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Fighting For and Fighting Through Electricity: an Ethnography of the Civil Resistance Movement "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo" from Chiapas, Mexico

Umberto Cao

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Ecole doctorale de l'EHESS

Centre Norbert Elias (UMR 8562)

Thèse de Doctorat préparée dans le cadre d'une cotutelle entre l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales et l'Université de Milan Bicocca

Discipline : Anthropologie Sociale et Ethnologie

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***Fighting for and fighting through
electricity.***

***An ethnography of the civil resistance
movement "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo",
from Chiapas, Mexico.***

Thèse dirigée par: Valeria Siniscalchi et Alice Bellagamba

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*«We were born of the night.
We live in the night.
We will die in her.
But the light will be tomorrow for others,
for all those who today weep at the night,
for those who have been denied the day,
for those for whom death is a gift,
for those who are denied life.
For everyone the light.
For everyone everything.»*

Emiliano Zapata, *Zapatista Manifesto in Nahuatl*, 1918

Introduction

«[They are those]
who don't exist, even if they do.
Who speak no languages, only dialects.
Who have no religions, only superstitions.
Who make no arts, only crafts.
Who have no culture, only folklore.
Who are not humans, but human resources.
Who have no face, only harms.
Who have no name, and are only numbers.
Who have no place in history, but only in local crime reports.
They are the nobodies.
Who are worth less than the bullet that will kill them».

Eduardo Galeano, *"El libro de los Abrazos"*, 1989: 52

The anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano once wrote that «we [anthropologists] – *do depend on the contingent from the moment we start our research, and this dependency affects the way we do our research*» (Crapanzano 2010: 58). Anyone who has ever experienced ethnographic fieldwork research could not agree more. Yet, I find that the "power of the contingent" often invests also the very choice of the study's subject. In the spring of 2014, I travelled across Chiapas for a project of visual anthropology, accompanying a Sardinian mural painter, Crisa. Through a long chain that I may not even retrace anymore, made of shared contacts, "friends of friends" and word of mouth, we came to know a group of people that decided to endorse our project. They opened their houses to us and hosted us in 6 different towns or villages. They provided walls to paint in their communities. With time, they shared their stories with us, their way of existence, and finally, their *struggle*. They were activists of a social movement named «*Organización de la Resistencia Civil "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo"*». It seemed they were very "concerned" with electricity.

The more they shared stories and the more I observed their Organization, the more I became intrigued and, to a certain extent, surprised. At the time, I was personally quite aware about the "epic" of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas (mostly known for its 1994 armed uprising) and averagely interested in indigenous mobilizations in the Americas (having previously researched about indigenous people, in North America). However, I was experiencing in person that the social arena in Chiapas was "not just about" EZLN - a vision still quite common in Europe, and in Mexico too. It was much more complex and rich. Above all, what had looked really new to me was the object and purpose of their activisms. They struggled *for* electricity. But also - as I would discover through this study – they struggled *through* electricity. In social movements literature, I had never found anything alike before. That's in short, how the contingent drove me here five years later and almost two of which was spent on the field in Chiapas to complete this doctoral thesis in anthropology about Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo.

The main characters of this study are peasant and poor people from Chiapas, militating in Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. Where for "peasant" we rely on the definition provided by the anthropologist Eric Wolf: i.e. agricultural producers «*who retain effective control of the land*» and «*aim at subsistence, not at reinvestment*» (Wolf 2001: 196). They therefore differ from "tenants", «*whose control of land is subject to an outside authority*», and from "farmers" who «*view agriculture as a business enterprise*» (*ibid.*). They very much look like the "nobodies" (originally, in Spanish: "*los nadies*") the writer Eduardo Galeano described in the famous tale we quoted in the beginning. Additionally, they are also indigenous, mainly Tojolabal, Ch'ol, Mam, Tzotzil, Q'anjob'al and Chuj. Being peasant, poor and indigenous are features that very often goes together. About 85% of Luz y Fuerza militants are so. Yet, as we'll have the opportunity to argue, Luz y Fuerza is not an indigenous movement. Similar to what the anthropologist George Collier highlighted on EZLN soon after the armed uprising, in this case we are not faced by a movement demanding rights for indigenous peoples: «*they are first and foremost calling attention to the plight of Mexico's rural poor and peasants, both indigenous and non-indigenous*» wrote Collier (1994: 7). Poverty is therefore a preponderant dimension in the existences of the people I observed and worked with on the field. «Chiapas is not poor at all, as it is rich in natural resources. The people of Chiapas are poor» is the leitmotif the anthropologist Paul Farmer heard

by locals during his visit in Chiapas, on 1997 (Farmer 2003: 99). Which is exactly the same concept I heard, twenty years later. In the same way, few have changed from Collier's words (which dates to 1994) denouncing that Chiapas was a sort of internal colony for the rest of Mexico, «*providing oil, electricity, timber, cattle, corn, sugar, coffee, and beans, but receiving very little in return*» (Collier 1994: 16). That describes a condition whose roots are very deep¹.

