossip about the actions and decisions of civil officials – is assumed to be public information and, while the content of political gossip is not always true, its circulation is expected. To a certain extent, the community has a “say” in political decision-making; officially through municipal representatives, and unofficially, through gossip.

The Women Who Threw Rocks: Political Process in Zinacantán

Just before Semana Santa (Easter Week) during the spring of 2008, the religious officials in Zinacantán decided to raise the fee charged to tourists visiting the community. The fee had been ten pesos (approximately US $1 at that time) and was raised to fifteen pesos. Although this seems like a nominal amount, for tourist guides bringing groups of twenty or thirty tourists it adds up quickly. The religious officials, who receive the funds, also moved the caseta (the booth where fees are collected) to the entrance of town. It had previously been located on the street outside of the main church in the center of town, but there were concerns that tour buses were parking in a large lot at the edge of town to avoid paying the entrance fees.

23 Technically the fees are meant for tourists who visit the church, but in practice are charged to all tourists (who stop at the caseta).
As was the case with the previous location, young girls “staff” the new caseta in order to solicit tourists to come to their homes and buy their artesanías (textiles). These girls have learned to be very assertive, even aggressive, with tourists – sometimes chasing down and pounding on cars that do not stop. Once tourists acquiesce, they are greeted in the home by the girls’ mothers and older sisters with textiles on display and “free” samples of cane liquor and traditional food (e.g., tortillas, beans, cheese, pepita, etc.). This tactic, which appears to be hospitable but also compels tourists to reciprocate by purchasing textiles, was commonly used by Zinacanteca women who generally agreed that tourists like to drink and are curious about indigenous food (especially seeing how tortillas are made by hand). Because a majority of women rely on tourism to
supplement their household income, or in some cases to support their household entirely, competition between women can be fierce. Although there are busloads full of tourists streaming in day after day, the profit margin on handmade textiles is so low that it is difficult for most women to earn much from their sales. The few exceptions are those women who, through various social connections, have made arrangements with guides to bring large groups to their homes and so have a constant flow of tourists who buy their textiles.

After the caseta was moved and the entrance fee increased, there was a significant drop in tourism. According to many women, tourists and guides did not want to pay the increased rate and so they were going to other indigenous communities, such as Chamula and San Andrés, instead of coming to Zinacantán. This put women’s livelihoods at risk and many expressed concern over the religious officials’ decisions.

The group of women who display their textiles at the museum were already disappointed with the officials, especially the presidente del templo (religious official who oversees tourism)\(^\text{24}\), because they had been requesting improvements be made to the museum for over a year but nothing had been done. Their requests were minimal and included minor repairs and new clothing to be displayed on the museum’s mannequins. The women justified their argument by pointing out the gaping holes in the thatched roofs of the two buildings – one of which houses the museum displays and the other provides space for the women to display their textiles and occasionally cook.

\(^{24}\) At the municipal level, there are three “presidents”: the presidente municipal / municipal president, who is the highest ranking of the civil officials (generally referred to simply as “president”; the presidente del templo / president of the church, who is a member of the religious hierarchy; and the presidente del PRD / president of the PRD, who is not a part of either traditional hierarchy but plays an influential role in political matters.
tortillas. Such structural decay made the rainy season quite unpleasant. The clothing on display has not been replaced in years, if ever, and is faded and ragged. Unfortunately, since the museum has fallen into disrepair very few tourists come to see it and those few who do are disappointed by the unkempt building. Consequently, the women sell very little, a situation further complicated by the increased fees at the caseta.

![Zinacantán museum](image)

**Figure 25: Zinacantán museum**

The women who work at the museum – contrary to those who send their daughters to wait at the *caseta* – tend not to participate in soliciting tourists to their homes and often express disdain for such tactics. Instead, these women alternate days at the museum, in groups of two or three, and share several stalls beside the Casa de la
Cultura where they display their textiles when they are not at the museum. Nonetheless, they were all concerned with the drop in tourism and the subsequent problems this created.

Not long after the entrance fees increased, a verbal confrontation between two women escalated, and the women began throwing rocks at one another. The women were fighting over access to tourists – that is, the income provided by the sale of textiles to tourists. Of course the fight generated a great deal of gossip, some of which recounted the event itself, but much of which pertained to the actions of the civil and religious officials in the following weeks.

*The “Unofficial” Political Realm*

One afternoon, shortly after the fight occurred, I sat outside of the museum with a (larger than usual) group of women as they discussed the recent events. After sharing news with one another about the fight, the women began to focus on the president’s role in the ordeal, asserting that if he prohibited women from soliciting tourists and fighting over them, and if the tourists were left alone to go where they wanted, he could prevent this sort of thing from happening altogether.

Later I discussed the events with Maria Cristina, a young woman who works at the museum, and she explained that a group of women (including the women from the altercation) had gone to speak with the officials.

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25 The women who work at the museum are not paid but are allowed to display their textiles for sale to tourists who come to visit the museum.
The women went to talk with the templo de la iglesia (church temple) so that they would lower the price in the caseta. That’s where the problem began. Now they charge fifteen pesos. It used to be ten and now the tourists don’t want to pay and don’t want to enter. That’s why the women went to talk with the templo but the templo didn’t want to lower it. [So then] they went to the presidencia. And the president said that yes, they (the civil officials) were going to lower it, if they put him in charge of it (tourist caseta), but if not, well, I don’t what he will do.

Although the women went to talk with both the religious and civil officials, neither attempt worked. The religious officials refused to help, whereas the president agreed to help if he could. Another group of women, including those from the museum, went directly to the president’s house to speak with him about the problem. Catalina, who is in her early fifties, recounts the following:

Catalina: The president has good intentions to respect everyone, but many times he respects only what his people say. It would be different if he respected the whole community but that’s not how it is. Sometimes, because of some problem they fight, like what happened several weeks ago. That was not good. ... We went to tell him to resolve the problems in the community. “Yes, we will resolve it,” he said but he can’t do anything because his people don’t want it like that.

Kristen: So what will the president do about the caseta?
Catalina: Who knows! That is our question. They say that they want to put it there close to the center and then...who knows if it will be in the same place or if they will build a new one. He didn’t say what he would do about that. What bothered everyone is that it was in a very isolated place, which was because of the decision of the sacristanes and the mayordomos (religious officials). The president said that he would manage it well, but we will have to discuss it in the cabecera and in the communities. Where will they put it? Who knows.
Catalina alludes to the community’s role in decision-making when she states, “we will have to discuss it in the cabecera and the communities.” She is clearly aware that the president alone cannot make the decision. Instead, he is being pressured by “his people” (influential members of the PRD) but also must take into consideration the wishes of the entire community.

Elena, who also went to the president’s house, expressed similar concerns over the president’s inability to take action. She stated:

Now, it seems that the president is governing well, like I said. But there are líderes (literally leaders, or political bosses), he is clashing with them, even though the president wants to work well. I think that he does want to work well because we went once to talk with him at his house and he attended to us well. Yes, even though we are PRIistas and he is PRD, but he did attend to us well. But still the president hasn’t done anything.

These women have identified what was to become the central issue in this dispute, i.e., whether the caseta, and the income it generates from entrance fees, would remain under the control of the religious officials or if the political officials would take over tourism. The women tended to believe that the president wanted to help them, and taking control of the tourism funds would seemingly be in his best interest as well. However, because this was not a decision the president could make on his own, he requested a community-wide consensus regarding the caseta and the administration of tourism.
The “Official” Political Realm

The process of consensus-building was complex and drawn out. For weeks after the fight, the issue of tourism was the primary topic of discussion at the biweekly juntas. Rather than focusing on the event itself, however, deliberations during the juntas focused on what was best for the community regarding tourism. The president asked the agents to engage in discussions with their respective communities until they could gain a municipal-wide consensus. After having already requested feedback from agents (and their communities) on two previous occasions, the president stated the following (in Tsotsil):26

This, compañeros (jchi’iltaktik) is our following point. As we know, for fifteen days this has remained pending and that each one of you as agents took the proposal to your communities. You were going to discuss and have a meeting in each of your communities but I don’t know if you met and had the meeting. I don’t know what the response would be that you bring. We are going to talk, together we are going to ask now about the problem that we have with tourism. That is what we have pending, what we have as our first matter.

Essentially three possibilities emerged from the civil officials’ discussions: 1) take control of the caseta, lower the entrance fee and use the funds for the municipal government; 2) take control of the caseta, lower the entrance fee but still give the funds to the religious officials to cover the expenses of religious rituals; 3) leave the caseta and the funds under the control of the religious officials. Interestingly, the third option was not

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26 Though the president mentions that the issue has remained pending for fifteen days, he is referring only to his previous request for agents to discuss this in their communities and the issue had actually been under consideration for thirty days.
given serious consideration in the subsequent discussions and the debates centered on which of the first two was the best choice.

Although there was little explicit discussion of the women’s concerns, the civil officials were clearly aware of the situation. A comment made by one of the community representatives (referred to as agents) illustrates: “I believe that the start of our problem, I don’t know if it was with the women because they are always the ones who cause the problem. Women always provoke problems.” The president responded, “The women have already spoken. They are not the ones who want to throw them (religious officials) out. I cannot condemn [the women] because it is us who should resolve the problem that we have.” These comments indicate that the men were already knowledgeable of the fight that had occurred, as the details of the event were never addressed in the meetings. It also seemed that the women’s requests to the president – to lower the fee and resolve the conflict – were being taken into account.

After one of the meetings I spoke with the Second Regidor, a high-ranking civil official, and we discussed the junta proceedings. He confirmed that the president was taking the women into consideration:

The president wants to move the caseta. That is what the artesanas are asking for, that it be moved to the center of town. Because when it is in the center, tourists can go wherever. But when it is out there, the artesanas of the PRI go up and monopolize the buses, they take it to their businesses. And they don’t leave them for anyone else. That was the problem.

The Second Regidor’s account puts an interesting spin on the events, reframing the problem in terms of political party. When the women talked about the fight they
discussed it as yet another conflict relating to tourism, not a conflict between political parties. However, it was consistently portrayed as such by the civil officials.

There was also some discussion about the irrationality of charging an entrance fee at all. The Second Regidor explained:

[For women] it would be better if there was no charge. That is what the agents were commenting on. If we go to San Cristóbal, do we pay to enter the city? But here, arriving in the municipio, “You must pay.” No. If we go to Tuxtla, the same, they don’t charge us. If they charge us, it is for the highway [toll]. If they charge us it is for the fee to sell our products in the market. But those are taxes. It is different than paying something only to enter and see the municipio. ... The problem really is that they raised the price. Now fewer [tourists] come. What we want is that they don’t charge, so that tourism can come because what we are seeing is that the benefit received from tourism is the services that are here, that tourists can buy. For example, if you go to an artesanía store you buy your tablecloth or your shawl or your shirt. Well, that is where the payment benefits the municipio. But charging before and giving nothing in exchange, well many buses just turn around and leave. It seems very expensive. You have to have something in exchange. Like if I want to take this (motioning to a bottle of soda), if I say to Jose, “Give me your soda,” well I give him his three pesos and I take my product. I will drink my soda! But if I just pay for nothing, why? No soda and he still charges me! Hijole! No way!

What the Second Regidor does not state, but implies, is that the entrance fees go only to the PRI because the caseta is controlled by the religious officials and so do not benefit the whole community. Increasing the fees limits tourism, which is detrimental to many. He perceives unequal access to resources in terms of political parties; and again
reframes the fight between women as a conflict between the PRD and the PRI. In the following statement he elaborates:

Well, the groups of artesanas are the ones who have the conflict, sometimes. Because there are people from both parties; there are people from the PRI and there are people from the PRD. So the people from the PRI want to monopolize all the tourists that come and don’t leave any for those women artesanas from the other party that is in power. That is where the conflict was, until there were blows between the women and they fought.

The situation is not quite as straightforward as the Second Regidor implies, however. There are women from the PRI, such as those who work at the museum, who do not attempt to “monopolize” tourists, and in fact condemn the women who do. This group of women also condemned those who got in the fight, suggesting that, from these women’s perspective, the conflict was not based on party lines.

In subsequent discussions during the juntas, the civil officials continually framed the issue as a political conflict between the PRI and the PRD. For the most part the municipal president remained neutral, stressing that the decision was up to the agents, in accordance with what their communities decided. However, the president of the PRD (who is not part of the traditional political hierarchy, but is nonetheless very influential) supported taking control of the caseta and the funds because, as he and others argued, the tourism funds were not being used as intended for religious purposes, but instead were used for political purposes in order to support the PRI.

After meeting with their respective communities, most agents did not commit to either side. Rather, they responded that their communities had agreed they would go
along with the majority and that it would be the larger communities who would decide.

For example, the agent from San Isidro stated the following:

In San Isidro they said that “According to the majority.” We cannot say anything else because we are a small community. That is what they said, that, “According to the majority.” “We are there together,” they also said.

The agent from Apas made a similar statement:

Well, they said that what the large communities say, we are there also. They are the ones who will decide so we can’t say anything. That is how they responded there in Apas.

The agent from the cabecera, however, proposed that others be consulted in this issue:

What we want is simply to meet with all those who know, like for example the elders (moletik), the healers (j’iloletik), and see what we can do, how much money the religious officials (jpasanteletik) receive. It is necessary that we take them into account. According to my opinion that is what we should do and that is also what the people say. And if we do that then we will have a solution to our problem, for our president whom they are involving in this.

Others agreed with this, including the president, although he left it up to the agents to discuss the issue with their communities or to consult with other community leaders.

Somewhat paradoxically, the president’s reputation depended on his ability to find consensus among the divided agents and community members, some of whom felt the president responsible for the problems that had occurred. One agent, after specifying that he did not blame the president, summarized people’s grievances:

Regarding the president they say that he is not governing well because the price of entrance for tourists was raised to fifteen pesos and they changed the
location and now they have to stop them and not let them enter. ... That is what they say when they speak. “What caused the problem is our president. He is not handling things well since he is still new...” But the one who is responsible is the president of the templo and the fiscales. That is what I think.

By reporting what others are saying, this agent informs the president of the criticisms he is receiving – circulated through gossip. The disapproving gossip is based on misinformation, i.e., the assumption that the president was responsible for increasing the fees and moving the caseta. Although this was not the case, the president must take seriously the opinions, and accusations, of the community. In the president’s concluding remarks during this same meeting, he asks that all the municipal representatives explain that he, in fact, was not responsible for the increased entrance fees (or the subsequent problems it created). The president stated, “Truthfully, this is shameful for me as president because they are saying that we are charging when [tourists] enter . . . so it would be good if you spoke with them, in the communities.”

In the end, nothing changed and the caseta remained under the control of the religious officials. As the Second Regidor explained:

The president cannot change the caseta. We have nothing to do with the caseta or tourism. Tourism is controlled by those in the templo and those in the templo are PRI. So we cannot get involved. If the people want to say so, we will take it and we will change the caseta to bring it here. But the people, the people arrived at the decision that no, that was not the solution. It is better to wait awhile longer and see what happens. And that is how it remains.

The Second Regidor also recognizes the importance of community sentiment in the decision-making process. While civil officials are ultimately responsible for
political decisions, they are expected to follow their community’s wishes – which are often expressed through the circulation of gossip.

**Gossip and Un/Official Politics**

Gossip clearly plays a pivotal role in Zinacanteco politics. Though gossip is situated in the unofficial realm – that is, it occurs outside of official political proceedings – it permeates the official realm and is even actively sought for official purposes. This indicates considerable overlap and blurring of boundaries between the official and unofficial political realms. In her discussion of women’s gossip in the Ecuadorean Andes, Crain (1991:68) similarly challenges “the hierarchy implicit in the ‘formal politics’ versus ‘informal politics’ distinction and the idea that these entities constitute two closed and separate spheres.” Crain (1991:68) further suggests that “the actual practices of individual men and women may at times cross the ostensible boundaries” between formal and informal – or official and unofficial – political realms. In Zinacantán, gossip is one such practice.