Historical background

The first contacts with Spanish conquerors, ended in a dramatic defeat for several of the indigenous groups present in Chiapas, the largest of which were the Tzeltals and Tzotzils (Farmer 2003: 100-101). Despite the uprisings against the Spanish began as early as in 1524, with the town of San Cristóbal besieged in 1527, the indigenous couldn't cope with Europeans' hunger for gold and domination, and the epidemics from imported diseases (*ibid.*). Since then, migrations of indigenous populations to escape deprivation and persecution, became "Chiapas' oldest story", as historian John Womack noted (Womack 1999: 5). During subsequent centuries, indigenous peoples saw their conditions worsening. They often reacted by staging the so-called Indian revolts, many of which ended in massacres of the natives (Farmer 2003: 101). Relevant developments came only with the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), that led to significant land reform. Indigenous peasants of Chiapas welcomed the reforms of the Mexican Revolution, as codified in the constitution of 1917. Some of them received *ejido* lands, communally held; others benefited of the abolition of debt servitude (Womack 1968: 373-74). However, land redistribution – in practice – most benefited given strata of indigenous society, tightening relations between PRI (the ruling party) and local *caciques* (strongmen) (Farmer 2003: 101). It is therefore uncontested that the expected improvements of the reforms didn't reach the poor of Chiapas (*ibid.*).

Still by the middle of the twentieth century, a few thousand cattle-ranching families held about half the entire state of Chiapas, more than three million hectares of land (*ibid.*).

¹ A compelling, detailed and even ironical (as in the typical author's style) description of the socio-economic situation of Chiapas in the early 1990s, of the deep iniquities featuring local society, and of poverty experienced by local indigenous peoples, may be found in 1992 Subcommander Marcos' text "*Chiapas: the Southeast in Two Winds, A Storm and a Prophecy*." (Subcomandante Marcos 1994)

Because of the exemption the Agrarian Law granted to ranches – explains Womack (1999: 15) – during the 1950s and 60s many landlords quit growing wheat and crops, expelled their peons before they could file for status as a community (and therefore demand the state for common land), and converted their fields to cattle. For decades, landowners, supported by *caciques*, made use of small armed groups known as *guardias blancas* to push the peasants off the more fertile land; this were forerunners to the paramilitary squads still operating in Chiapas (Farmer 2003: 101). Thousands of indigenous peasants were forcedly moved into the highlands canyons. Some left their communities to work coffee farms on the Sierra Madre. Others continued to work as "debt slaves" on ranches (*ibid.*). Soon, coastal plantations and highlands lands were not able to anymore feed the increasing population they hosted (Nash 2005: 180). Since the 1970s and until the beginning of 1990s, at least 200 thousand settlers moved to the virgin Lacandón Rainforest seeking fertile land to survive on (*ibid.*). The coup-de-grâce came in 1992, with President Salinas de Gortari officially halting land reforms. This exposed thousands of colonizers, in the Rainforest and elsewhere, to the threat of never gaining title to the lands where they lived and being expelled at any time (*ibid.*). Under these circumstances came the news about the North American Free Trade Agreement. Shortly after sunrise on January 1, 1994, the EZLN rose up. In 1996, the San Andrés Peace Accords were signed between the EZLN and the Mexican government. Agreements that the latter largely betrayed with the promulgation of 2001 Indigenous Law (Le Bot 2013: 42; Mora 2010: 296).

It is exactly at this point, in the first half of the 2000s, that the events narrated in this work started. An enormous portion of the Chiapas population was still living in conditions of severe deprivation. Access to basic services such as electricity became increasingly prohibitive, due to the high fees. Growing groups of people began to seek new forms of social activism, other than EZLN. The association of these three elements led to the foundation of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. It was born as a movement of the "civil society" (according to its self-definition), whose declared core mission was the direct and autonomous access to electricity. However, since the beginning, it has displayed a much more articulated political vision and strategy, where electricity is essential, but just a part of a wider mosaic.

Structure and goals of this research

In this work, the group of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo activists are introduced and analyzed not as a given. We tried to comply with what Eric Wolf argued all along his rich scientific production: the constitution of social groups could and should be explained in terms of process and relationship (Gledhill 2005: 38). In studying Luz y Fuerza, this research performed an "actor-oriented approach" – as defined by the anthropologists Ton Salman and Willem Assies (2017: 95) – according to which researches should address not the movement-as-actor, but rather the actors that make the movements. The focus on the actors, their motivations, aspirations, doubts, uses and misuses of their activism, helps to understand social movements as polyvalent and multilayered phenomenon (*ibid.*). It also supports our insight in their successful or failed outcomes (*ibid.*). For these reasons, the point of view of local actors has been prioritized at any stage. In Part I of the work, the general context into which the stories and the facts narrated in these pages have occurred, is presented. It is strictly based on those elements local actors highlighted as the most meaningful and relevant to describe their daily reality - first and foremost - poverty.

Luz y Fuerza activists usually identify themselves as «us, the poor», most of the times opposed to «them, the rich» or «them, the mighty», which is indicative of a perceived inequality. Yet, most notably, when they related their conditions and experience of poverty, their emphasis is less on the material and economic aspects and more on violence. Material and economic shortage and precarity are real and they do not underplay them. The basic wooden huts in which many activists live, with dirt floors, no running water, toilets or drainage system, are telling, as well as the symptoms of poor diet and poor health many of them and of their relatives show. Nevertheless, they preferred to call my attention to the violent threats they are exposed to, for being poor: repression, arbitrary and extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and human rights violations, authorities' systematic corruption, lack of rule of law and impunity. Overall that describes a condition of "structural violence", as Paul Farmer defines it (Farmer 2004). Therefore, by means of a "technical" approach, chapters 1 and 2 of this work try to translate these *emic* and subjective declinations of poverty, into *ethic*, objective (only in theory), countable and widely comparable assessments. A set of relevant statistical data and information from national and international reports is

proposed, in order to establish an up-to-date insight on the living conditions of a large portion of the population in contemporary Mexico.