Crain (1991:68) further argues that “women’s narratives constitute a form of politics.” Utilizing a Foucauldian analysis, Crain (1991:67) suggests that women’s gossip about devil possession represents “a ‘subjugated discourse’ developed in counterpoint to the master-narratives of development elaborated by state institutions and commercial farmers...” However, as van Vleet (2003:510) argues, narratives “cannot be understood along a simple opposition
between local and national arenas or between people’s actions as resisting or accommodating hegemonic discourses.”

While political gossip in Zinacantán does reflect changes in the global economy, such as a rise in tourism, it does not seem to be a form of resistance. Zinacanteco gossip can be viewed as a political tool, but of a very different sort than that discussed by Crain (1991). Both women and men use gossip purposefully and strategically to inform civil officials of community opinion and thereby influence officials’ actions and decisions. As such, gossip is an integral aspect of local political processes.

**Conclusion**

This event reveals the many intricacies of politics in Zinacantán, including the diverse range of local actors, as well as the ways in which local politics engage with processes of globalization. Politics are not limited to the proceedings of the biweekly juntas, nor are they restricted to the community of Zinacantán. The current political context in Zinacantán is shaped by a complex set of factors, including local factions and the historical decline of the PRI, which is due in part to the impact of neoliberal policies. The emergence of a highly mobile middle class that is able to support global tourism also plays a role in “local” politics. The civil officials’ reframing of this event is further reflective of national trends that amplify divisions based on party membership.

The hierarchical structure of civil authorities can be considered the official realm of politics within Zinacantán. These positions are pivotal in shaping political practice and
the men who serve in these cargos are well respected throughout the community. However, politics encompass far more than the official sphere. Political bosses (caciques, líderes) continue to manipulate the actions of elected officials. Civil authorities also seek the knowledge of respected elders and curers when the community faces conflict. Although politics in Zinacantán are generally perceived as a male domain, it is clear that women participate in influential ways, including directly soliciting the support of officials and engaging in gossip and narrative regarding the actions of the officials.

Although politics are conceptualized in terms of conflict, the ways in which conflict is portrayed may vary. For example, women, including those of the PRI, generally viewed the problem with tourism as a result of the actions of the religious officials, who are also PRI. For them, the actions of local officials had real economic consequences in terms of their ability to earn money from tourism. In contrast, the civil officials portrayed the problem as a conflict between political parties. It should not be assumed, however, that political views are determined by gender. In fact, men and women often have very similar views, including the assumption that when conflicts arise it is the responsibility of the civil officials to resolve them. It is further assumed that this task ultimately falls to the president.

Thus it is interesting to note the extent of community involvement in political processes. Decision-making can involve a lengthy and complex process and, in the case of the caseta, it fell to the community as a whole to come to a consensus. The president and civil officials have considerable authority in specific areas, such as the distribution of
government support and resources. However, in many instances they must be accountable not only to the community, but also to state and national governments. Thus, political process is predicated on the interests of a range of actors, both at the local level and beyond.

Discourse, both official and unofficial, is integral to political process in Zinacantán. Gossip is especially salient in Zinacanteco politics and often influences actions and decisions by local officials. The circulation of gossip, primarily by women, is not a form of resistance to hegemonic discourses, but rather is considered necessary to local decision-making processes. Such strategic use of gossip highlights the blurring of boundaries between official and unofficial political realms.
Part Three: Narratives
Recent debates regarding globalization often point to its destructive impacts, especially in poor, rural and indigenous communities. In a discussion of “disaster capitalism,” Klein (2007) observes efforts by economists such as Milton Friedman to “depattern societies” in order to establish “pure capitalism,” which translates into neoliberal policies. What is striking, however, is the persistence of ideological pluralism despite state efforts to homogenize. Perhaps in response to such persistence, Mexico has recently begun implementing policies that seem to indicate a neoliberal multiculturalism – attempts by the state to ostensibly embrace the country’s ethnic diversity through development and assistance programs. The result is that indigenous peoples are reevaluating and renegotiating their positions both within their own communities and within the national context. In Zinacantán specifically, we see patterns of legitimizing contemporary political traditions – especially by women – revealed through local narratives.

A close consideration of patterns of language use challenges the notion of a homogenous, bounded community as well as common assumptions of indigeneity. This
chapter draws on the linguistic concept of register\textsuperscript{27} to analyze ideological pluralism in Zinacantán. Although this chapter begins to identify patterns of register use, the examples I draw on were elicited for the purpose of research (e.g., interviews, personal narratives, etc.). Therefore, I do not make claims regarding the broader use of registers. Nonetheless, this focus on language use, which looks at the complexities of signaling political ideologies, suggests the need for an alternative to Vogt’s (1969) theory of encapsulation, in which social/cultural change is conceptualized in terms of the incorporation of “new” cultural elements into the “traditional” system. Vogt (1969:582) refers to this process as encapsulation, which “may be seen as a special form of ‘syncretism’. . . which Zinacantecos have evolved to cope with the new cultural elements injected into their way of life.”

Vogt’s approach is based on the assumption that Zinacanteco culture is fundamentally traditional, but is still able to accommodate certain modern developments. Further, it implies that modern and traditional elements are kept distinct. While studies in linguistic anthropology, such as the work by Kroskrity (1998; 2000) among the Arizona Tewa, indicate that such a pattern does exist, it does not seem to be the case in Zinacantán. Political ideologies are not encapsulated or kept distinct. Rather, Zinacantecos are evidently proficient at managing ideological pluralism.

\textsuperscript{27} Register can be defined as a particular style of expression, linguistic or otherwise, that is context-specific.
Overview of Register

The term register, in its most general sense, refers to a style of speaking that is context-specific and shaped by factors such as the relationship between and the social standing of interactants. Register is “an analytic construct devised by linguists to capture social regularities of value ascription by language users” (Agha 1998:154). However, Agha (2007) also observes that registers may consist of non-linguistic signs such as dress and demeanor. As such, Agha (2007:80) emphasizes “the way in which behavioral signs (including features of discursive behavior) acquire recognizable pragmatic values that come to be viewed as perduring ‘social facts’ about signs, and which, by virtue of such recognition, become effective ways of indexing roles and relationships among sign-users in performance.”

In Zinacantán, patterns of dress serve as one type of non-linguistic register. Traditional, locally-made clothing can signal one’s membership in the community since the style of the clothing and specific design of embroidery varies by village or municipio. Clothing also varies according to gender and in Zinacantán most men now wear Western clothing, whereas most women wear the traditional hand-woven, embroidered skirt, blouse and shawl (see Figure 26 below).
Figure 26: Juana with her husband and son
Clothing may also signal specific types of social settings, such as public or private. For example, when women are in their homes or other private or semi-private settings, they do not wear their shawls. However, whenever they leave their homes or enter more public settings they always wear a shawl – even when the weather is very warm. During cold weather women may wear a Western-style cardigan but, in public settings, the shawl is always worn over the sweater and thus serves more than just a practical purpose. It is the appropriate and expected attire for women in public contexts.

Patterns of dress also vary between everyday contexts and special occasions. Typically women have one or two sets of clothing for everyday use and one set of clothing that is kept only for special occasions, such as religious fiestas. Because the colors and designs of Zinacanteco clothing are constantly changing, the clothes worn for special occasions are, ideally, of the most contemporary style. Previously women’s blouses and shawls and men’s ponchos were predominantly red and white, but during the time in which I conducted fieldwork blues and purples were very popular. Figure 27 shows several young women at a fiesta wearing the newest styles, along with an elderly woman wearing an older style shawl.
Men’s clothing also varies by occasion, as well as by social rank. Although some men wear ponchos over their Western clothing on a frequent basis, ponchos and other traditional items of clothing are worn most commonly for special occasions. Designs of men’s ponchos are consistent with the designs of women’s clothing (see Figure 28 below). Men who are in respected positions of leadership wear items of clothing that signal their social position. These items are the same as those worn by the civil officials during biweekly juntas and other special occasions (such as when political dignitaries come to visit). Figure 29 below shows two men at a religious fiesta who are wearing very different clothing consistent with their social rank. Thus, clothing in Zinacantán presents
an example of a non-linguistic register, shaped by complex patterns of indexing social status within particular social contexts.

Figure 28: Men in ponchos

Figure 29: Men at a religious fiesta (note the differences in their dress)
Social Groupings in Zinacantán

Before considering patterns of (linguistic) register in relation to ideological pluralism, it is necessary to first address some of the ways in which Zinacantecos conceptualize group identities. In his recent book, *Language and Social Relations*, Agha (2007:268) clearly illustrates that social groupings are mediated by complex semiotic processes, which cannot be fully understood with reference only to a static ontology of social groups. In other words, simply recognizing groups that can be named is insufficient for understanding the ways in which people position themselves in relation to either named or unnamed groups.

In Zinacantán we see, not surprisingly, considerable variation in the negotiating of group identities. It is not uncommon, however, for Zinacantecos to contrast themselves with other indigenous pueblos, assuming a certain level of common group identity. While taking Tsotsil classes (at a language institute in San Cristóbal), my Zinacanteca instructor began the course with a political history of Zinacantán, emphasizing that in Zinacantán Catholics and Evangelicals can live together (*convivir*) but in Chamula, the neighboring *municipio*, there is only one religion – anyone who is not Catholic is expelled. Because she herself is Evangelical, this is likely an important aspect of group identity for her to emphasize, but it implies a widespread tolerance in Zinacantán that is not always apparent in social interactions.

In a discussion about local politics the Second Regidor made a similar comparison, but with reference to maintaining traditions. Here he is explaining the ways in which civil officials participate with religious officials:
Entonces, van los regidores también. Participan con los moletik\textsuperscript{28}. Por esa razón allí estamos con la costumbre, pues. Allí estamos con la costumbre y con la tradición. En cambio, en otros municipios, ya no. Los regidores del ayuntamiento ya no participan para nada en usos y costumbres. Solo lo que corresponden a lo constitucional, hasta allí está. Pero en cambio nosotros no.

Tenemos relación con los moletikes y los mayordomos. Es que en otros municipios también, este, están perdiendo la costumbre. Ya muchos no tienen mayordomos, alférez, casi ya no. Se está perdiendo.

So, the regidores go too. They participate with the moletik. For that reason we are there with the custom. We are there with the custom and with the tradition. On the other hand, in other municipios, no, not now. The regidores del ayuntamiento (government officials) now do not participate at all in usos y costumbres. They only comply with what is constitutional, that is all. However we do not. We have a relationship with the moletikes and the mayordomos. Although in other municipios, well, they are losing the custom. Many do not have mayordomos, alférez, almost none. It is being lost.

This expression of solidarity between civil and religious officials may seem surprising in light of the fact that they are of opposing political parties; the civil officials are PRD and the religious officials are PRI. However, these divisions are superseded, in this case at least, by the values placed on tradition.

In contrast to the previous examples, which allude to a common identity with which the speakers identify, the following example demonstrates a certain distancing from assumed solidarity. This excerpt is taken from a narrative by a young man named Arturo. His family has lived in Zinacantán for three generations but his grandfather was a ladino, and married his Zinacanteca maid. Arturo lived in San Cristóbal for some time,

\textsuperscript{28} Moletik, mayordomos and alférez are all terms that refer to religious officials.
where he attended college, but now lives in Zinacantán and has opened a small store in
the front room of his father’s house in the center of town. For this particular interview,
we walked several blocks away to the large plot of land his family owns and which
Arturo associates with his family’s heritage. Arturo strives to become reincorporated
into the community and emphasizes his indigeneity, but the narrative about his
grandfather reveals a certain tension:

1 Le cuentan, me contó mi tío, que mi abuelo, este, estas tierras pertenecían a los
2 Zinacantecos. Pero, mi abuelo no es, no era Zinacanteco, pues. Por eso (laughs)
3 por eso dice que sacó todo. Entonces él compró estas tierras. Porque dice, los
4 Zinacantecos lo vendieron. Como había mucha agua ellos decían que no le
5 servía para nada. . . . Entonces ellos no sabian para que usar, como sale. Y él
6 empezó hacer este, a curcos, o zanjas... canales.
7 They tell me, my uncle told me, that my grandfather, well, these lands used to
8 belong to the Zinacantecos. But, my grandfather isn’t, he wasn’t Zinacanteco.
9 That’s why (laughs) that’s why they say he took all of it. Then he bought these
10 lands. Because they say, the Zinacantecos sold them. Since there was a lot of
11 water they said that it wasn’t worth anything. . . . So they didn’t know how to
12 use it, how it would work. And he began to make, well, furrows, or ditches...
13 canals.

In this passage the use of phrase “los Zinacantecos” (Lines 2 and 4) clearly distinguishes
his grandfather as non-Zinacanteco and, implicitly, as non-indigenous. It also provides
justification for the purchase of the land, since the Zinacantecos did not know how to
use it and his grandfather did. Arturo continues:

1 Tenía muchas cosas pero sabes que es lo, lo mágico que a mi, me llama
2 atención, es que mucha gente de aquí afirma que él había hecho un pacto
con... con un sobrenatural. Podríamos decir con, con el diablo [y] que él se había ido a una cueva, a pedir todo eso, porque aquí hay una, este, como una... un mito, podríamos decir mito o historia, o creencia, algo así. Cuando una persona tiene mucho dinero... siempre piensa la gente que hay un pacto con los sobrenaturales, en el cerro o en una laguna especial. Mi papá me dijo que mi abuelo había hecho eso, y que por eso había tenido mucha producción, tenía mucha tierra. Yo no sé- siento que no fue eso, sino que fue más, por su inteligencia. Bueno, eso también bien, porque cuando él murió, todas las cosas desaparecieron. Las vacas se murieron, los caballos también, y que todos se desordenó. Todo se desordenó cuando él se falleció.

He had many things but you know what is the, the magic for me, that calls my attention, is that many people here affirm that he had made a pact with... with a supernatural. We could say with, with the devil [and] that he had gone to a cave to ask for all of this, because here there is a, well, like a... a myth, we could say a myth or a story or a belief, something like that. When a person has a lot of money... people always think that there is a pact with supernaturals, in the [sacred] hill or in a special lagoon. My father told me that my grandfather had done this, and that is why he had a lot of production, he had a lot of land. I don’t know- I feel that it wasn’t that, but rather that it was more, from his intelligence. Well, and also, because when he died, all his things disappeared. The cows died, the horses too, and everything fell into disorder. Everything fell into disorder when he passed away.

Here Arturo recognizes local beliefs and is careful not to invalidate them, but does not identify with them. By using terms such as “magic” and “myth” (Lines 1 and 5), Arturo reveals his skepticism and then offers his own account of his family’s history, which contrasts with local beliefs and even with his own father’s account. As someone who considers himself indigenous but is considered by others, at certain times at least, to be ladino, Arturo encounters such tensions often.
Issues of ethnicity and language are pivotal in determining group relations, but the boundaries are often blurred. Throughout my fieldwork I tried to get a sense for how categories such as indígena and ladino were determined because at times I was told there were no ladinos living in Zinacantán, and other times I was told that there were. Some would say that there used to be but aren’t any more. A local official, however, observed that, although there used to be more, now there are only a few. He states:

Antes vivían, y ahora siguen viviendo. Hay algunos ladinos. Por ejemplo, Don Fernando, lo que está acá en la esquina, en la abarrote. Es medio-ladino pues, porque sus papás fueron ladinos, creo. Ahorita es, ya es medio... medio... habla el español y el Tsotsil. Podemos ya platicar con él en Tsotsil, pero sus papás fueron kaxlanes. Este, toda esa familia que está acá en esa manzana son medio-ladinos.

Before they lived [here], and now they continue living [here]. There are some ladinos. For example, Don Fernando (Arturo’s father), the one that is there on the corner, in the store. He is medio-ladino then, because his parents were ladinos, I think. Now he is, he is medio... medio... he speaks Spanish and Tsotsil. We can converse with him in Tsotsil, but his parents were kaxlanes. Well, that whole family there on that block is medio-ladino.

Although at the time Juan was serving as the Second Regidor, he is a teacher and self-identifies as “un profesor de educación primaria indígena / a professor of indigenous primary education.” As a prominent and well respected member of the community, Juan emphasizes his indigeneity differently than does Arturo.
The significant distinction between indígenas and ladinos, according to Juan, has
to do with language, as illustrated in the following transcript:

1 Juan: Fue la migración. Vendieron sus tierras. Pero esta familia todavía siguen

2 allí. Allí está Doña María también, la que está acá en la esquina. Son medio-

3 lados pues, son medio-kaxlanes, se puede decir.