The second recurring element in the activists' narration is "neoliberalism". They point at it as an essence of being the root of all evil, an all-powerful entity ruling over people, national governments and the entire world. They clearly deploy an understanding of neoliberalism as a class-based ideological "project" (Ferguson 2009: 166; Harvey 2005). Whereas being Chiapas still a sort of internal colony - as we above argued quoting Collier – it would be more appropriate referring to "liberalism" tout court, not "-neo" at all. And more precisely, it is about an «*old-style laissez-faire liberalism*» (Ferguson 2009: 173) - a definition the anthropologist James Ferguson coined based on a similar case of Africa - in the service of the national and international capital. In this work, the category of "neo-liberalism" as local actors intend it, will often appear. However, not before having provided a basic and much needed criticism of the concept and its uses (and misuses), together with a review of liberal structural adjustment programs implemented in Mexico since the early 1980s to this day, both at chapter 1.

The third and final aspect is the self-identification as «us, the indigenous» most of activists reveal, just after «us, the poor». Which was obviously expected, considering that the vast majority of them descend from the ancient Maya. And what makes unavoidable an aperçu on the contemporary reality of indigenous Mexicans, over twenty years after the 1996 Accords, whose complete denomination was – not by chance - "San Andrés Peace Accords *About Indigenous Rights and Culture*". In chapter 3, the multidimensional sides of socioeconomic inequalities vexing indigenous peoples are explored. Some emblematic examples are eventually offered, about how indigenous rights are hardly respected in practice, although clearly acknowledged on paper. Finally, most recent reports on how limited, impaired and misleading indigenous political representation and participation in the political life of the country, follow. The examination of these three elements, so essential for activists to represent their lives, constitutes the indispensable economic, material and political knowledge onto which the interpretative efforts performed in this study lay their basis.

Four main set of questions are indeed posed, and their response are sought through this study. Being that Luz y Fuerza is still unknown in scientific literature, the first purpose

is "to census" it. Which means to retrace its genesis - the reasons and the processes that led to its existence, as well as to identify who are the activists, why, and how they came to militate in such a movement, and what expectations and "aspirations" - in anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's sense (2004) – animate them. Finally, the ultimate political goal the movement pursues is considered. The second set of questions aims to frame this specific case study within the wider landscape of contemporary social movements, most notably from Latin America and with a peasant and/or indigenous base. In this sense, special attention will be paid on the context of Chiapas, where similarities and divergences between Luz y Fuerza and other relevant social movements (EZLN in particular) will be highlighted. Third, attention is directed on whether – comparing with the general context of local and regional activisms - Luz y Fuerza boasts significant aspects of newness with regards to ideology, organizational modes, modus operandi; and political discourses, strategies and practices. Fourth, and lastly, the presence of electricity at the core of Luz y Fuerza is addressed, to analyze what roles it may play on the life and political project of the Organization, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to grasp possible influences electricity may have on contemporary and forthcoming social mobilizations.

Disciplinary background

Overall, it has to be stressed that this work has been driven - quoting the anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2014: 100-102) - by ethnography, rather than by theory. This entailed an initial "landing" on the field with a light "baggage" of theories and preliminary hypothesis. Consequently, it has allowed the field in "guiding" the building of the theoretical background required to seek coherent responses to the research questions. Nevertheless, this thesis is the crowning element of a doctorate co-hosted by an Italian and a French academic institution. Accordingly, the key subject that anthropologists from these two European countries were focused on Mexico over the decades, presented a preliminary and valuable scientific base for this study.

On the Italian side, the forefather of the "Mexicanist" tradition can surely be considered Italo Signorini, who in 1973 established the Italian Ethnological Mission in Mexico, which he directed until his death in 1994. The key ethnographic researches he

conducted in Mexico were among the Huave people in the isthmus of Tehuantepec and, since 1980, among the Nahuatl people in the Sierra de Puebla. Signorini explored the subsistence activities of the Huave, their parental and social organization, their political and ceremonial system, as well as their traditional medicines (see Signorini 1979). With the Nahuatl, he analyzed their cosmology and outstanding system of beliefs and medical practices (see Signorini and Lupo 1989). Alessandro Lupo, who was a disciple of Signorini, and eventually his colleague and successor at the head of the Italian Ethnological Mission, is today the main reference for Mexico in Italian anthropology. He also worked among the Huave and Nahuatl peoples, with whom he further developed the study of their oral traditions, cosmology, ethno-astronomical knowledge, religion, and rituals (see Lupo 2013; 1998; 1997). He also observed the dynamics between native medical practices and health institutions (see Lupo 2012; Signorini and Lupo 1989), and the cultural processes of identity negotiation (see Lupo 2015).

The relationship between French Anthropology and Mexico is longer and somehow more complex. The French Scientific Mission to Mexico was established in 1864, amidst the French military intervention in the country during the rule of Napoleon III. The Society of Anthropology of Paris, founded in 1959, was part of the Mission too. In the same year, the Mexican Scientific, Literary and Artistic Mission to Mexico was set in Mexico, with a mixed composition of both French officers and Mexican savants. Both commissions clearly fitted into a wider imperialistic plan (Cunin 2013). Nevertheless, as the French sociologist Elisabeth Cunin affirms, the Missions were, at least in part, also motivated by humanistic goals (*idem*: 22-23). They advocated the rights of Mexican indigenous peoples and criticized the paternalistic tutelage under which they lived (*ibid.*). These Commissions gave an important contribution to the foundation of Americanism in Europe (*idem*: 19). In addition, they eventually contributed to the institutionalization of sciences, and particularly of anthropology, not only in Mexico but even in France (*ibid.*). Throughout the twentieth century, France still considered Mexico as the entry gate to Latin America (*idem*: 26). Particularly, during World War II, Latin America became a preferential partner for the part of France in resistance against the Nazi occupation (*idem*: 25). During the conflict and immediately after its conclusion, an important system of scientific institutional cooperation was set between France and several Latin American and Caribbean countries (*ibid.*). The opening of the French Institute of Latin America in Mexico City dates to 1944 (*ibid.*).

Since the 1960s, such a policy was even further strengthened, as Latin America became a key-region for De Gaulle's "third way" between capitalism and socialism (*idem*: 32). Since in the early 1980s, social sciences in France experienced the affirmation of the discourse of cooperation and development with the "third world" (*idem*: 33). This vision would inform – for better or for worse - the scientific relations between France and Latin America until today.

However, the influence of French anthropology on Mexican anthropology has been definitely inferior to the influence of anthropology from the United States (*idem*: 26). Manuel Gamio, one of the forefathers of Mexican anthropology was trained at Columbia University under the direction of Franz Boas (*ibid.*). Additionally, a number of research centers on Mexico were long since established in the USA, and the two countries always had a constant flow of researchers between them (*ibid.*). More so, French anthropologists Jaques Galinier and Alain Breton, explained that although several French anthropologists worked in Mexico, they implemented rather different approaches and worked on very different fields (Galinier and Breton 1988: 300). That made it hard to attribute a common theoretical orientation to them that would have taken root in Mexico (*ibid.*). Yet, in the preliminary phases of this research, the reading of some of the works produced by French anthropologists on Mexico emerged stimulating. I make particular reference to those works that were conducted in the area of Chiapas. As early as 1937, Jacques Soustelle became one of the first scholars to highlight how the system of community posts (*cargos comunitarios*) served as a fulcrum of catholic religion (see Galinier and Breton 1988: 298). He worked, among other groups, with the Lacandons from the Chiapas rainforest (Soustelle 1937). During the 1970s, serious efforts were dedicated to the kinship studies, inasmuch the "classical" concepts of "clan", "lineage" or "segmentary societies" were not mechanically applicable to Mesoamerican indigenous societies (Galinier and Breton 1988: 301). Henri Favre dealt with these topics in Chiapas among some Tzeltal and Tzotzil communities (Favre 1971). There, he was able to emphasize the political dimension beyond the conditions of marginality in which lived the indigenous groups he worked with (*idem*). Unsurprisingly, through an analysis of their myths and beliefs, he eventually wrote about the "insurreccional potential" of the "indigenous peasantry", (Favre 1978). Another major reference is to the investigations of Alain Breton, who from the late 1970s to until recently has had an intensive interaction with Mayan groups between

Mexico and Guatemala - particularly among Tzeltal communities. His investigations with the Tzeltal communities especially concerned territory and social space (Breton 1979), fests (carnival most notably) and sacred (Breton and Becquelin Monod 2002), and ritual and religion (Breton and Becquelin Monod 1989).

These were the main contributions on Mexico from Italian and French anthropologists we considered. Yet, when performing anthropological researches in Mexico, one may not avoid acknowledging that the country boasts of a rich and compelling local tradition in anthropology. This holds especially true when a research deals with Mexican indigenous populations, as this one does. As a matter of fact, Mexican anthropology since the early twentieth century and until today, has had a direct and intense involvement or better intervention, in the existences of Mexican indigenous peoples. In addition, this may evidently have an influence on how the presence and the work of an anthropologist is currently perceived among indigenous communities, and also in the wider Mexican society.

The genesis and evolution of Mexican anthropology are inseparable from the history of the Mexican nation-state. Relying on the historical analysis proposed by the Mexican anthropologist Salomón Nahmad Sittón, modern Mexican anthropology can be said to begin with Manuel Gamio's study of the mestizo population living in the Teotihuacan region of Central Mexico (Nahmad Sittón 2008). Gamio's works laid the foundation for an anthropology that soon defined itself as «*political, nationalist and action-oriented*» (*idem*: 129). It was an anthropology that would not just cooperate with the state, but also deeply shared the goal of «*assimilating Indians and mestizos into Mexico's modern, Spanish speaking nation*» (*ibid.*). All across the 1930s and 1940s, the paradigms embraced and promoted by Mexican anthropologists have been dominated by *indigenismo* - a set of theoretical and administrative practices that «*combined theories of cultural relativism with paternalistic policies for the defense, improvement and assimilation of Mexico's indigenous populations*» (*idem*: 131). *Indigenismo* mainly represented a conceptual and political framework in which the indigenous was constituted as a voiceless, passive subject for intellectual contemplation (indigenous "culture" and "civilization" had to serve as the basis for the "Mexican national culture") and administrative reform (*ibid.*).