4 Kristen: Y hablan Tsotsil?

4 Juan: Medio hablan, le digo. Medio hablan, pero no muy hablan. Podemos se 5 platicamos con Don Pacho Martinez. Hay unas palabras que sí, puede hablar,

5 pero hay algunas que no. No es lo mismo platicar con una gente nativa de acá.

6 Habla perfectamente el Tsotsil. Platicque, conversa bien. Pero uno que es medio-

8 kaxlan, como lo llamamos acá nosotros, son los ladinos, pues los kaxlanes. No 9 hablan perfectament- no pronuncia bien las palabras mas que nada.

10 Kristen: Mhm. No es su lengua materna.

11 Juan:  Mmmm, no es. Solo, medio, están practicando como usted. Si, también

12 está aprendiendo que [unintelligible] aprender en Tsotsil, pero va a ver algunas

13 palabras que le va a costar a pronunciar. Si, por ejemplo “k’an, k’on…”

14 Kristen: Mmmm, glotal.

15 Juan: Los glotales. Es un poco difícil de pronunciar. Y acá fue los kaxlanes no 16 muy pueden pronunciar. Es lo que he observado con Doña Elisea Suarez, con

17 Doña Susana, con la difunta Doña Rutilia. Acá estuvieron viviendo, pero si

18 llegas en la tienda... En vez de decir, “K’usi chak’an” dice “Kusi chakan.”

19 Entonces, allí se va a dando cuenta pues que no... Entonces, así está. De que

20 hubo ladinos y hubo, y sigue existiendo.

21 Juan: That was the migration. They sold their lands. But this family still remains
there. Doña Mária is there also, the one who is there on the corner. They are medio-ladinos so, they are medio-kaxlanes, you could say.

Kristen: And do they speak Tsotsil?

Juan: They “half” speak, I’d say. They “half” speak it, but they don’t speak much. We can converse with Don Pacho Martinez. There are some words that yes, he can say, but there are some words that he can’t. It is not the same as talking with a person native to here. [They] speak Tsotsil perfectly. [They] speak, converse well. But one who is medio-kaxlan, like we call them here, they are the ladinos, well the kaxlanes. They do not speak perfectly more than anything they don’t pronounce the words well.

Kristen: Mmhmm. It isn’t their first language.

Juan: Mmmm, no it isn’t. Only, half, they are practicing like you. Yes, they are also learning that [unintelligible] to learn Tsotsil, but you will see some words that are difficult to pronounce. Yes, for example, “k’an, k’on...”

Kristen: Mmmm, glottal.

Juan: The glottals. It is a little bit difficult to pronounce. And here it was the kaxlanes, that can’t pronounce much. That is what I have observed with Doña Elisea Suarez, with Doña Susana, with the deceased Doña Rutilia. They were living here, but if you go to the store... Instead of saying, “K’usi chak’an” (“What would you like?”) they say “Kusi chakan.” So, then you realize that no... So, that is how it is. About how there were ladinos and there were, and they continue existing.

The use of the term “medio,” as in “medio-ladino,” “medio-kaxlan” and “medio hablan,” is especially interesting. The term kaxlan is originally from Castillian Spanish, but is used in Tsostil to designate foreign objects or people.\[29\] Ladino is used in Spanish to refer to non-indigenous people, although indigenous people can “become” ladino by adopting a

\[29\] Kaxlan also means “chicken.”
more Westernized lifestyle, including speaking Spanish and wearing Western clothing. “Medio” as an adjective literally means half, middle, or average, but also can mean “somewhat” or “a little.” Whereas in the United States, there is a significant concern with definitively determining racial fractions, the same is not true in Zinacantán. In the above example, Juan does not literally mean “half-ladino” or “half-kaxlan” and even conflates these with the less-marked “ladino” and “kaxlan,” as in the statement: “But one who is medio-kaxlan, like we call them here, they are the ladinos, well the kaxlanes.”

This example is also of interest in its detailed description of pronunciation and the way it is linked to ethnic identity. Natives speak “perfectly” and non-natives do not. This view of language explicitly supports Agha’s (2007) observations of the ideological nature of registers and competing valorizations. “Each is ideological from the perspective of every other in so far as it gets the (normative) facts incorrect” (Agha 2007:157). In this case, whereas natives to the community speak Tsotsil perfectly, ladinos or kaxlanes only “half” speak Tsotsil and do not “pronounce the words well.”

In addition to conceptualizing ethnic identities in terms of language, Zinacantecos also point to more concrete differences. Women especially note differences in dress and ways of living. Eventually I simply began asking people what it means to be indigenous or what significance the term indígena has. These questions were often met with confusion, as this is a term that has only recently come into use. Previously, the term indio was more commonly used. When I asked Maria, a woman in
her forties who speaks little Spanish, what *indígena* means, the following discussion transpired between Maria and Juana, who was translating for me:

1. Kristen: Y para usted, que significa *indígena*?
2. Juana (to Maria): K’usi la li *indijenae*?
4. Juana: Ji’, pero k’usiotik xkaltik un?
5. Maria: K’usi li k’u xi’elanotike?
6. Juana: K’usi la spas *significar* li *indigenae*?
7. Maria: Ja’ me mu jna’ un mu me xul ta jol vo’on taja’a.
8. Juana: Mu xa me jna’ k’usi uk un.
9. Maria: Yechon uk.
10. Juana: Ch’ay xa xka’i.
11. Maria: Mu xul ta jol.
14. Juana: K’usi xkaltik li *indijenaotik* une, mi ja’ li jtsektike mi ja’ li jk’u’tike?
15. Maria: Ja’ un, ja’ li jmochebtik une, ja’ li jtsektik une.
16. Juana: K’usi spas *significar*...
17. Maria: Ja’ *indijena* chava’i li jtsek jk’u’tike yu’van chako’oltas aba chak jxinulan jkaxlan.
18. Juana (to Kristen): Este, dice que, este, los indígenas como traje, nuestro traje. Y es cambio con los de... los... ladinos (quietly). Es diferente.
20. Juana (to Kristen): Sí, no somos iguales. La ropa, la comida... nosotros es que
tenemos otra... otro trabajo como... ustedes. Ustedes son... puros, este, en la oficina, este... salen en otros lugares. Como indígenas, que se vamos a hacer. Cargar leña, hacer la comida (laughs) lavar ropa... eso es la indígena que está, si.

Kristen: And for you, what does indígena mean?

Juana (to Maria): What is indígena?

Maria: Indígena is the people.

Juana: Yes, but how are we (inclusive)?

Maria: What are we (inclusive) like?

Juana: What does indígena mean?

Maria: That I don’t know, I can’t imagine what it is.

Juana: I don’t know what it is either.

Maria: Me too.

Juana: I have forgotten.

Maria: I don’t remember.

Juana: But we are different from kaxlanes.

Maria: Yes, different, we are like indios then, that’s it.

Juana: But the concept of indígena, it might be because of our clothing?

Maria: Yes well, it is our shawl, our skirt.

Juana: But what does it mean...

Maria: We are known as indígenas because of our clothing, because we don’t compare to the kaxlanes.

Juana (to Kristen): Well, she says that the indígenas, well, like our clothing. And it is different with those from... those... ladinos (quietly). It is different.

Kristen: Aaa, yes.
Juana (to Kristen): Yes, we are not the same. The clothing, the food...we well we have another... another kind of work like... you all. You all are... only, well, in an office, well... you go to other places. As indígenas, what are we going to do. Haul firewood, prepare food (laughs) wash clothes... that is the indígena that is, yes.

At one level, clothing, as well as daily activities (e.g., hauling firewood, preparing food and washing clothes vs. working in an office and traveling) can be considered as non-linguistic registers. Women overtly recognize the iconic value of these factors as distinguishing themselves from ladinos.

**Ideological and Sociohistorical Characteristics of Register**

Registers may index identity, including ethnic identity, in various ways, but they are also ideological in that they can be manipulated based on understandings of stereotypic values. “Register distinctions can thus be manipulated interactionally to achieve effects which – though dependent on the stereotypic values of particular lexemes – are, at the level of text, significantly at odds with such values” (Agha 2007:158). So, in effect, language users can trope upon stereotypes to achieve other means.

During one of my language classes in the Zapatista community of Oventik, my instructor and I looked over a document I had found in the church archives in San Cristóbal – a Tsotsil grammar written in 1804 by a Spanish priest. While going through various conjugations, we discovered that the priest who wrote the description had not learned either of the forms for we, inclusive or exclusive, but instead used the same form as second person plural. My instructor commented, “Kaxlanes sometimes learn some Tsotsil but often use only the second person, so we make jokes and speak like
them, using only the second person (laughs).” Although he did not give any specific examples, one can imagine various scenes in which native speakers mimic non-native speakers. In certain contexts native Tsotsil speakers might imitate particular ladino ways of speaking Spanish as a means of achieving, or at least indexing, higher status. But in this case the imitation of ladino ways of speaking is used for the opposite purpose and jokingly highlights the kaxlanes’ ignorance.

Within the Zapatista movement the power of words has certainly not gone unnoticed and the movement has often been referred to as a “War of Words.” In this context the ideological, as well as the sociohistorical aspects of registers and register formation become especially salient. During my initial meetings with the Junta de Buen Gobierno in Oventik, I was asked to bring a list of questions relevant to my research. I returned the next day with the list, which included the question, referring to the Junta, “Es similar a los otros cargos en los pueblos indígenas? / Is it similar to other cargos in indigenous communities?” When I gave the members of the Junta copies of the list of questions, everyone read them over while one man read them out loud. He hesitated on the word “similar” and they all discussed this in Tsotsil. I asked if “similar” was not a word in Spanish, thinking perhaps I had made a mistake. He replied, “Yes, but it is a word used by people ‘que conocen mas / who know more.’” I assumed by this he meant educated people. He then said it means “parecido / comparable.”

His statement, “It is a word used by people who know more,” is metadiscursive in that it comments on my choice of words, but it is also ideological in its implicit value judgment. Although I had chosen that particular word for the simple reason that it is an
English cognate, I had inadvertently indexed the role of someone “who knows more.” Clearly he was familiar with the term, and the register(s) in which it is used, but rejected them both by offering an alternative (parecido). Once my question was appropriately reframed, the members of the Junta then answered it.

The next example also comes from a conversation with the Junta. Toward the end of my fieldwork in Zinacantán, I returned to Oventik with some friends from the United States who wanted to visit the community. Upon arriving we met with the Junta, to be given an introduction to the community and the opportunity to ask questions, as is typical for visitors. Our guests were quite interested in the movement and asked a number of questions about international support, military presence, the national government, and so on. Only one man spoke in response to these questions and at one point commented:

The government does many things to try to divide the indigenous communities, like Oportunidades, Progresa – or Pobreza, we don’t know what it’s called! Also PROCAMPO...these programs divide the communities.

The programs he mentions are governmental assistance and development programs. They have become increasingly common in communities such as Zinacantán and arguably are aimed at discouraging support of the Zapatista movement. This comment is especially poignant in its humorous play on words – “Progresa” and “Pobreza.” “Progresa,” the name of one assistance program, literally means “progress” whereas “pobreza” means “poverty.” Through feigned ignorance and sarcasm, this fleeting reference offers a complex critique of government policies, implying that rather than
improve, they actually impoverish indigenous communities. Further, this comment can only be understood with reference to a specific sociohistorical context, in which indigenous communities have been marginalized, yet many are now organizing in protest.

**Ideological Pluralism as Revealed through Local Narratives**

Although Zinacantán is not anti-government in the same ways that the Zapatistas are, the political context there is nonetheless complex. Previous ethnographic studies have at times portrayed the community as a closed and neatly bounded unit that, despite “outside” influences, has maintained its traditional values and customs. As a result, Zinacantán has been viewed as distinct from the modern world. A consideration of patterns of language use challenges these assumptions and indicates that the political ideologies indexed in local narratives are both modern and traditional.

In his research among the Arizona Tewa, Kroskrity (1998; 2000) identifies patterns of indigenous purism and strict compartmentalization. These “ideological preferences . . . provide specific cultural resources for maintaining maximally distinctive languages that can serve as the symbolic and communicative vehicles for their indexically associated social identities” (Kroskrity 2000:333). Among the Arizona Tewa, language mixing is strongly discouraged and, as one speaker indicated, this practice is analogous to the way corn is planted: colors of corn are kept separate just as languages are kept separate (Kroskrity 1998:112). This is not at all the case in Zinacantán, where languages are frequently mixed, as are political ideologies.
In a supposedly traditional, closed community, one would expect to find a sense of deference to hierarchical structures of authority – the civil and religious officials that have been so well documented by anthropologists such as Evon Vogt. For example, Vogt (1969:284) observes the following regarding sources of political power:

Such men have not only the ability to ‘speak well’ in handling internal and external political problems but also political power derived from other sources – holding a cargo or having served in the past in the cargo system, being the old and respected head of a large lineage, having many compadres, serving on the Ejido Committee that controls land, and so on.

Taylor (2007) refers to this structure, and the corresponding ideology, as hierarchical complementarity. The men who serve in these positions are prominent figures within the community and narratives from both men and women make frequent reference to their roles in political and ritual life. The following excerpt, from a woman in her early sixties who is a member of the PRI (the opposing party of the current government), illustrates (Maria speaks only Tsotsil and this is her daughter’s translation into Spanish):

1 Juana: Dice que los jueces están muy bien. Lo trata muy bien la gente y le dice la gente que los que tienen problema que se calme, que lo respete la ley y... ya que a nosotros lo respetamos y así... el juez, sí, entiende muy bien, dice.

2 Juana: She says that the judges are very good. They treat people very well and people say that those who have problems, that they calm them, that they respect the law and... then to us we respect them and so... the juez, yes, he understands very well, she says.

Maria’s comments indicate a respect for “traditional” hierarchies, a respect that was similarly expressed by many of the women with whom I spoke. We also find
commentary, however, that indexes liberal individualism, a relatively modern political ideology. Gray (2000:2-3) observes that “(l)iberal regimes are often viewed as solutions to a modern problem of pluralism”, but goes on to argue that liberalism now must seek tolerance and “peace among different ways of life.” Gray further states, “In nearly all contemporary societies the coexistence of many ways of life is an established fact. Though distinct, these ways of life are not independent. They interact continuously – so much so that it may be hard to tell the difference between them” (2000:11). The coexistence of liberalism and hierarchical complementarity in Zinacantán is a case in point.

Although no one in Zinacantán would identify these as registers (as far as I know, there is no local term for “register”), for analytic purposes it is useful to examine the ways in which Zinacantecos index political ideologies. Consider the following statement by Maria, a woman in her forties who is illiterate and speaks little Spanish:

1. Ch’abal to’ox. Tey abol sbaik chlajik ta majel, tey yoxik satik. K’ajomal
2. ta smeltsan sbaik ta kavilto, pero mu xch’amباتik lek. Chlaj ech’el
3. yo’on. A la puersa tsutik ech’el k’alal chlajik ta majele. …Jel xa lavi une. Mas xa lek un oy xa va’al…lavie oy xa ta xch’ak sba li antsetik min
4. yu’un solel chlajik ta majele, ma’uk xa yech ti tey sk’eloj sbaik chlajik ta yok ta sk’ob li vinike, i’i. Ta smeltsan sbaik o mi mo’oje ta xch’ak sbaik tajmoj, porke k’ux li svokolik chmal xch’ich’elike. …Ja’ li mas xa ip’ijub li antsetike, i ochik ta eskuela. Mas xa ip’ijubik ati vo’nee ch’abal to’ox
5. eskuela. Ch’abal to’ox chanob vun. Pero lavie sna’ik xa espanyol, sna’ik xa sk’elet vun, por eso ip’ijubik xa mu xa sk’anik tey xlajik ta majel.
6. There wasn’t [any protection for women]. They put up with all
mistreatments. They would go to the cabildo but they were not respected. They reconciled. Even though they were beaten they were forced to reconcile. ... It has changed. Now it is better if there is someone...if a woman is mistreated by her spouse they can separate. They are not left to be beaten by a man, no. They resolve it or they separate because it is painful when there is bloodshed. ...Women have woken up. They go to school. They are more prepared. Before there was no school. There was nowhere to study. But now they speak Spanish, they know how to read, that is why they are more prepared and they are not allowed to be mistreated.