During the 1950s, some anthropologists began to reconsider their commitment to indigenismo and the relationship between indigenous peoples and the nation state. Most notably, Gonzálo Aguirre Beltrán coined the concept of "region of refuge", as a space defined by regional power relations, wherein indigenous communities were structurally subordinated to non-indigenous and "dominant" social sectors and to the state (*ibid.*). Therefore, the only solution to improve the condition of Indians according to Aguirre Beltrán, was their acculturation and assimilation into the dominant society (*ibid.*). Acculturation became the cornerstone of the Regional Coordination Center the National Indigenista Institute (INI) (founded in 1948) established, under the direction of the anthropologist Alfonso Caso and Aguirre Beltrán, in Chiapas and in several other regions (*ibid.*). Yet, critical voices against the acculturation model started to raise. The anthropologist Pablo Gonzáles Casanova, proposed the definition of "internal colonialism" to account for the cultural, ethnic, political and economic marginalization experienced by indigenous populations in Mexico and in other Latin American countries.

Further criticisms against acculturation theory were expressed since the 1970s by anthropologists such as Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Salomón Nahmad, and Leon Durán. They combined ethnology with the approach of internal colonialism, with the purpose of setting a clear distinction between – making reference to Bonfil Batalla's classic (Bonfil Batalla 1987) - the "Imaginary Mexico" of the national Europeanizing elites, and the "Profound Mexico", in which indigenous cultural influences still play «*an important constructive and civilizing role in shaping Mexico's national history and culture*» (Nahmad Sittón 2008: 132). This position, defined as "ethnicista" was an expression of the new model of anthropological collaboration proposed at the Barbados meetings of 1971, 1977 and 1993, by Latin American anthropologists (*ibid.*). Yet another strong blow to the integrationist paradigm was offered by Robert Jaulin's critique on ethnic cleansing, which contributed to further distance the new Mexican anthropology that took shape in the 1980s, from the "old school" represented by ideologues such as Aguirre Beltrán, Alfonso Villas Rojas (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, despite the many criticisms, indigenismo remained dominant for a long time in Mexican anthropology (*idem*: 133) . At least, this was in part due – explains Nahmad - to anthropology's strong institutional dependence on the de facto one-party

state, ruled by PRI (*ibid.*). Certainly, the crisis brought by the student protests and the massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968, heralded an important turning point in the relationship between Mexican state and Mexican anthropology (*ibid.*). Many anthropologists started questioning the discourse of revolutionary nationalism into which their discipline was framed and limited. Yet, the more influent single factor that urged Mexican anthropologists to rethink their discipline should be identified in the gradual end of PRI political monopoly (*idem*: 137). Considering the close dependence of anthropology on the state, this is not surprising; critiques to the state had to be necessarily accompanied by critiques to the discipline (*ibid.*). At that point, Mexican anthropologists started introducing themselves to the ascending political actors and the new state apparatus, just as the "official" anthropologists who had worked for the previous PRI governments (*idem*: 141). This practice led several anthropologists to stand in support of the counter reform measures of the government and the authoritarian politics of the Mexican liberal state (such as the 1992 land reform) (*idem*: 142). More generally, they were in defense of the existing power and party structures (*idem*: 140). However, the majority of Mexican anthropologists expressed critical positions with respect to liberal reforms and remained committed to promoting progressive social change (*idem*: 142).

Nahmad concludes his analysis by affirming that Mexican anthropology as whole is now called to a great social and political commitment to set a new relationship between the Mexican state and its indigenous peoples (*idem*: 146). The political program it should pursue includes the following three goals: inclusion of indigenous peoples in the political decision-making processes; the diffusion of a culture of pluralism and tolerance across the national society; and higher social justice (*ibid.*). In each of these areas, anthropologists share responsibility with the peoples that were once the "object" of their study, but who are now equal partners in anthropology inquiry (*ibid.*). These considerations clearly apply not only to Mexican anthropology and anthropologists, but also to any anthropologist conducting ethnographic research in Mexico (and probably beyond).

Approaching now the second feature the research interlocutors ascribed to the themselves – being peasant, in anthropology, a conspicuous and valuable scientific literature on peasants and on their revolutionary potential does exist. It is especially thanks to the remarkable works of Eric Wolf first and James Scott later, that the peasant

started to be repositioned as revolutionary subject, against Marx and Marxists' denigrating view (Thomassen 2012: 681). The reference is, in particular, to Wolf's comparative studies of peasant resistance, contained in his masterpiece *Peasants Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Wolf 1969), and also to Scott's masterpiece *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* about south-east Asian peasants (Scott 1976). The anthropologist John Gledhill – among others - has also extensively analyzed the theme of peasant rebellions in relation to Marxian paradigm (Gledhill 1985). In what also concerns peasants in Mexico, a relevant body of contributions is known. The Mexican Revolution in particular is retained to have been – according to the anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen (Thomassen 2012: 680) - a major reference point in Spanish and Latin American anthropological traditions. Either about Mexican peasants in general either about their relationships with revolutions, worth mentioning are, among many, the studies of anthropologists Robert Redfield (1930) and later, Oscar Lewis (1951) in the village of Tepoztlán. Again, the works of the same Wolf on Mexican context (Wolf 1969; 1956; 1955). David Nugent's excellent historical anthropology on the events leading to the Mexican Revolution and on peasants' life in the post-revolutionary Mexico (Nugent 1993). Victor Turner took Mexican *Insurgencia* of 1810 as an example to explain his view about the liminal character of political revolutions (Turner 1988: 91). Or, although with a more historical perspective, the books of the already mentioned John Womack about the Mexican Revolution (2011; 1968) and revolutions in Chiapas (1999).