This interview was conducted in Juana’s home. Because Maria speaks little Spanish, she suggested to Juana that she would feel more comfortable answering questions in Tsotsil and having Juana translate into Spanish for me. Juana and Maria have a close relationship and both work at the museum. They are not exactly equals, however, because Maria is older. As such, Juana assumes that Maria “sabe mas / knows more,” which is one of the reasons Juana suggested I talk with her. Although I did ask questions, much of our interviews consisted of conversations between Juana and Maria.

It is interesting to note the patterns of language mixing employed in the passage above by Maria. She uses common Spanish loan words, such as pero / but (Line 2), mas / more (Lines 4 and 8), porque / because (Line 7) and por eso / that’s why (Line 10), as well as cabildo / government building (Line 2), escuela / school (Lines 8 and 9) and español / Spanish (Line 9), but significantly does not use Spanish to discuss issues of literacy. For example, she uses the Tsotsil phrases, chanob vun / to study (Line 9) and sk’elel vun / to read (Line 10). Although Maria’s Spanish is limited, she can hold a basic
conversation and likely could have chosen to use the Spanish *estudiar* / to study and *leer* / to read. By emphasizing the importance of education, Maria implies an inherent value placed on liberal individualism, which in this case is rendered consistent with traditions expressed in Tsotsil. Coming from a woman who received no education, the importance of literacy and the ability to speak Spanish is significant. Also of significance is the implication that this has allowed women to confront the authority of civil officials in the cabildo. In this case, liberal individualism challenges certain aspects of hierarchical complementarity. While the power that men have “traditionally” held over women is called into question, the continued existence of the hierarchy is respected.

In the following examples these seemingly conflicting ideologies are indexed alongside one another, the speaker effortlessly switching between ideologies. These are excerpts from a narrative by a woman named Maruch, who is in her early eighties, is also illiterate and speaks no Spanish (aside from the use of common loan words). Maruch was narrating her life history and, although I was present, she directed the story to her granddaughter. (Maruch’s narrative is related in more detail in the following chapter.) In the first passage here, Maruch is discussing a land dispute in which her mother was involved:

1. *Ja’ ox tsk’an li ta Sok’on une... muk’ xak’ yu’n xa me sna’ojbe*
2. *smelol cha va’i ne. Pero mu jna’ k’ucha’al xnak’ yu’un vun ti jme’e*
4. *Pero tey lok’ sbi une, va’un jecho xa’al ti lek sna’oj li jme une. Tsk’el un*
5. *chak’ ta k’elel mu sna’ vuna a, pero ta sa’ buch’u lek sna’ sk’el un, o*
6. *sna’ une va’un ja’ xanav o xchi’uk un ti jme’ une.*
They were going to ask for the [better] land by Sok’on...she didn’t give it to them because she knew what their intentions were. **But** I don’t know how it was that my mother was able to keep the papers. She had the papers saved. She had the papers for the land hidden. **But** her name was on them and that’s one thing my mother knew a lot about. She read them – she gave them to another person to *read* because she didn’t know how to *read*, **but** she looked for someone who could *read* very well... ‘This is what I will give you,’ she said. ‘Look at my papers,’ she said.

The instances of language mixing here are quite similar to those illustrated above. Maruch also uses the common load word *pero* (Lines 2, 4 and 5) but when discussing the papers for the land, uses the Tsotsil *vun* (Lines 2, 3, 5 and 7) and when discussing reading the papers uses the Tsotsil *k’el* (Lines 4 and 5). Further, Maruch emphasizes the importance that literacy plays in issues of land tenure and the right to private ownership, again an implicit value placed in liberal individualism. The following passage similarly addresses literacy, but also the importance of hierarchical complementarity:
...Kuch xa ono’ox kuntikotik noxtok un...

So Doña Xunka _____ wanted to steal all the land. ...and someone was found that could speak for her. ...It was Maryan Paste’, as we called him, but he was actually a licenciado. So he got together all the sons of Doña Xunka. He didn’t think he could accomplish it in San Cristóbal, so they went clear to Tuxtla. Who knows what they said in Tuxtla. They returned again, but we were in San Cristóbal... Don Palas knew a licenciado ...there in San Cristóbal. They spoke, they settled the papers for the land. ...We took it to the comunales. They had their licenciado ...that man named Maryan Paste’ was his name. ...We went to see the boundary marker, our boundary marker. There they all walked in a line. ...“That is not it...that is not your land,” they said about Doña Xunka.

...Then we had succeeded...

This narrative also indicates the value placed on literacy with regards to issues of private land ownership. It is licenciados who facilitate the processing of paperwork relevant to land ownership. Licenciado is the term used for anyone who has obtained a college education and at least one of the two mentioned here is likely indigenous, judging by the name (Maryan Paste’). This emphasis on literacy and private land ownership is again indicative of liberal individualism. However, Maruch also signals respect and deference in a number of ways, including the respectful terms of reference, me’ (Lines 1 and 3) in reference to Xunka’, who was trying to steal their land, and mol (Line 6) in reference to Palas, who is Maruch’s older brother and was helping to keep the family from losing their land. Interestingly, Maruch does not use a similar term of respect in reference to the licenciado, Maryan Paste’.
In addition to terms of respect, Maruch also uses verbs such as *tsob* / to gather together (Line 3) and *meltsaj* / to resolve conflicts (Line 7). These are often used in reference to meetings or gatherings of traditional healers or community leaders (*tsob*) and the processes by which they resolve disputes (*meltsaj*), thereby carrying connotations associated with hierarchical structures of authority. The direct references to both local authorities and state officials are of interest as well. The local authorities are the *comunales*, who are responsible for settling land disputes and are considered to be a subset of the traditional hierarchy. The state officials are those in San Cristóbal and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, to whom Zinacantecos often go when they want to bypass local officials or when a case is too serious to be handled locally. In this case, it is the decision of the local authorities (the *comunales*) that prevails, despite the appeals made to state officials.

Women are clearly indicating the importance of literacy and individual rights in the negotiating of local politics. However, they also discuss local politics in ways that suggest officials themselves must embody both ideals concurrently. There is a general sentiment that certain political officials (especially the president) should be literate and educated in order to better serve the community. Juana, a member of the PRI who is illiterate but learned to speak Spanish while working with her father as a young girl, states the following:

1. *Si, el capacidad que tiene el presidente, es el estudio. Mmhmm, mas el*
2. *estudio y este, el español. Y también el corazón y la cabeza también que*
3. *piense bien, que es lo que hace. Porque si no sabe hacer nada, sí su*

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Yes, the ability that the president has is education. Mmhmm, mostly education and, well, Spanish. And also, the heart and the mind to think well, [about] what it is that he does. Because if he doesn’t know how to do anything, if his heart is not very good, and if his mind doesn’t think well, there they will… I don’t know what they will do, but they will put all the blame on him. And also, well, the help that comes, the support that he asks for, from him they just ask his signature since he doesn’t know to read or write. They just ask his signature and those that are very intelligent in reading and writing…they give the money to [them] and the poor president is left there with only the signature.

At the time there was much speculation that the current president, who was just beginning his term, did not know how to read, write or speak Spanish well. This is of significant concern to the community because of the possibility that valuable governmental resources will be mismanaged and, as Juana implies, those who are literate will effectively control the resources. Thus, a president must possess a range of qualities that enable him to be a successful leader – not only must he be educated, and therefore better able to negotiate in wider political realms, but he also must possess integrity of heart and mind (as Juana indicates in Lines 2 and 4) in order to maintain respect within the community.
In Tsotsil many references to one’s character and state of being (health, happiness, honesty, etc.) are phrased in terms of the heart, or o’onil. For example, to say that someone is of poor character in Tsotsil is chopol yo’on / a bad heart. To speak of someone’s intentions or desires is sk’an yo’on / the heart wants. (See Laughlin 2002 for more on heart metaphors in Tsotsil.) So even though Juana is speaking Spanish here, as a native Tsotsil speaker references to the heart likely have much broader implications regarding the president’s character and ability to lead within established hierarchies. Thus, in complex, yet overt ways, what might be considered traditional ideals of leadership are linked with presumably modern ideals.

**Legitimizing Changing Traditions**

The rise of the PRD has resulted in the locally perceived increase of communal conflict, which Zinacantecos articulate in terms of political factions. This conflict is often linked to unequal access to resources, specifically government funding. The distribution of government resources is based almost entirely on party membership. Even religious fiestas are organized by political affiliation so that, for example, the PRI, the PRD, and the PAN, each hires its own band at large celebrations, paid for by obligatory contributions from party members, referred to in Tsotsil as tojel ak’el, or “communal tax” (translation from Laughlin 1975). These taxes are only one of the many ways in which community members are modernizing traditions. While communal taxes are arguably traditional, they are now being collected on the basis of party membership.

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30 The only assistance distributed without regard for political parties includes the living stipends provided to the elderly and the supplemental income for women who participate in the Programa Oportunidades.
While it is not clear exactly when this practice started, it is associated with the political practices of the PRD – a view that is particularly apparent in the critiques of the practice by members of the PRI and the legitimizing of the practice by members of the PRD.

As Juan, the Second Regidor, explained, the municipal government distributes the resources it receives from the state and federal governments to each of the communities within the municipio. There was considerable debate within the community regarding the ways in which resources were being distributed. It seems that previously distributions were based on the number of habitantes (jinaklejetik; from the root nak, meaning “to reside”). Now there has been a slight shift so that distributions are now determined by the number of cooperantes (jtojel ak’el), those who pay the tax (“participation”) required by their particular political party. Juan explained that cooperantes are those who cooperate, or give their participation (i.e., payments) for fiestas and so on, whereas “habitantes include women, boys, girls, and men in general.”

In the following discussion, Juan tends to slightly blur the distinctions between the two, likely because this was a rather sensitive issue in which the municipal government was being accused of partisanship, but the new practice was consistently reframed as traditional:

1. Juan: A cada comunidad también, de acuerdo al número de cooperantes,
2. numero de habitantes – cooperantes, ahora sí, vamos por cooperantes. Ya no
3. por habitantes. Porque acá el gobierno se aleja a través de usos y costumbres. Y
4. los usos y costumbres es cooperantes. Son los que cooperan en cada fiesta, en
cada, este, evento social que se hace. Porque acá cada fiesta que se realiza es cooperante, es cooperar, cada uno de los habitantes cooperan, para que se lleve acabo la fiesta.

Kristen: Pues hay habitantes que no son cooperantes?

Juan: Que no cooperan acá. Por ejemplo, como hay, acá hay dos partidos, más reconocidos, el PRI y el PRD. Entonces el PRI, coopera con su grupo también. Allí coopera.

Kristen: Aaah, aparte?

Juan: Aparte. No se juntan con nosotros. Entonces, no le toca la participación que sale acá de la presidencia.

Kristen: Y como reciben recursos?

Juan: Pues a través del, de su regidor plurinominal, gestiona también ellos creo, y...allí les dan su participación. Pero es mínima.

Kristen: Y cada comunidad recibe los recursos...igualmente para cada cooperante, cada habitante o como...como reciben?

Juan: Así es. Por cada habitante. Es que los recursos se reparten a través de número de cooperantes. Una comunidad que tiene mayor número de cooperantes recibe un poco más, y una comunidad que tiene menos cooperantes recibe un poco menos. Es así la repartición de los recursos, a través de los cooperantes.

Kristen: Ah, sí. Pues, una comunidad que tiene más del PRI recibe menos?

Juan: Sí, recibe menos. Sí.

Juan: To each community also, according to the number of cooperantes, the number of habitantes – cooperantes, now yes, we go with cooperantes. Now not by habitantes. Because here the government moves away from usos y costumbres. And the usos y costumbres is cooperantes. They are those who
cooperate in every fiesta, in every, well, social event that they have. Because here every fiesta that takes place is [by] cooperante, it is to cooperate, every one of the habitantes cooperates, so that the fiesta can be accomplished.

Kristen: So are there habitantes that are not cooperantes?

Juan: That don’t cooperate here. For example, since there are, here there are two parties, most well known, the PRI and the PRD. So the PRI cooperates with its group too. It cooperates there.

Kristen: Aaah, separate?

Juan: Separate. They do not join with us. So, they do not receive the participation that comes here from the presidencia.

Kristen: And how do they receive resources?

Juan: Well through the, from their regidor plurinominal, he manages them also I think, and...there they give their participation. But it is minimal.

Kristen: And each community receives resources...equally for each cooperante, each habitante or how...how are they received?

Juan: That’s it. For each habitante. Well the resources are divided according to the number of cooperantes. A community that has a greater number of cooperantes receives a little more, and a community that has fewer cooperantes receives a little less. That is how the distribution of resources is, according to cooperantes.

Kristen: Ah, yes. So, a community that has more PRI [members] receives less?

Juan: Yes, it receives less. Yes.

Although Juan implies at various points (Lines 2 and 20) that resources are distributed according to the number of inhabitants, he eventually confirms (in the second segment
which is from a later conversation) that the distribution of resources is, in fact, unequal. However, he nonetheless frames this practice as consistent with usos y costumbres.

Hobsbawm (2003[1983]:1) identifies such practices as “invented tradition,” which is “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” The collection of communal tax is considered traditional, but the new practice of collecting the tax based on political party often is not. The way in which it is framed by civil officials, however, implies that the practice is customary and traditional, thereby rendering it non-negotiable.

This did not prevent the members of the PRI, who received no resources from the municipal government, from protesting the practice. Some organized a “march” to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital, in order to protest to state officials and the story was even covered on national television. During a biweekly junta in Zinacantán, the president of the PRD discussed the airing of the story on television and asserted that the current practice of collecting communal tax is customary. Addressing the agents present at the meeting, he stated the following (Spanish words in bold to indicate language mixing):

1 **Chaktaje vaiun ti buch’u to oy to chim jabil no hay ningun problema. Pues le’e**
2 **oy ali muro, techo, piso, k’usi chtune. Oy to buch’u mutobuy sta’anoj ch’abal to problema. Pero ti boy xa ep xa ibat une ja k’ucha’al julemtal li **oficio trate** chtal
3 **ta viernes chamje to li takat to ik’el ox. Vaiun ja li albatal ali chaktaje**
pendientekotik ti k’usi chale oy ep k’otem kejaetik. Le’e jnajojtik xa no’ox, k’altik xa no’ox, k’ucha’al agenteoxuke, representantes. Yu’un o no’ox ikiltik k’ucha’al hay gobernador, hay presidente de la republica vaiun ja tey iyakik ta television nacional li kejaune mu jna mi oy van buch’u iyile yiliknan ta television...

Pues ja yech chkaltik chaktaje li ju jkantik ti ti jtujtik partido. Xkaltik ja yech chal pero k’usi chkaltik ta agenteetik. Ta spas ve’ik svunaltak vo’otike yu’un no’ox ta yu’un no’ox muk bu ta jtujtik no’ox. Lo único ak’o tojolajuk ak’o beneficijo ja yech li jkostumbretike – ak’o lo’ilajuk xchui agenteetik ti buy pasbil reconocer ja yech agentetak. Ja yech ta pasel li listae ja no’ox li vo’one lo’ilajkotik jpastik opinar.

So those that already have two years [of government assistance], there is no problem. So with that there are walls, ceilings, floors, which is still useful.

There are those that still have not received anything, there is no problem. But [there are] those that have received a lot and that is what the official document addresses, which was going to come on Friday, just the day before yesterday, they called me. So that is where they told me that we are pending (meaning delinquent, unsettled) regarding what they tell us because they have received many complaints. But we know, what we have said, you as agents, as representatives. Of course we saw it like with the governor, the president of the republic and that is when the complaint appeared on national television. I don’t know if any of you saw it, I think you saw it on television...