Such a renowned anthropological tradition is of course fully acknowledged and considered in this work. However, the subject of the study as well as preliminary evidences from the field oriented the theoretical setting towards further horizons. Luz y Fuerza defines itself as an organization of the "civil society", not an indigenous one nor a peasant one. As known, that of civil society is a concept somewhat ambiguous and flawed². For the purposes of this study, it is worth mentioning that the idea of civil society expressed by activists, overall fits the interpretation provided by the anthropologist June Nash: «*Civil society is not an ascribed category waiting for actors to enter into preordained roles; it comes into being with the emergence of new social actors who challenge the status quo, and with the reinvigoration of civic consciousness*

² For an overview on the (intense) debates in anthropology and more generally, in social sciences, about the concept of civil society, see Layton 2006, and also the (critical) review of this work by Neil Whitehead (2011).

among those who see their values or premises denied.» (Nash 2001: 160). Nash quoting political scientist Ronnie Lipschutz (Lipschutz 1992) further argues that the notion of civil society dates to the Romans and came from those people living within the Roman empire, keeping their own legal codes (*ibid.*). Similarly, social movements for inclusion in the political arena trigger the changes redefining civil society in contemporary times. This happened with the class struggle of the XIX century, when workers aspiring to become full citizens, produced socialist and communist alternatives to the "bourgeois class society" that excluded them (*ibid.*). A further redefinition occurred with the women's movement and the civil rights movement (*ibid.*). More recently, it continued with indigenous societies proving the possibility of a multicultural existence (*ibid.*).

Therefore, according to this definition, the framework of social movement studies and the specific contributions anthropology brings about them, became more suitable and fruitful to use in this research. Additionally, rather than "revolution", the political key-question at stake is autonomy. This required a convenient historical and theoretical framework about the emergence of autonomy as a theoretical-political paradigm and the progressive affirmation of it in peasant struggles. The second part of the work defines the disciplinary and theoretical context from which this research develops its ethnographic analysis.

Methodology

The purpose of the ethnography contained in this work is not to "give voice to the voiceless", but it rather aspires to be evocative of "experiential totality", as Eric Wolf recommends (Gledhill 2005: 40; Wolf 2001: 54). For this reason, its structure ideally recalls the knowledge process that unfolded on the field, since the very first contacts with the subject. This is probably similar to the approach most curious enough observers (not necessarily ethnographers) may have, upon their encounter with Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. From the first and most general aspects of the subject, regard is shifted on to the deeper and more complex ones and respective interpretations formulated step by step. This ethnography also goes in the direction of what anthropologist Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira called an "anthropology of practice", or in other terms, an anthropology of action (Cardoso de Oliveira 2006). He refers to an approach absolutely different from

applied anthropology, which is not only considered too praxi-oriented and lacking acceptable theoretical background, but most notably carries the legacy of colonial thinking. Instead, his vision refers to an anthropology *«committed not only to search for knowledge about the search for knowledge, but above all with the lives of subjects undergoing observation»* (*idem*: 225-6). The fundamental questions of social responsibility and of anthropological ethics are clearly invoked. And they assume an especially compelling connotation in the case of Luz y Fuerza, inasmuch as the subject of the study is a social movement opposing the government, and still quite hard to interpret for this latter. In the following three paragraphs, I'm going first to confront with the topic of social responsibility towards the research interlocutors. I will then propose some considerations on performing ethnographic activities in a dangerous field such as Chiapas, and I will recall the main measures of danger management I implemented. Finally, I will resume the "results" of a long and complex process of reflection about my presence and my positioning on the field.

Social responsibility

The concerns about producing an ethnographic knowledge that those in power may use to repress, corrupt or to exterminate opposers are very concrete (Juris and Khasnabish 2015: 580). In 1976, June Nash, after years of fieldwork conducted in revolutionary settings in the 1960s and 1970s and with the indignation raised by Projet Camelot (see Horowitz 1973) and the publication of Thailand counterinsurgency research (see Wolf and Jorgensen 1970) still strong, wrote: *«ever since we discovered that secrecy was a defense against the dominant culture, we have been increasingly aware that our data may be used against those whose lives we have shared»* (Nash 1976: 148). She added further that: *«since we have no official audience with statesmen or policy makers, we do not know how or whether our publications influence policies that will affect the lives of the people we study»* (*ibid.*). Moreover, the people anthropologists study are often cut off from the data published by language or literacy block. Just as anthropologists lack control over the product of their research, loosing – as Nash noted – the basis for their social responsibility towards research interlocutors (*ibid.*).

In consideration of all these sensitive aspects, in this study utmost attention has been paid to not increasing in any form and under any circumstance, the threats activists are

already exposed to. The names of the persons appearing in this ethnography are fictitious. Any detail that may lead to a clear and unequivocal identification of them has been omitted. In the fieldnotes too, some key-research interlocutors appear with nicknames instead of their real ones. The field notebooks were locked up, periodically scanned, and digital files stored in secure servers with double encryption. To make sure that sensitive information or analysis contained in the ethnography do not generate concrete threats to Luz y Fuerza or its activists, concerned parts were shared for revision to one of the key-research interlocutors, also at distance: nevertheless, almost no amendments were required. More generally, data analysis benefited from the valuable collaboration of some key-research interlocutors, trying to extend - as anthropologist Luke Lassiter envisages - the polyphonic dimension of the ethnographic work to a "next level": i.e. the cooperation between researcher and research interlocutors even in the reading and the interpretation of the ethnographic text (Lassiter 2001). In order to at least bridge a part of the gap between the people studied and the final product of the research (this thesis), the author made a commitment with Luz y Fuerza to make available an adapted and translated version of it in Spanish; as well as to hold presentations of it for members of Luz y Fuerza, in all regions of Chiapas where the Organization operates. Lastly, an ethnographic documentary project about Luz y Fuerza, based on this research, is planned too, and should be realized in cooperation with the activists, and with the scientific and technical support of the *Fabrique des Écritures en Sciences Sociales*, in Marseille.