We are going to say then that it is certain what we are saying, that we do not want [it] for ourselves, in our party. We are going to say that is how it is, but what we say with the agents. That we are going to make our documents by ourselves because of course we are going to do it, not only us. The only thing we want is that they pay the communal tax with us and that they then have the benefits, because that is our custom – that they speak with the agents, who they recognize as their agents. That is how we are going to make the list. I only ask that we converse and that we state our opinions.
The president of the PRD party, who happens to also be the cousin of the municipal president, is a rather verbose man. His position is not considered part of the traditional hierarchy, but he attended all political meetings and spoke far more than any of the traditional authorities. He is referred to as “El Conde,” Conde being his surname, and Juana once told me, “Él sabe bien la política. / He knows politics very well.” This is in stark contrast to the traditional officials who are not considered politicians, but rather are more along the lines of community leaders. Thus, whenever El Conde spoke, he spoke adamantly and forcefully. In this case, he seemed to be attempting to convince the municipal agents of the importance of continuing with the “custom” of providing governmental assistance only to those who pay their communal tax to the PRD. In particular, he is encouraging the agents to not be swayed by the pressure from the state governor and President Calderón, both of whom visited Zinacantán and implicitly criticized the municipio’s partisan practices.

Throughout El Conde’s speeches he would frequently refer to the government’s means of distributing resources as “costumbre” and at key times, as in the above passage, would “Tsotsilize” the Spanish term by adding the first person possessive prefix (j-) and plural suffix (-tik), thus giving the meaning, “our custom” and rendering the custom even more customary when stated in Tsotsil as possessed by all. Although El Conde requests that the agents state their opinions, the only discussion that follows is in regards to the “list.” It is made clear that the PRD is open (“abierta”) and that government resources are available to anyone who chooses to put their name on the
list. Agents should explain this to their respective communities and be available to anyone who wants to put their name on the list. To put one’s name on the list in actuality means joining the PRD and paying the communal tax to the PRD.

Not surprisingly, this was not a satisfactory response for those who choose to remain PRI, as it gives them no option other than joining the PRD. Many members of the PRI continue to complain openly and bitterly, but apparently with no recourse. And yet, despite the frequent lamenting of recent tensions and divisions, Zinacantecos widely agree that things are better now that the government, through funding provided at state and national levels and managed at the municipal level, has begun providing electricity, water, roads and schools – crucial aspects of a modern infrastructure which are highly valued.

**Conclusion**

By drawing on the linguistic concept of register, I have attempted to demonstrate the pervasiveness of ideological pluralism in Zinacantán. Further, I suggest that such pluralism necessitates a rethinking of previous ethnographic findings in Zinacantán. While Vogt portrayed modernity as encapsulated within a traditional way of life, patterns of language use in Zinacantán imply something much more complex. Local narratives, especially those of women, reveal a discursive legitimizing of local political practice, as well as a keen awareness of shifting political ideologies. Hierarchical structures of authority are clearly integral to life in Zinacantán, but liberalism is treated
as equally integral. As such, both modern and traditional ideologies are activated through modern processes.
**Interlude – Juana**

Here Juana addresses several issues, including the importance of education and literacy, but also comments on the land she inherited from her father. Each of these issues indicates an inherent value placed on liberal individualism.

And so, from thirteen on I lived with my mom and I began to work, to make textiles, ponchos for little boys. And so, I began to learn to weave and embroider too. And so it is our custom to make food also, yes, traditional food here...

But did you study? In elementary?

No, none. They didn’t let me go...Because I have two little brothers to take care of. Yes, so my mom wouldn’t let me. Yes...and so, I didn’t study...so I learned Spanish when I began to sell. I understood how people talked and what they said...

Where?

To sell here in the...well...there was no Casa de la Cultura.\(^{31}\) We were piling [our textiles] up there, showing them to people. We had some bundles like this...we had to haul them, like in San Cristóbal in the park. Yes, that’s how we were here too. There wasn’t any place to sell... So that’s how we did the work...

So, how did you learn Spanish?

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\(^{31}\) The Casa de la Cultura is a cultural center that has stalls available for rent where women can display and sell their textiles.
Well, just by how people speak, what people say, so I...I don’t know how I understood. I just understood that’s all. Yes, I understood people...I listen to them speaking...and I remembered it in my...my memory and, so I learned. So I learned without reading, without writing, without a teacher, without whatever, nothing. Yes, right now I know how to speak a little and I know a few letters too because I went to study in INEA, and a guy that works there taught me. Yes, and so I learned to read and write, a little, not much but, more or less. I didn’t continue because I didn’t want to study alone. There were twenty of us, and most of them didn’t want to study and I was the only one that remained. And the guy didn’t want to teach only one person either. So, that’s why he stopped studying and teaching and I stopped studying. Since now that I am an adult, well, I don’t have time, I have to work and I have kids and I can’t do any of that.

And how did you learn Tsotsil?

Tsotsil? It was when we were little kids, like our...like my dad and my mom spoke to my siblings, they always spoke Tsotsil. Yes. And me too they spoke to me like that so, as a baby, yes, as a little kid. And we always speak like that, to babies. And that’s how they remember, I believe, because that is how we remember it... (laughs) the language we speak, which is ours...

When you were a girl, did you go to San Cristóbal much or not?

Yes, when I was a girl, I went to San Cristóbal but not walking like before. I went in a truck. But it left twice a day, no more. Yes, if you didn’t catch it, well, then you walked. Yes, there were only two (laughs). I traveled to Tuxtla, to San Cristóbal, when I was little.

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32 Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos / National Institute for Adult Education
Yes, since my dad, well, he has a stall in Tuxtla, and my sister, she also likes to go to Tuxtla to sell. Yes, she takes me, and my aunt also likes to go.

So, you went to sell?

Yes, to sell flowers, vegetables, fruit... whatever there was because there are pears, peaches, apples, chayote, chard. Down there we had a lot, like, chard, radish... Yes, my father plants it. And we came to work here too. Yes, this land is from my dad. Yes, we planted a lot of milpa. And my brothers were put to work in Tuxtla too, and the others study. Yes, that’s why there’s nothing now to make the milpa. And, well, then we stopped doing it, so, we don’t have it. Now we don’t have any flowers, nothing. Milpa, yes, but not flowers.
Chapter 8

Political Ideologies in Personal Narrative

“Nuestro mundo está lleno de historias. / Our world is full of stories.”

- Alejandra Lopez Perez

This chapter focuses on a narrative by a woman named Maruch, who has lived in the municipio of Zinacantán for most of her life – aside from a few months she spent in San Cristóbal with her godmother. Maruch is approximately eighty years old, presumably born sometime between 1915 and 1920, though she has no birth certificate. Her story begins with her grandfather, a powerful healer who was likely born between 1870 and 1880, then moves on to a discussion of her parents, who were likely born during the 1890s or early 1900s.

Now Maruch lives in the cabecera with her daughter, Margarita, and her granddaughter, Alejandra, whom Maruch raised. They are, in Alejandra’s words, a “modest” family who has faced many difficulties throughout their lives. Alejandra attributes their ability to overcome adversity, in part, to their religious faith as “Evangelicos” (Seventh Day Adventist). I had first met Maruch two years earlier while taking Tsotsil classes and spent a considerable amount of time in her home thereafter. Because Maruch does not speak Spanish, I first spoke with Alejandra about recording both her and her grandmother’s life histories. She immediately agreed and seemed eager to do so.
Over the course of two days, we recorded both of their life histories, as well as Alejandra’s summary of her grandmother’s story in Spanish. The bulk of this time, however, was spent recording Maruch’s narrative. The version that appears here is from the original Tsotsil, as narrated by Maruch. In the interest of space it has been shortened, but is still in the order it was told by Maruch. I have divided the narrative into sections and include a brief discussion at the end of each section of relevant themes.

In a discussion of narrative analysis, Gubrium and Holstein (1998:164) use the term “‘narrative practice’ to characterize simultaneously the activities of storytelling, the resources used to tell stories, and the auspices under which stories are told.” In this case, Maruch’s story was told under the auspices of ethnographic research. The four of us, Maruch, Alejandra, Margarita, and I, sat in their bedroom, which doubles as a sort of living room. Maruch spoke directly to Alejandra, who listened attentively and occasionally asked brief questions. Margarita also listened and would comment or join in every now and then. It seems, however, that the narrative was intended for and directed toward Alejandra. The events that comprise the narrative all occurred prior to, or just after, Alejandra’s birth (approximately 1980). However, Alejandra was already familiar with most of the stories and at times would ask specific questions in order to clarify or to direct her grandmother’s narrative. Although Alejandra attempted to elicit a sort of linear, chronological narrative, Maruch tells her story in a way that highlights the

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33 Maruch’s narrative was later transcribed and translated into Spanish by Alejandra and another young woman who helped me with Tsotsil transcriptions. I then worked from both the Tsotsil and Spanish transcripts to translate the narrative into English.
salient issues and struggles she faced throughout her life and implicitly addresses the ways in which political ideologies relate to her struggles.

Throughout my analysis of Maruch’s narrative, I employ the technique of “analytic bracketing” in order to “focus on one aspect of narrative practice while temporarily suspending analytic interest in the others” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998:165). Though there is much in Maruch’s story that warrants consideration, for the purposes of the present analysis I focus on the aspects of her life that relate to ideological pluralism, i.e., the simultaneous respect for traditional hierarchies alongside an inherent value of liberal individualism. Considering the historical depth of Maruch’s narrative, which includes not only her own life experiences but also those of her parents and grandparents, it seems that such pluralism is not a recent occurrence. Rather, Maruch’s stories suggest that ideological pluralism is, and has been, integral to Zinacanteco “tradition.”

Historical narratives do not simply reflect ideologies, however. Dinwoodie (2002) observes that historical narratives among the Tsilhqut’in draw on the past in order to contextualize relevant contemporary themes. In other words, “(t)o approach the ‘present’ as it is understood locally . . . one must become attuned to ideas that were generated in the past” (Dinwoodie 2002:7). In Maruch’s narrative, ideas generated in the past are actively rendered concordant with modern ideologies, indicating continuities between past and present politics in Zinacantán.

In a discussion of political thought among the Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka), Harkin (1998:319) utilizes oral narrative to demonstrate a native “theory of politics.”
Oral narratives are widely recognized as important historical sources. . . in addition to providing historical data, they contain modes of interpretation embedded within their narrative form. . . Stories about the past are always a central element of human institutions, especially political ones, and encode their main ideals and values (Harkin 1998:320).

While Harkin (1998) is referring more generally to narratives of myths, Maruch’s stories suggest that the same is true of personal narratives, which point to patterns of political “ideals and values.”

Paralleling the ideological pluralism evident in Maruch’s stories is a mixing of both Western and non-Western notions of the self, reflected in varying narrative styles. On the one hand, certain aspects of Maruch’s narrative contrast with modern Western assumptions that “the experiences narrated in a legitimate life history are unique to the narrator” (Oakdale 2005:4). In this respect, Maruch’s stories are similar to Kayabi narratives, such as those documented by Oakdale, in that “(n)arrators (and audience members) are involved in a process of identification with the experience of others, including members of other ethnic groups, spirits, and deceased individuals” (2005:4). Much of Maruch’s “life history” consists of the experiences of her parents, grandparents and other relatives. Through the telling of these stories, Maruch gives her daughter and granddaughter the opportunity to identify with these others’ experiences and also uses them to frame our own life “story.” On the other hand, Maruch emphasizes her identity as an individual, consistent with Western notions of the self. This is especially true in regards to Maruch’s interactions within traditional hierarchies in Zinacantán, against which she often struggled. Maruch’s various experiences reveal the challenges faced by
one individual who, throughout her life, has attempted to realize her “self” as she negotiated the complexities of modern traditions.

**Relevant Themes**

Maruch’s narrative highlights a number of ethnographically significant themes, including kinship, inheritance and the supernatural. These topics have been documented in great detail in other studies of Zinacantán, particularly by Vogt (1969), but here I offer a brief overview to provide some background for Maruch’s narrative.

Descent is clearly patrilineal, while inheritance of land and house sites tends to be patrilineal with, as Vogt (1969:229) observes, “an ideal of equal distribution among sons.” However, as we see in Maruch’s narrative, both she and her mother inherited land. This does not seem to be uncommon, as numerous other Zinacantecas have inherited land from their parents, along with their male siblings.

Conceptualizations of a hierarchical order are pervasive in Zinacanteco life, especially with regards to ritual, but these ideas also shape familial relations. Consider the following diagram of political authority in Zinacantán (from Vogt 1969:288):
For most purposes, women are considered to be under the authority of men throughout their lives, but the ways in which this authority plays out varies from case to case. Nonetheless, adherence to a hierarchical ideal impacts women’s lives significantly, as Maruch’s narrative reveals.

The realm of the supernatural plays an important role in Zinacantán and includes a complex array of gods. The world is conceptualized as consisting of three parts: the earth (*balamil*), the sky/heavens (*vinajel*) and the underworld (*olon balamil*). Each is
occupied by distinct supernatural beings, but the one most relevant to Maruch’s story is the Earth Lord. Vogt (1969:302-3) gives the following description of the Earth Lord:

[The Earth Lord] has multiple manifestations in that any opening in the form of a cave or limestone sink or waterhole constitutes a means of communication with him. . . . Communication with the Earth Lord is viewed with ambivalence. On the one hand, there are glorious myths about men’s acquiring riches in the form of money or livestock by going to visit the Earth Lord’s cave. On the other hand, the Earth Lord needs many workers, and there is danger that a person’s soul will get “sold” to him as a servant for years – until the iron sandals given each worker wear out.

In Maruch’s discussion of her great grandfather, she relates various occasions in which he communicated with gods, who seem quite similar to the Earth Lord in Vogt’s description. Though aspects of Maruch’s story are consistent with early accounts of Zinacantán, her narrative also complicates such views, necessitating a reconsideration of previous ethnographic findings.
Figure 30: Maruch (center) with her daughter Margarita (left) and granddaughter Alejandra (right)

Maruch’s Story

Alejandra: ...when they ran you out, just like when you usually talk, so tell her...

Maruch: It was when they went to Isquipula when... I don’t know what the place is called.

Alejandra: I don’t know either. You just tell how it was... You just tell about the suffering that cured your mother.

Margarita: Yes, that, when he went into the cave, like they told it, you tell it...

Alejandra: Yes, like that, but tell it to me and then I’ll tell it to Kris also.

Maruch: Ah, and, and can she understand? Will she understand?
Alejandra: I think she will understand some of it.

Maruch: Ah, should I talk first about my mother?

Alejandra: Yes, go ahead mamita.

The Grandfather Seeks an Heir

Maruch: My mother had a grandfather. She had a grandfather, but they didn’t have a grandson... Well they had their daughter-in-law but they didn’t have a grandson. So, “Let’s go to ask, in the lowlands in Isquipula,” they said. So they went. We say that that is in the lowlands. They went, to the lowlands they went. “Take one of these rocks,” said the grandfather. “Take a rock,” he said. I don’t know what size of rock it was. “Put it in your waistband like this,” he said. So, she put it in her waistband like that and left. They went walking down and left. Then our grandfather came to talk, where this god was found, which is Isquipula. He came then, he came to pray. He was in the water, down in the water. Apparently they were looking down in the water and there was a person. There was our god; he was down in the water. So he asked him and the man began to cry because his son didn’t have a son. This was when there was only one son. This is why they say that he said, “Who will receive the plots? Who will receive the land? There is no one.” So, “It is better that I go with her. I will go down with her,” he said. “Well, go then,” and so he went. They say that he came to speak; he came to say that he asked for a son. Then, “Take the rock out,” they say he said. “Put it on the ground,” he said. Then he put the rock on the ground...

Alejandra: Where did he put it? At the side...
Maruch: There beside the water I think. Did you know that there was water there? He put the rock there and the old man began to speak. He solicited his children, well, his grandchildren. When he finished speaking they returned. Then surprisingly one night there was a baby. So at dawn the woman was pregnant. There was the baby, there moving inside, it was there moving. “Now you see what I tell you, we have succeeded. It is well,” said the poor old man, because the truth was he had no grandsons. “Ah, we have succeeded, it is well,” they say he said. “Let us see, let us see then,” they say that he said. Then I think they looked for a midwife, they looked for someone who could take care, who could care for...

Alejandra: They say that our grandfather was a healer?

Maruch: He was a healer. They say that he was a healer. They looked for someone to take the baby in, and then the months with the baby passed. It didn’t last long. I don’t know how many months the pregnancy lasted. Then the baby was born, but what happened is that he got a little annoyed. The father got mad at the baby and the baby transformed into a girl. It should have been a boy but no, it transformed into a girl. “Ay, why did I do this?” they say the man said. Then the baby was born. “But that’s all right even if it is a girl. It is fine with me,” said the poor man then...

Alejandra: But how did they know it transformed into a girl?

Maruch: I don’t know. I can’t tell you how it happened, only that it did. That’s how my mother transformed into a girl. She should have been a boy and transformed into a girl. “Ah well no matter, she is already in the world. It is good help for me,” he said. Then up the road came his older brother. The little girl had grown. She had grown and was now
big. Then, the poor old man, he cared for her very much. He knew how to play the guitar. He went to find little peaches. She began to... smash them with... like crush them and smash them. Then she smashed her hand and began to cry for her hand. He began to dance and got his guitar... So, that is how our grandfather was. Then, that is how he distracted the little girl that got hurt, and how he calmed her and healed her. So in truth he loved his granddaughter very much. Then all was well. Her younger brother had been born, so there was another child and it was a son that came then. It was a boy, who is the grandfather, they say, of Romin Ruiz. They say it was a long time before there was a new little brother and it was boy. “Ah, really now it is very good. We have succeeded,” said the poor old man. “Now that I have a son of my own, I feel very proud,” he said. Then the man didn’t have any worries because he had a grandson.

The importance of a male heir is very apparent in this segment, as is a reliance on the supernatural. The baby should have been a boy but because of an unfortunate occurrence was transformed into a girl. The girl was Maruch’s mother and so Maruch’s life was marked by misfortune – in this case, supernatural – even before she was born.

Of Caves and Wealth

Alejandra and Margarita: Your grandfather, it is your grandfather that went into caves?

Maruch: Aha, he also went into the cave, he knew how to enter caves. He went through this world knowing many things. The poor old man, they asked for his wealth. There was a snake that was very wide. When he found it, it was a little donkey about this
big...There were many where there was water, like this here... there were many donkeys when the land was made a long time ago. But the donkeys were this size. You could hear the donkeys saying, “jits’ jits’ jits’.” “Oh, those donkeys,” they said and the deceased old man went quickly to get one. When he arrived there was a snake and who knows how he saw it. There was a snake coiled up. He was scared by it and our grandfather distracted it. He got a wand like those that they say have leaves and are still little plants, and went to clean it. He didn’t want to touch the snake. It scared him. I think it scared him. He got it... and then suddenly stopped. And that little donkey was this size. Quickly he put it in his arms. He took it in his arms to his house...

Alejandra: His house has always been in Sok’on?

Maruch: Yes.

Alejandra: Your house was always in Sok’on?

Maruch: It is still there, but you would have to walk very far from here because these lands didn’t have an owner. There were very few of us. That is why we were very far apart. So, he arrived to his house and went to put it in his house. He went to put it in a trunk like the trunk we have here. He put it inside. He was going to guard it and when he was going to open it the money he found was Mexican coins and that’s how he had money. Visitors came and people thought the house was very strange. It was a house with a tall pointed roof. It was very high up...

Alejandra: Like the house of the virgin in San Cristóbal?

Maruch: Like in San Cristóbal. The little animal transformed. He slipped it under the roof of the house. Then some visitors came to the house, like when someone visits us. . . . So
they came, “Look grandfather Lukax. Look at the snake on your house,” the people said, frightened. “Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid. It is my pet,” said the old man. So he was rich, but... they had grass mats outside of the house and laid the money out in the sun. He was very rich when he lived in this land. He entered caves. He went into Isak’tik. He went into Lach Chikin. He went into... the land had small openings and he entered...

“What do you want?” they said to him. “What would you like? What do you come to do to me? What are you looking for?” they said. “I didn’t come to look for anything. I only came to visit. I just came to see you,” he said. “But there is something that you want. You want a cow? What... what do you want?” they said. “Ah, that’s it.” Suddenly there was nothing. There was a nicely folded cow skin there. “What are we going to do with this?” said the old man again. When he was inside the cave, “What is this?” he said. “Oh that is nothing. It is a cow. Do you want the cow? Do you want to play with it?” they said. “You are going to play with it.” But... I think that because of this he had a very strong heart. “Fine,” he said, “that will come later,” he said. “Fine, take the rope” and so they gave it to him and gave him another three more times. And suddenly he found the cow standing there. “Well look,” it was said to him. “Look,” they said. “You want to catch it?” they said. I don’t know, I think that he did get it. He did catch it and he didn’t ask for it. He didn’t want it. He just wanted to explore inside the cave. Inside the caves our grandfather walked. Also on the land in Chilo’. Now those were the lands of our grandfather, the grandfather of my mother, when she lived, or we could say when she grew up. So that was her grandfather. He also went into that cave... suddenly the edge of the cave was small, but the old man could enter only if he knew how to open the door,
or, I don’t know… and he entered and came out and brought a turtle about this size. He brought it in his hand. “Look,” he said again. “Aaaaa,” they said. “Where did you find that?” they would say. “Where did you find that?” they said. “Ah, I found it there inside the cave but you’re not going to…touch it. You all can’t touch it, only me. I just wanted to show it to you,” he said then. “Aaaa,” they answered. He went into the cave again…he went to leave it again. But the deceased old man knew everything…

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The grandfather of Maruch’s mother was very knowledgeable and had the ability to enter caves. The caves referred to here are very small openings, often where a natural spring comes out of a mountainside. Because this man had these special abilities he became wealthy. This is reflective of beliefs pertaining to the cosmic order (hierarchy). It is not hard work that is valued (as in particular Western ideals), but rather it is his knowledge of the supernatural that allowed him to acquire wealth.

**Land**

*Maruch:* Well the grandfather of my mother, oooh, that old man was so rich. He was so good. That’s how my childhood was. Well, really the old man was very good… because of that my mother lit candles for him when she was alive. And I began to become aware. I lit candles for him and would go to visit him. But that’s because he had his land in Avanebal. He had land…in Mexa Ton or Xila Ton, or what is the land called that is down there… by San Antonio. The old man had all that land.

*Alejandra:* San Antonio is there in the lowlands.
Maruch: Down there, yes in the lowlands. Yes... there, but the old man was rich. He had horses and other things. He went on horseback. You see, before there were no cars. It wasn’t like now, you see. There are only big roads, just big roads. No, there were only little paths. If you had a horse, you could see like him, travel like him. He went and traveled, went to see his plot in Mexa Ton, went to check his land in Xila Ton, went to see his lands in... very far away. He had much land. That’s why before, my mother had land. Everyone had land. But it was taken by other people and my mother also was involved in stealing land. She had much land in Nachij, there in Jech Ch’entik, as we call it, Jech... onte’ tik or whatever it’s called. It is over there... and it was owned by the deceased Romin Ruiz. He came to rep... he is the one who came to ask the... the... the son of Lukax Ruiz, the younger brother of my mother.

Alejandra: Aaah, yes, yes...

Maruch: Uuhh, so, he came to ask for the land, when they had realized. There were two of them.

Alejandra: He only had two children, the young boy?

Maruch: Two, I don’t know why. There were two. A girl and a boy and they lived in Nachij. It was the older sister of Romin. So... then they came to ask for the land and she gave it to her. My mother gave it to them. “I am going to give it to you but I’ll give the land on the other side, and it is very extensive. It is not small. These lands here I am not going to give you,” she said. They were going to ask for the land by Sok’on. They were going to ask... for the land that is closer to us, my mother thought. She didn’t give it to them because she knew what their intentions were. But I don’t know how it was that my
mother was able to keep the papers for the land. She had the papers saved. I don’t know
how. She had the papers for the land hidden. Her name was on them and that’s one
thing my mother knew a lot about. She read them. She gave them to another person to
read because she didn’t know how to read, but she looked for someone... someone...
who could read very well or someone who knew how to read. “This is it that I will give
you. This is what I will give you,” she said. “Look at my papers,” she said and she
received complaints. “So it is,” said the people.

Alejandra: Where was...the son of your mother, the one named Lukax, where did he go?

Maruch: He died.

Alejandra: Aaah.

Maruch: And only two of his children remained. There were just two, a girl and a boy
also. We don’t know why, and that is how my mother grew up with only two of them.

Alejandra: What was the story of your mother?

Maruch: Well, that was her story.

Alejandra: Yes, how did your mother grow up? How did she grow old that her...

Maruch: Aaa, that I don’t remember...

Alejandra: How did she marry your father, like when she was young, when she was...

Maruch: Aaa, they went to ask why the engagement (bride price) was so much... the one
who asked previously had actually lost. Before... if there was some girl that had already
grown up a little, even if she was still young, when we have grown up a little to this size,
we are ready. When you have grown up a little more, then they come to take a person
away. Then they take her away for several years, sometimes for five or six years. They
were old-fashioned before. Is it like that now? Now it is very different. So that is how my mother left. They took her away. She got married. She married my father. Now the grandchildren... the children of her older brother, it was in those days that they became aware. It was when they came to ask for her land, when they were aware. They came to ask and she gave them a little bit of land – Jech Noktik...as we say...Jech Noktik. But...the land was very extensive. Beside all of it there was pine forest and that is what my mother gave them, those lands that were taken away. There was a person who we knew as Chep Xankik, one part was already occupied, but there was a question as to why my mother won. They returned to ask, yes, they went to get the... comunales in order to go and see how to measure the land. Yes, like it said there in the papers. So, “We can’t do anything Don Chep,” they said to the person that was already occupying the land. “We can’t do anything Don Chep. These lands already have an owner. Now we can’t do anything else. You could just fence off what was unoccupied when the owners weren’t aware,” they said. “So now that they are aware they came to ask, but... here it is... here it is in the papers,” they said then. The papers were a yellowish color, because they didn’t have boxes like we have now. Yes, yes, then triumph, “Well, you will have to leave,” they told him. “But I have occupied this for a long time. I have been working in this place for a long time,” he said. “Even though you have been here a long time, even though that’s how it has been. What are we going to do if it says here in the paper? How are you going to rob them?” they told him. “You can’t steal it,” they told him. “Well then that’s how it is,” he said with amazement. So they left him. My mother gave him a little bit, a little piece of
land without trees. There he stayed and there he died. That was in Nachij. When he passed to the other side, he left his land. I think they sold it then.

Margarita: Yes, they sold it.

Maruch: So that’s how it was, how my mother and father lived.

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Maruch identifies land as a form of wealth, noting how rich the grandfather was because of all the land he owned. Whereas this land was acquired because of his knowledge of the supernatural, Maruch’s mother was able to maintain ownership of the land possessed due to a very different type of knowledge. Maruch’s mother was not literate, but she recognized the role of literacy and the importance of official documents in conflicts over land. She knew her (individual) rights as a land owner and also knew the varying values of particular types of land. This allowed her not only to keep the land of her choice when her relatives requested land from her, but also to regain control of her land that had been illegally occupied by someone else.

Growing Up, “My Father was Rich.”

Alejandra: And you, how did you grow up?

Maruch: Me, I came later... I was becoming aware. I was very small...

Margarita: There in the same place your mother settled down? Where she grew up, did you grow up there too?

Maruch: I grew up there...

Margarita and Alejandra: Aaaah.
Maruch: I grew up there, in the place where my mother’s house was.

Margarita and Alejandra: Aaaah, yes.

Maruch: So, we grew up. My siblings began to become aware. My... my mother and father also. Antun and my brother Palas began to be aware. It was when they divided their lands that were there also. . . . Then we grew up. The others looked for wives and few of us were left. It was good after a while. I learned to weave... and my father learned to work. I learned to weave and so learned to help my father. Before he had a horse, he had a little horse. They bought it when his two sons were there.

Alejandra: Aaa.

Maruch: My father, my father had learned some things. He ground his nixtamal (corn dough). He would wet it in... inside the metate. He ground and ground it, just him. And we say that is a bit of wealth...

Alejandra: Mmmhmm.

Maruch: But of course it was he who could grind the fastest. Now, people buy it... They said there were some little mills with which we could now grind our coffee. This time my father was the one who bought it. Then we ground our nixtamal like that. He ground...he ground it in the mill when we realized that. Afterwards, we would press it because the masa came out in one piece because we still couldn’t run it again. It was very difficult. Since I was the only one... there were two of us, but wherever my mother and father went I was the one who had to feed the workers...

Alejandra: Aaaa.
Maruch: Yes, like I said before there were workers. “Please do us the favor Maryan.”

Maryan Ulo’ is what our worker was called. Don Maryan was his name. There were two and one was younger. It was his brother. They slept inside the temascal. That’s where our workers slept. Then, “I am going to visit. I can’t do anything here with you all.

Please come to wake my daughter at dawn. Come to wake my little ones. Come to wake my daughters so that they can make a fire,” he said then. “All right,” she said. “Remember you have to make tortillas,” he told us before leaving. “All right,” we said.

We already knew that we had to make tortillas. The tortillas were already in order. But not… not the poor Chamulan. Knock knock knock, on the door. “What?” we said to him because we had already heard him. “Can you get up and make the fire? It is almost dawn,” he came to tell us. Afterwards he was still going to sleep. So then we washed up… we ground our nixtamal, then we made tortillas. Then they came to eat. We heated up our beans. The fire was going well, yes because there was wood like we have now… That’s how our tortillas were made and our workers ate. And they went… after finishing eating, they went to work the land…

Alejandra: They went to work.

Maruch: They went to work. That’s how it was every day, every day…

Alejandra: Aaaa.

Maruch: Yes, my father was rich. When I began to be aware, he started to cultivate all of Sok’on, also what was on the other side of the road, Vet’s land…

Alejandra: Ah, yes.

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34 Ulo’ is a term used in Zinacantán to refer reciprocally to a person from Chamula.
35 A temascal is small building used for a steam bath.
Maruch: Now it was still on this side. My father cultivated it. He looked for cows. Although...from Ravol they raised cows, all the way up to Ravol they worked the land. Then he worked cows, it was all cows, those who took over the land...

Alejandra: Aha.

Maruch: Then the worker came just to make small plots. Then that was when the milpa was planted. I also learned to weave and helped with everything there was to sell... what my parents sold. There was fresh corn. Corn was abundant. I shucked my father’s corn, and sold it. He sold the corn and with that went to buy a horse.

Alejandra: Aaaa.

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Here Maruch emphasizes yet another type of knowledge – the practical knowledge required to work and make a living. She gained this knowledge as she grew up. Her father was also learning as he acquired more land, hired workers to cultivate his land and began to run cattle. Their wealth was evident in the abundant corn that allowed her father to buy a horse, which at that time was a sign of one’s economic success.

Family Troubles

Maruch: Well, but I put up with a lot. Well...later I told my older brother, “But seriously our dad, our mom, they say that you have to let it go finally, they tell me.” But you saw that I wanted to cry when I say this, every time I remember that.

Alejandra: Aaa.
Maruch: So, it hurt my heart greatly. Well, I cried when I talked to my brother. “Antun,” I told him, “What,” he said. Well, “This... that is what our parents are saying,” I told him. “And well... well... they are becoming jealous and running me out of the house, that I must leave,” I told him then. “And that is what they tell me,” I told him. “Ay but why are they really doing that? They are getting crazy,” he said surprised. “No, I imagine because...” he said. “I don’t really know,” I told him. “Now what do you think?” he said. “I don’t know where to go,” I told him. “You think I know where to go?” I told him. “I really don’t know. It occurred to me to leave home,” I told him. “But where are you going to go?” “I don’t know where to go. I can’t figure out where to go,” I told him. “I had said that I would go with my godmother,” I told him. Since I had my godmother in San Cristóbal, who is the grandmother Lupa, the younger sister of the mother of the priest, Father Juan, they called him. Well then, “I will go to her since she is my godmother,” I told him. “Aa,” he said. “It’s fine,” he said. “Look,” he told me then, “if you want to go, then you have to go,” he said. “But even if you have to put up with a little more,” he said. “I will put up with a little then,” I told him. I put up with it one more time after I told my brother. So I got up early that time that...well I am always that way, that I get up early when it’s almost dark still. I don’t know how to sleep much.