Danger

Clearly, the numerous concerns about threats and risks that were so far expressed, emanated from a significant dimension of the danger that is involved. Statistically, Chiapas is less insecure and violent than other federal states in Mexico, such as those most directly affected by the ongoing *war on drugs* (like Colima, Baja California or Guerrero). However, it is still part of a generally insecure and violent country (see chapter 2). It is still crossed by the shadows of the low-intensity warfare that never ceased since the 1994 Zapatista uprising, with several paramilitary groups still active on the field (Hidalgo Dominguez 2012). Additionally, according to the research interlocutors, the presence of drug cartels is increasing too. The study of a politically sensitive subject such as a resistance movement could somewhat escalate the danger of

violent reactions from authorities, local groups of power or paramilitaries. Albeit, according to anthropologist José Ruben Orantes García – who acted as academic advisor in Chiapas for this research – the profession of anthropologist in Mexico is always somehow risky, regardless of the study subjects³. Anthropologists may be perceived as a disturbing presence, who may obtain "thorny" information even if not directly looking for them. That imposes on them to keep a "low profile" – Orantes says –, to walk softly and to develop a certain *savoir-faire*.

Consequently, in the field, a set of measures to manage danger were implemented. These are precautions that – as anthropologist Jeffrey Sluka argued based on his fieldworks in the very heart of Northern Ireland guerrilla war during the 1980s – amount to little more than common sense (Sluka 2012 [1995]: 292). Nevertheless, they help in mediating at least to some degree most dangers (*ibid.*). Just to give some examples, during public protests, I made sure to unequivocally appear as an external observer, rather than a participant and activist. Holding a camera and taking pictures surely serves the purpose in such situations. Under circumstances where a larger public than activists of Luz y Fuerza was involved and the presence of police informants ("*orejas*": ears) was suspected, I made it absolutely clear in this case that *despite* the camera, I was not a journalist but an anthropologist working for a university, and that my writings were not going to be published in any newspaper. This was a required clarification given contemporary Mexico is one of the deadliest countries in the world for journalists (see chapter 2). Sluka warns that although the status of an outsider or "*objective scientific observer*" may offer, in some cases, a degree of protection, one should not count on it much (Sluka 2012: 290). Generally, he concludes that despite "skillful maneuver", some dangers may be beyond management, just because danger is not a purely "technical" problem and is never totally manageable: luck or bad luck may always result determinant, indeed (*idem*: 292). What is at stake is the termination of the research, or worse yet, the termination of the researcher (*ibid.*).

During the fieldwork for this study, I personally found the termination of the research as the most realistic threat. The memory of hundreds of foreigners expelled from Chiapas on suspicions of engaging in political activities (i.e. being Zapatista supporters) (see Nash 2001: 201) is still vivid. My stays in Mexico complied with all Mexican laws. Yet,

³ Private conversation, 21.10.2016, San Cristóbal de las Casas

from outside, the difference between being an observer of political activities (such as those carried out by a social movement), and being involved in them as truly activist, might not always be evident. In consideration of this, I felt less potential threats to my life. I "relied" on this "tradition" of expulsions, if for some reason my research could have "disturbed" authorities or other "stakeholders", allowing the euphemism. Potential threats to personal safety, however, goes beyond the research and its specific contents. Major risks might have come from the situation of general insecurity ongoing in the country. Usually, foreigners in Mexico are sensibly less likely to be victims of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings or other major human rights violations widespread in the country. Yet, some of them were victims too, which confirms the need for being reasonably cautious.

The same activists most of the times protected me, by dissuading (or actually denying) me from participating in some of their activities or actions they deemed potentially too dangerous. They often accompanied me in order to not let me travel alone in certain areas, for example along the border with Guatemala – a region of major drug and human trafficking. They stayed *pendientes*, vigilant for me especially when travelling alone and making sure that other activists waited for me on arrival or on the way. On the other side, I somehow thought that my very presence could in certain circumstances, protect activists from immediate abuses by authorities. A *guero*, academic researcher, with European passport, is likely to represent an inconvenient witness, in case of "ordinary" contingent repression. The principle is the same expressed by anthropologist Philippe Bourgois when he recounts that during the Salvadoran Civil War (1979-1982) refugees in a Salvadoran refugee camps in Honduras desperately wanted foreigners to reside in the camp with them, because foreign witnesses deterred military officials from engaging in random abuses (Bourgois 1991: 116). Whereas, of course I could not do anything in case of a planned and coordinated strategy against one or more activists, that could have been easily performed any time in my absence.