Alejandra: Uhuh.

Maruch: Before, one time when I got up, I wash my nixtamal immediately. I wash my nixtamal, I grind my nixtamal, when I grew up. So I was going to make my tortillas and suddenly my mom got mad. She got out of bed. I don’t know what she blamed me for.
She got out of her bed and came over where our fire was. It was the kitchen where the old man and woman slept and we slept in the big house, so we slept there on the floor.

Alejandra: Aa.

Maruch: “There where you are sleeping, you brought your bed,” she said. I was already there putting my little bed away, it was just one plank. It was really small where I slept, since I slept alone. Well, I don’t remember how it began. I forgot how it was that the problem began when I got mad. Then I got mad and in a moment my mom began to yell.

She got up quickly and came toward me. “Is it your custom to not pay any mind to orders, to advice? Is that why anyone can make you sad and you leave?” That is what they told me various times, why I was said to leave for somewhere else...(begins crying)

Alejandra (to Margarita): Bring a little bit of water so that mom can drink.

Maruch: So, I got up. I washed my metate, my ax, I smoothed my masa, I got mad. So my mom got up. “Of course you are like this. You are already very deceitful,” she told me.

“Aaa,” I told her. So already they didn’t believe me. “But... but you want to be here. That’s fine. Get out,” she told me. So that is when I answered her, when she told me to go away, get out. “I can go,” I told her. “I can go mother. I can go since I am bored here with you, if you don’t want me here,” I told her. That was the reason why I left. “Take it!” said my father, coming quickly toward me. He had taken out his leather strap. He slapped me with it so that I would leave, but I was standing there grinding my corn. He came toward me to hit me on the butt. With a burst my father hit me. Aaa but I was... we didn’t cry like now. So they beat me with the leather strap. I left...

Alejandra: Do you want some water mom?
Maruch: I left, I left there... I got my... my... I got my... clothes, my metate. I washed them and the grinding stone. I set them aside, then... then I didn’t move. I wasn’t able to listen, to answer when they beat me. I just got my things together, my clothes, I washed my metate, my ax, before leaving. I was going to get my petate. I put it with my blanket. Then I left. I went to find my brother, but I didn’t spend much time there. “Go to Palas’s house,” he told me. “See it is better that you go. I will go and leave you so that you can stay with Palas, because it is farther away, because our parents walk right by [here]” he said. And he was right. They would go right by there. “Palas lives farther away,” he told me. “All right,” I told him. So I had to go. “She could stay here. She could stay here with you. Otherwise, well, they would blame me if she stays with me,” they said amongst themselves. “That is true because you live very close,” they said. “Whereas you live farther away,” he said. “That is true. I live farther away,” he said. I lived there for awhile...but not too long. I couldn’t stand to be with Doña Chepa. They lived poorly. They put the nixtamal on the fire, then took it out and ground it undercooked when it had just been in the fire a little while. Well, I went calmly to visit my brother every now and then. When Doña Chepa came back she was mad. I think she wanted me to be there all the time. She didn’t want me to go visiting. “Well what am I going to do?” I said. So again I told my brother, “But it’s just that Chepa behaves this way,” I told him. “Well what are we going to do? Go to where your godmother lives. I will tell Palas and we will lie a little,” said my brother. He knows a lot of things. “I am going to lie a little,” he said. Well, “If you want, Palas, I think it would be better. I heard rumors around that they are going to come to take Maruch, our parents will come to take her,” he said. “I think it is better
that she goes to stay with her godmother, since her godmother is still alive,” he said.

Then Doña Lupa was still alive.

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Although it is not entirely clear why Maruch left her parents’ house, it was obviously a very emotional experience for her and to this day is difficult for her to recount. She indicates that her father was abusive and the respect with which she spoke of her father previously is no longer apparent. Upon leaving home, Maruch relied on ties of kinship (her older brothers Antun and Palas) and compadrazgo (her godmother in San Cristóbal) for support but, according to her account, the decision to leave was her own.

Forced Marriage

Maruch: Four months I was in San Cristóbal. Then I left. Oh but she was very good. She didn’t yell at me, nothing. With my godmother, I slept, so my godmother slept like this and I slept like this. My godmother really was very good. Then they went to take me from there. They went to ask for me there. I don’t know how it occurred to them to do that, to ask for me. There was… they spoke very well with my mother. So they found me in San Cristóbal. So they say that my mother didn’t want to give me away, that she just began to yell at the people. My mother and my father were very mad. “That is your ruse. It is your habit to do all these things, that you just make your daughters ashamed,” my brother said unexpectedly, when he realized what my parents did. “You who are doing this, you are a vain person. Perhaps you aren’t able to answer well. Perhaps you aren’t able to receive everything that they came to give,” he said again.
Alejandra: Your older brother?

Maruch: My older brother said that. So they sat down to hear what the people had to say there in my older brother’s house. He went to ask my brother Antun, “It’s just that they want her. It’s just that... really... we already ate, we already drank,” he came to say. He came to say that in San Cristóbal. “Well with that, so it is, she has to go... I think she will get along well with the boy. Of course I know the boy. I know him, he is a good boy,” he said again and again. “It would be good for her to go, for her to get married. That is best. Of course she will suffer some when she leaves here to go there,” he said because they had told him, they talked to him about how I left. I didn’t get along well with the boy. So that is how I left.

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Even after leaving home, Maruch’s parents still had authority over her. It is likely that her father agreed to the marriage based on social obligations of his own. Because the ritual of eating and drinking together had been carried out, Maruch was obliged to comply with the arranged marriage, against her own wishes.

Parents Divorce

Maruch: And my suffering was plenty growing up. Then when I got married... I didn’t have children for awhile. Five years I didn’t have children. I went on alone. Well they gave me a horse then. He came then, “Have one of these horses,” he said.

Alejandra: Aaah.
Maruch: Then, “I hand it over to you.” Then they arrived leading the horse, my older brother. I didn’t inherit anything from my parents. Absolutely nothing. That’s how I was left, like now. My parents had sheep, they had horses. But they didn’t give me anything, nothing. That is how I grew up before. Ah but I got married. Unfortunately my parents had fought. They separated...

Alejandra: Were you already married?

Maruch: I was already married when my parents separated. I was already married... although then I still didn’t have children. So it was. He left. I realized when they separated, well I will not understand why they separated, I don’t know...

Alejandra: Aaah.

Maruch: I just realized that they said that it was my father who beat a lot. That I understood. So my mother went to find me where I was, “I will go over to her,” she said. “I will go to Maruch,” she said. Unfortunately she only kept her mouth shut for a little while, and, because I don’t spend the whole day at home, I go other places. We had a little piece of land in Chilo’. My mother had already divided Chilo’ and as inheritance I had one part.

Alejandra: Aa, yes.

Maruch: We had already planted on that land. We came to harvest our milpa...I don’t remember which fiesta it was, if it was San Sebastian, something like that. We came to harvest our milpa. They were the last plantings. But I had not realized that my mother had left. We had gathered it all and when I came back I didn’t find my mother there, nor was she at my house. She was not used to living in my house, because I couldn’t stay
there. I couldn’t remain there, not with her in the house, with her sitting there alone. So it was. But it was because we harvested for a long time. So when I arrived she wasn’t there. Everything was clean. She wasn’t there. Her metate had been taken, she had a metate. “Where did my mother go?” I said. “Where did my mother go? Perhaps you have seen her?” I remember I said that to my mother-in-law, but I think they also hadn’t seen where she went. I don’t remember how it happened. Later we realized that they were in agreement with... with Doña... well, the wife of the Albinoetik, I think it is the one who is still alive now. She had a metate. I don’t know what else she had. I think my mother had clothing, and she went to take it, with Doña Chepa. But later we knew from the gossip that she went with them to haul off her things. I think that she went to leave her things there, and I think that afterwards she returned with them... they came back to get them, and it was Don Palas that received her at his house again...

Alejandra: Aaa, she went to live with him.

Maruch: She went to live with him again, but she suffered a lot. She suffered there more. My mother lost weight there. She was very thin. Later, I don’t know how it was that she met with my younger sister Tinik, the one who died. So my mother, she went with her. I think Tinik was still married. Later they separated. Tinik, well I think she went to Jolo’. Consequently, that is why my mother died in Chilo’.

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Upon separating, Maruch’s mother kept her land and part of it went to Maruch. However, Maruch seems to have expected more of an inheritance form her parents because they had sheep and horses but gave her nothing. It was her brother who gave
her a horse. So Maruch still had to struggle – farming her land and making her own way. According to Maruch, her mother disapproved of this and that is why they could not get along.

**We Bought a Little Land and Struggled to Keep Our Inheritance**

Alejandra: But we’re missing how you got married...

Maruch: What?

Alejandra: How was it that you got married? How was it that you had children?

Maruch: Well, I already said how it was when I was growing up. I already told that. Now I am going to go back to tell it then, how it was that my daughters grew up...

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: Aaa, but I said that we lived there after... there on the other side when we bought our lands, my land is the one that now is used for...

Alejandra: The one that is down there.

Maruch: Down there, that is where we bought. Well, I don’t remember how much that land cost me. I think that it was four hundred, but it was in pesos, the money was cheaper. I think it was four hundred that we paid. It was the land of my older brother that he gave me.

Alejandra: The land down there was your brother’s?

Maruch: It was his.

Margarita: Since Doña Susana, Doña Elisea had land. So they went to sell it and the older brother of our mother bought it.
Alejandra: Aaah.

Maruch: That is how it was sold. They sold their land. Later my older brother bought it. Then we bought those lands that are there now. We bought our little bit of land. That was when I had already married. We planted... the father of my children planted cabbage. He planted cabbage where the land is level, there in...

Margarita: In Chilo’

Maruch: Yes, so it was there. Then, it was full of heads of cabbage in that place. The cabbages were about this big. They grew very well. So I lived there, it was my land... that was my inheritance, not like the other land that was bought. We bought it, there where our house was built. So I became aware. I realized then. They came to ask for this... they asked for my land. There were already two portions from my mother. It was the place where my mother’s house was. Then they came back to divide the land when my mother passed away. That’s how it was... I don’t know how many parts the land was divided into. Even my older sister was able to receive some. Well Doña Xunka ____ was going to steal all the land that is there, all the land until Sok’on. Ooooh, until someone was named that could speak for her. It was Maryan Paste’, as he was called, but he was really a licenciado. So he got together all the sons of Doña Xunka. He felt that he couldn’t accomplish it in San Cristóbal, so they went clear to Tuxtla. Who knows what they said in Tuxtla. They returned again, but we were in San Cristóbal. Palas knew a licenciado, they spoke with him there...there in San Cristóbal. They renewed the papers for the land. “There remains no other owner when the owner dies,” that is what they said. “So we are going to divide it,” they said. There were four of us including me.
Alejandra: With you there were four.

Maruch: Yes. We had already heard rumors that... they wanted to seize all the land up to our fences that were there, because they thought that it wasn’t going to be ours.

Alejandra: So then they agreed with your brother on this.

Margarita: Her brother had already died, it was just his wife.

Alejandra: Aaa, he had already died, aaaaa!

Maruch: He had already died, yes he had already died. So Doña Xunka wanted to steal all the land. She was the one that was stealing everything! So all the matters were resolved. They went to the comunales. We took it to the comunales. They had their licenciado...that man named Maryan Paste’. They had gone with him. We went to see how the land was. We went to see the boundary marker, our boundary marker. There they all walked in a line. So we said, we were already together, Don Palas had gotten us together. “Come, don’t be left behind,” they told my older sister, our older sister. “You won’t be left out. We have to all be together wherever we go.” So we were all there. “That is not it... that is not your land,” they said about Doña Xunka ___, of course it was not only her land, but she believed it was only hers, along with her sons. “Aha,” she said those words, the one who was going to steal it. Then we had succeeded. We were able to succeed. It was divided into four parts, one part was my older sister’s, one part was my younger sister Tinik’s, one part was my older brother Palas’s and one part to me.

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Land figures prominently in this segment as well, as Maruch and her siblings struggle to keep their inheritance. Her older brother solicits the assistance of a licenciado in San
Cristóbal to validate their papers and the comunales confirm that Maruch and her siblings are the rightful owners. Throughout this discussion Maruch references values associated with liberal individualism (e.g. literacy, private ownership), while indicating respect for traditional hierarchies.

**Raising Children and Marital Difficulties**

*Day Two*

Alejandra: Go on… we left off with your wedding.

Maruch: Aaa, yes when I got married. The ritual of changing the clothing or the ceremony?

Alejandra: However you want to tell it.

Maruch: I don’t remember everything.

Alejandra: That’s fine, just what you remember.

Maruch: I’ll start with my first pregnancy.

Alejandra: Go ahead.

Maruch: The birth was very difficult. I suffered a lot. In fact, the midwife had not realized I had twins. She realized it at that moment. I was conscious when the first one was born. Everyone was disconcerted. So my daughter was born and still I had contractions and my stomach was large. Afterwards I lost consciousness and I didn’t know how or when the second was born…

Alejandra: Yes.
Maruch: It was very difficult to take care of two babies. I didn’t sleep. Both would cry, both were hungry and needed to be changed. There were times when sleep overcame me and I wouldn’t realize they were crying. One time your aunt Mari gave me a slap in the face because of that.

Alejandra: Aaaah!

Maruch: Yes. What could I do?! I didn’t have the energy to get up and calm my baby.

Alejandra: Of course.

Maruch: It was very difficult to raise the two twins. When they were about six months old, your great grandmother took one. So, Doña Susana told me that she wanted one. She had realized the precariousness of the life I was living with my daughters. She saw that I suffered a lot with my daughters and the best option that she could offer me [from her point of view] was to gift one to her. When my mother-in-law and sister-in-law found out, they offered to help me take care of them and to go live with us. They thought that I was going to give one away. Your aunt and great grandmother lived with us while my twins were breastfeeding. As soon as they were able to eat atol and tortilla soup, they decided to return to their house, taking one with them. I was opposed but your grandfather agreed.

Alejandra: Where did they return to? The house down there?

Maruch: No, since they had lost it. They prohibited me from seeing her and going near her. Since my mother-in-law knew San Cristóbal well and some families there, they opted to go there all day and returned in the evening with the intent of keeping me from my daughter. I heard her crying at night. She wanted to nurse and I was going to see her but
they kept me from entering the house. They reminded me that I shouldn’t see her and kept me away... yes, that is how it happened.

Alejandra: Your twins were born on my great grandfather’s land then.

Maruch: Yes, we lived there. Later we bought the land down below and we went to live there.

Alejandra: Ah, now I understand.

Maruch: Mmm, yes, that is the story of your aunt. When she grew up, they told her I had abandoned her after she was born, that is why she is angry with us. The two grew up but, you see, [Loxa, one of the twins] passed away giving birth to her daughter. It is a loss that I will never get over.

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: When we went to the other land, we started with a small house without a door. Shortly thereafter I sold a piece of land that my mother had inherited. So with that we built the house and bought some things. Years later, I divorced your grandfather. I couldn’t stand it anymore. My husband, the father of Margarita, drank a lot. He never gave me money. I made textiles for others, to support my daughters. At the time your late aunt Loxa (the twin that stayed) was the oldest and was responsible for taking care of her younger siblings. She carried them and took them out in order to let me work and that is how I obtained food. I tried many times to get divorced. I couldn’t because the autoridades always supported your grandfather and great grandfather. The autoridades told me I could support my children and to stop bothering my husband. If I wanted the
divorce I had to pay a large amount of money. So that is why I wasn’t able to get divorced when I was young.

Alejandra: Aaaah.

Maruch: I went to the cabildo many times so that they could help me with the divorce process. It always came out the same that I had to pay if I requested it. My older brother supported your grandfather.

Alejandra: Aaaah. You weren’t able to get divorced then because you didn’t have anyone’s support.

Maruch: The times that I wasn’t with my husband, I always had a little bit of money to feed my children. That was the money I was given for the textiles and I saved it. One time your grandfather told me he was going to plant corn, so I should prepare tostadas. He left in May and returned in July but returned with nothing.

Alejandra: Oh, mom...

Maruch: Sometime around the fiesta of San Lorenzo.

Alejandra: In July?

Maruch: He went and left me without any corn. Before he left he told me to send the girl (your aunt Loxa) to ask for corn from your great grandmother. So that’s what I did, but she just sent us a little bit of corn. Your aunt, she realized what our situation was even though she was just a girl. I mentioned to her that I was going to make textiles again. She said, “Mom, I am going to ask Doña Loxa, the wife of Don Perez, for the textiles that she had told you about.”

Alejandra: The señora that lives down there?
Maruch: Yes, the señora that just passed away. I don’t know how she (Loxa) knew which house was hers. When my daughter came back she brought the textiles. Thank god I was able to get corn with the help of Loxa. So with that, those who ordered textiles paid with corn. That’s how it was that I acquired corn. In the mornings, I prepared tortillas with salt for my children and then Loxa took them out to play.

Alejandra: To play in the street?

Maruch: No, in the uncultivated land. Meanwhile, I made textiles in order to get corn. At that time, I had some large ceramic pots. I don’t remember now how many. When your grandfather came to harvest, he was surprised to see how much corn there was in the house. He returned with nothing. I don’t know why. Supposedly he went to work, with Prutarco.

Alejandra: Who was Prutarco?

Maruch: The husband of Margarita, Margarita whose mother is Doña Sarapina. It was a long time ago. They lived where Don Manuel Romin lives now.

Alejandra: Ah, yes.

Maruch: Doña Margarita asked also why they didn’t return. Days later someone commented to her that maybe they had another family there. I found out from her. When it finally occurred to them to come back, your grandfather made my life miserable. He began to watch me closely every time he got drunk. I realized, because he yelled a lot. I left the house with my children because he hit me. Also my neighbors advised me if they saw him drinking. Sometimes I slept out in the fields and other times at your aunt Catalina Muchik’s house, the wife of Don Petul Perez. They actually still live in the same
place. In the morning I would return to the house because I had nowhere else to go and I couldn’t find help to get divorced. My marriage did not go well. I withstood the mistreatment for many years and finally was able to get divorced.

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Despite being forced to give up one of her daughters and dealing with her husband’s many transgressions, Maruch draws on her own strength to provide for her children. She recognizes that she would be better off without her husband and continues, for years, to confront the local officials with her request for a divorce. She also implicitly recognizes that there are social (and cultural) constraints that restrict her ability to make her own decisions.

**Obtaining a Divorce**

*Maruch: Some years later, I tried again and the answer from the president was favorable. He told me, “Señora, if you want to get divorced you can but because your daughter studies, she can return to her father.” The president asked me insistently if your grandfather had kicked me out of the house and it was affirmed. “Señora,” he told me, “at your age we do not insist that you return to your husband since there are no longer small children.” I felt very satisfied, but I was afraid and so told him, “President, my husband knows people with legal knowledge so he may fight to impede the separation.” He assured me, “All citations related to this from San Cristóbal we will invalidate for you.” There was total support for me because at that time there were then two parties, the PAN and the PRI. The president was PRI and your grandfather was PAN,*
that is why he never went around the cabildo. All his legal activities were in San Cristóbal.

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: “Don’t worry,” he told me. “Whatever document you need we will write it and send it to the respective court.” Before I decided to separate, at first he told me I would have to leave the house but then he changed his mind...

Alejandra: Aaaah.

Maruch: When he told me he was going to leave I would never stop him. Then I thought it was my house. Aaahh, the moment arrived to leave and he kicked me out! Yes, in the final days, your grandfather wouldn’t let me sit on the patio. He was always threatening with his machete. Your uncle Mikel realized this about him. He was your father’s good friend. Your grandfather ran me out of the house. One afternoon he returned and demanded that I leave. I told him I was going to leave and he asked me, “When?” I answered, “Tomorrow in the morning. This situation has ruined me. I can’t stand anymore.” He reaffirmed to me that he would never run his mother off the land and would always support her. I already had a little bit of corn and clothes ready, so that is how I left the house.

Alejandra: Aaaah.

Maruch: I went to live with your aunt. When they went to talk with Don Maryan Tsintan, he advised them to give me housing for a few days and to support me. After leaving the house, your uncles stayed to talk with your grandfather. My daughters (Juana and Margarita) had their things prepared to leave. So we took the essentials. So, that is how I
separated. I was living with your aunt for a few months. Your father was separated with your mother.

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: Your parents were always separating for whatever reason. Your mother was very particular.

Alejandra: But they were still married then.

Maruch: Yes. Your mother went to her parents’ house. That was only the beginning of the problem. Every time she wanted to return to your father she would send someone for whatever pretext so that we would go for her. That time, we didn’t go because I had serious problems with your grandfather. When I had finally separated, you had been born.

Alejandra: When did you get divorced, you and my grandfather?

Maruch: When?

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: I went to live with your aunt. I don’t remember how much time passed. Your grandfather went to talk with the priest. He wanted me to return to him. The priest went to look for me but I hid. He never spoke with me and gave up. As a last resort he went to the cabildo and we confronted each other before the president but I was firm in the decision that I had made. The president gave us fifteen days to see if I would repent and return to my husband. Finally, the president spoke with me and said to me that as an autoridad he had to appear to convince me to return but really he respected my decision.
At that time, your father had stayed with your grandfather while I was living at your aunt’s house.

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: Your grandfather finally understood that I would not return to him and he did not come back to insist. He appealed to the priest but he could never reprimand me. I realized that my sister, Tinik, supported your grandfather. My husband had done me in. So I got mad and wanted to run him out of the house and live alone with my children. I asked advice from Don Markux because he was the ex-president, to see if I could keep the house. He told me it was within my right to demand and to win the case. Margarita was still young and was studying. Besides I sold a little piece of land in Sok’on in order to build the house and Don Petul Vet knew that. He was the bricklayer and in this case was a witness. I told Maria my plans. She asked me not to run her father out of the house and that I could stay and live with her. After learning her opinion, I was discouraged and that’s why we live here.

Alejandra: Mmmm.

Maruch: Still here. Your grandfather would come to see (your aunt) Lolen, of course, when she got sick. Sometimes, he came drunk and wanted to hit me but I wouldn’t let him. That was the reason for my divorce. He began to drink and drink. You know he died from that.

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: Your grandfather was drunk. He fell to the ground and at that moment it began to rain hard and he was there. No one realized that he had fallen. Who knows where
your father and his wife were. I think it was a mayol that saw he had fallen. He got him up and sat him by the door of the house down there. Sometime later they saw him and his heart was beating but very slowly. They immediately took him to San Cristóbal but at the top of the mountain, Muxul Vits, he passed away. They didn’t notify me so that I could go see him and that was fine because I wouldn’t have gone. He did much damage to me. They just came to notify Margarita.

Alejandra: Yes.

Maruch: So, that is my story.

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It was not until political factions developed, which worked in Maruch’s favor, that she was able to obtain a divorce. Even then she faced many difficulties. Through her own tenacity she was able to withstand (through avoidance) the pressure of the priest and successfully impeded any legal action her husband might have taken. The influence of her relatives continued to impinge on her decisions, but she had at least succeeded in the long struggle to be independent of her husband.

Conclusion

Maruch’s story begins by recounting the wealth her great grandfather had acquired, in part through supernatural means. As a young girl Maruch was estranged from her family and did not receive the inheritance she felt she was due. After leaving her parents’ home, they still held authority over her so that she was forced into an arranged marriage (as was customary at the time). Maruch’s husband was an abusive alcoholic
and after many years she was finally able to obtain the support of local officials in granting her a divorce. Maruch also struggled, as had her own mother, to maintain control of their land.

Maruch’s narrative reveals an awareness of and commitment to a range of ideologies, modern and traditional, that are integral to Zinacanteco life. We see glimpses of the Zinacantán described by Vogt and his students in their discussions of cosmology and ritual practice. These practices and beliefs continue to be of relevance today and Maruch’s granddaughter, Alejandra, frequently retells the same stories she grew up hearing from her grandmother. But we also see something more as Maruch recounts the many difficulties she faced – struggles in which success depends on individual will.

This contrasts significantly with Maruch’s discussion of her great grandfather, in which she attributes his success (i.e., wealth) to his knowledge of the supernatural. He acquired wealth, and thereby land, through his abilities to capture a snake/donkey that provided him with money (Mexican coins) and to enter caves, where he was able to communicate with the god(s) who gave him gifts. As she reflects on her own life and, to a certain extent, her mother’s, Maruch emphasizes a very different type of knowledge and skills. Maruch and her mother do not have the same abilities as the grandfather, but instead rely on tenacity and individual will. Maruch’s mother was able to keep her land because she knew a lot about the legal documents pertaining to land ownership, even though she was not literate herself. Maruch also was able to keep her land, with the help of her siblings, because they also recognized the importance of maintaining official
documentation. Maruch’s ability to act on her own was often impeded by relatives or civil officials, but she continued to work hard to provide for her children, keep her land and eventually obtain a divorce. Despite the limitations she faced, Maruch never condemns those in positions of authority. Rather, she respects the hierarchical nature of Zinacanteco society, while attempting at the same time to make her own way.

What is perhaps most striking about Maruch’s story is the pervasiveness of ideological pluralism. She makes numerous references to an ideology of hierarchical complementarity, including the grandfather’s special abilities, the comunales who resolve land conflicts and the civil officials who oversee requests for divorce. Maruch also references various values associated with liberal individualism, including the importance of literacy, land ownership and her own hard work and resolve that allowed her to endure so much. Although these ideologies have at times come into conflict, they are all integral to the course of Maruch’s life – as expressed in this account. Furthermore, Maruch’s narrative indicates that such ideologies have been co-present for long enough that it is often difficult to distinguish them. Whereas previous studies of Zinacantán have often attempted to differentiate between aspects which are characteristically modern (i.e., Spanish) and those which are inherently traditional (i.e., Mayan), Maruch’s narrative illustrates complexities that challenge such distinctions.
Interlude – Alejandra

Similar to Maria Cristina and Juana, Alejandra also discusses the importance of education. In contrast, however, Alejandra’s family strongly supported her education. While Alejandra’s grandmother and aunt emphasized education as a means for achieving independence, both economic and personal, Alejandra saw education as an opportunity to wear mestiza (i.e., Western) clothing, which also could arguably be linked to economic success. All of these ideals are reflective of liberal individualism.

Then, I don’t know when, Kris, in what grade... in, in elementary, I formed an image. I don’t know if I saw an image on television or I don’t know, but I saw people going to study wearing mestiza clothing. And from then on no one could take that image away from me. And I think also that influenced me a lot to keep studying, because I said, “No, if I don’t study, how am I going to wear that clothing?” I have always liked it Kris. Then the same, my grandmother tells me, she talks to me about the history, which she just told you about, what she suffered. She tells me, “No, you have to study. You are not going to be like me. All right, I am not telling you not to get married. Get married, but I don’t want you to depend on a man. You can be independent, from a man. Having children, you can still go on. Having secure work.” Well, the same with my aunt, because she tells me, “No, I didn’t study, but you study. It is very difficult to earn money in these conditions.” I believe that, with the help of this image that I will never lose because I have it well imprinted here, Kris, then, that influenced me a lot to continue studying and
nothing mattered more to me. I tell you, so, you realize that we are a humble family. With that humility we have experienced many difficulties. In elementary I didn’t feel it much, nor in junior high. High school was where I felt it most, because it was all in San Cristóbal. I felt it a lot because of money. And that is to say nothing of college. Well, I worked, but I didn’t earn much. But my grandmother and my aunt always helped me. I had many, many scarcities, but we kept on… always with the support of my grandmother. She had to get me up early. She got up with me, she fixed me breakfast, and everything. I left at the time I had to go to school. She calculated the time I would come back and the food was ready too... same with my aunt, no I tell you. The money that they gave me, they told me, “Listen, if you need anything, you will have it.” And they gave it to me. And I don’t know, I feel that, for me, my grandmother and my aunt, they, they are not my grandmother or my aunt, but rather my mothers, no? They are my mothers. So I want the best for them. Obviously for me too. What I have always thought Kris, and it is almost like, an objective, to give them the best, no? Like I’ve told you, my grandmother has suffered a lot.
Conclusion

“The elders from before looked for treasure because [they] were clairvoyant... There was a lot [of treasure], but now we are receiving support from the government, not like before when the pueblo had its treasures.”

- Maria Perez Arias

On a warm, sunny afternoon in May, before the rainy season began, I left the museum and walked up the street past Juana’s house. She was sitting out front with her youngest son, so I stopped to chat. As the conversation continued, Juana invited me to come inside and sit down. Our discussion eventually turned to politics, as often happened, and Juana had a lot of questions for me. She mentioned all of the conflicts in Zinacantán recently, including the problems with tourism, and then asked, “In the United States, do they kill people over politics?” I had no easy answer for her but tried to explain, eventually stating, “Sometimes, yes, that happens. But generally, no.” Juana replied, “But they are in Iraq. Why are they killing people in Iraq?” On one level, Juana already knew the answer – war is about politics, which is precisely the point she was making. In fact, Juana knew quite a lot about the Iraq War, observing that, “Even women and children are being killed and they have no schools.” But she nonetheless sought an answer to the question, “Why?”

After further reflecting on Juana’s comments, I realized that in matters of politics the “answers” are never straightforward. Rather, they are fraught with tension,
skepticism and, at times, hidden agendas. Often there are no answers at all, only more questions. Nonetheless, I suggest, and hope to have demonstrated, that the cultural significance of politics is worthy of consideration and, in fact, lends itself to ethnographic inquiry. Politics profoundly permeate the daily lives of Zinacantecos and through various discursive means — both official and unofficial — politics are given meaning. Conversely, “local” political processes and ideologies are actively shaped by the circulation of “political” discourse — often in the form of gossip. The interplay between political process, ideology and discourse is further shaped by a continual refashioning of tradition and modernity.

Approaching ethnography in Zinacantán requires a reconsideration of the ways in which the community has previously been portrayed. I have focused primarily on the work of Evon Vogt, whose extensive writings on Zinacantán remain invaluable resources, but due to an increasingly global perspective in anthropology such works are being called into question. In an effort to avoid the limitations of early culturalist and materialist approaches, I have sought to take a more historical and situational approach, which challenges portrayals of indigenous communities as either isolated, highly integrated entities or as rife with conflict and tension. Further, rather than viewing Zinacantán as separate from the modern world, I argue that Zinacantecos actively engage in modern processes, including the incorporation of tradition, since “tradition is what peoples do today (and perhaps did yesterday)” (Nagengast and Kearney 1990:88).

To better elucidate these processes, I have drawn on recent trends in political anthropology, which look beyond typologies of political systems (Vincent 1990). I have
focused on the politics of historically specific events and a range of local narratives to
highlight three interrelated themes: the blurring of boundaries between official and
unofficial politics, the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, and the
pervasiveness of pluralism (both ideological and material – that is, economic). These
patterns are, to a certain extent, uniquely Zinacanteco, but also must be situated within
the broader context of globalization. For example, identifying the wide range of political
ideologies (e.g., patronage, indigenismo, liberalism and neoliberal multiculturalism)
evident in Calderón’s visit is useful for understanding the intricacies of contemporary
Mexican politics, but the local (in)significance of the event is also very telling –
consistent with relationships of patronage, the resources provided were valued more
than a visit by the president. The fight between the artesanas held much more
importance locally, but also indicates some of the ways in which local politics are linked
to globalization (e.g., through the rapidly growing industry of tourism, as well as
increasing political factionalism in Mexico).

Such complexities are apparent throughout Zinacantecos’ narratives, which
indicate an intense awareness of political change – and what is at stake, politically
speaking. However, Zinacantecos’ narratives reflect something more than just change,
as evidenced by the frequent signaling of ideological pluralism. Women’s narratives in
particular indicate that a range of traditional beliefs and practices endure, including a
continued commitment to the hierarchical order – present in political life and reflected
in the cosmos. That traditional ideologies are maintained is not surprising, but their
existence alongside such modern ideologies as liberal individualism is striking. Although
these ideologies are seemingly contradictory, their co-presence is actively managed. Multiple ideologies are (re)negotiated and legitimized through the often discursive processes of modernizing tradition.
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