My positioning on the field

Nevertheless, ethnographic fieldwork in a dangerous setting cannot be reduced to merely a matter of not to harm, not to expose others and one's self to danger, and to

control risks. A well-known passage of June Nash recurs in discussions about conducting fieldwork in politically sensitive environments:

«In Bolivia it was not possible to choose the role of an impartial observer and still work in the tin mining community of Oruro, where I had gone to study ideology and social change. [...] The polarization of the class struggle made it necessary to take sides or to be cast by them on one side or the other. In a revolutionary situation, no neutrals are allowed.» (Nash 1976: 150)

Whether or not the ethnographer takes side – comments Sluka – people directly involved in the situation are going to define whose side they think you are on (Sluka 2012: 291), and they will consider him on the basis of this definition, regardless of any profession of neutrality he may advance (*ibid.*). In my case, the only fact of being interested in Luz y Fuerza and conducting a research in that regard, was for the activists a clear profession of sympathy and adhesion to their struggle. They trusted me and allowed me to carry out this research. From the very beginning, they called me *compañero* (comrade), just as one of them, and so I called them too. This happened also thanks to the first contact in 2014, when I participated in painting murals for free in their communities, and thanks to the typical cumulative effect that the sociologist Ned Polsky named "snowballing" (Polsky 1967: 129): I have been introduced by one of the most prestigious persons in the movement, the founder, which vouched for me with all the activists. Luz y Fuerza activists were right, inasmuch as I actually decided to study their Organization because I sympathized with their problems, grievances, struggle and nonviolent methods for social justice. Yet, I could never consider myself as an activist like them. This was not really out of worry of scientific objectivity or academic validity for my analysis: excellent ethnographic works have been produced in Chiapas by scholars being declaredly activist and directly engaged on the field into the socio-political realities (often EZLN-related) they studied, indeed (see Levya Solano 2010; Speed, S. 2010; Levya Solano, X. and Speed, S. 2008). Therefore, in my case it rather was out of deep respect towards the activists.

An interesting view about the position of the anthropologist on the field and more specifically, about the fundamental dualism between research and activism (and researcher and activist), emerges from a recent analysis done by anthropologist Richard

Rechtman (2017) on the work of anthropologist Veena Das. Rechtman asserts that in the work of Das, there is no distinction between activism and research, as far as anthropological knowledge arises from the anthropologist's active participation in the observed scene (*idem*). «*It is because the anthropologist shares the same space, breathes the same air, and feels the same horror or the same empathy that they are able to give words to what has been said or not said in the ethnographic scene*» (*idem*: 133) . The only manner to get in contact with the "everyday" (a fundamental concept in Das' anthropology), is to get as close as possible to the scene and be part of it, actively participating in it (*ibid.*) - there lies the coincidence between research and activism.

During my fieldwork, the activists and I shared the same poor spaces, the same hot or freezing air, modest meals, interminable and uncomfortable trips on the back of a truck. We also shared the same inclement weather, fatigue, temporary hunger, thirst, and the same dangers and fears. To use Das' terms, this was emphatically getting close to their suffering and through it, knowing their otherness (*ibid.*). However, for me that happened just for some days or weeks, during the limited months of fieldwork. After those long days, I returned to sleep in a quite comfortable house in the center of San Cristóbal de las Casas, which was usually rented to foreign travelers. I had unlimited access to internet, hot water, excellent meals, health insurance, a salary in euros and a European passport with all the inherent rights and benefits. On the contrary, for the people of Luz y Fuerza, those hard conditions and circumstances are part of their daily life. They represent the normality their existence is made of, not just a temporary human and professional experience. Therefore, at least for the sake of intellectual honesty, I cannot really say that I was an activists just like them, or that I have been "one of them". My participation in their activities was for research; for them, activism was for survival. This alludes to the distance and the difference between research and activism and between researcher and activist.

For these reasons, I feel closer with the claims of anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes that in anthropology, knowledge production and activism are two separate actions (Scheper-Hughes 1995). Anthropologists should use their expert knowledge to defend the rights and support the cause of people they study, through advocacy or bearing witness: this is activism (*idem*). But the knowledge itself should not be informed by the purposes of activism and it should as much as possible be free of ideological

conditionings (*idem*). Based on his ethnographic researches of humanitarian agencies, anthropologist Didier Fassin held the epistemological position he named "distanced interiority" (Fassin 2010: 38-39). This refers to the sort of "engaged critical realism" that emerges in situations in which the anthropologist shares deeply the subjects' concerns, but he is also able to express uncomfortable critiques whenever required (see also Escobar 2014: 101). These critiques should be anchored in both sound empirical research and accurate theoretical analysis, in order to avoid easy dualisms (e.g., between "god" and "bad" people, or between "victims" and "the state") and to make doable and receivable, non-complacent and openly critical studies (Fassin 2010: 39). Inspired by such an approach, in this study, I wrote some of the critical observations I could make during the fieldwork. For instance, I wrote about the limited and often instrumental involvement of women in Luz y Fuerza activities. However, my efforts were addressed specially to create with the key-actors of the Organization, a frank environment where criticisms were openly shared and discussed, as a potential contribution towards further development of the Organization. In this sense, I agree with anthropologists Jeffrey Juris and Alex Khasnabish when they affirm that "engaged ethnographers" (i.e. engaged with intellectual and political concerns) may not only observe and take part in activist practices, but also help in varying degrees their organization, activities and their imagination (Juris and Khasnabish 2015: 580). Similarly, I had the feeling from the onset that, with the activists of Luz y Fuerza, being a scientific research devoted to their Organization, represented a form of external and "authoritative" legitimation of their struggle. In that regard, in case of need like in a bloody repression, this academic "proximity" may evolve in solidarity, advocacy and concrete support, as it has somehow been the case for EZLN over the last twenty-five years.

Ethnographic activities

Finally, some specifications about the ethnographic activities conducted in this study. Fieldwork took place in two main sessions - from October 2016 to March 2017, and from July 2017 to February 2018. A third and short stint in the field occurred between May and June of 2018. This short stay was mainly to share with some key-research interlocutors "final" analysis and interpretations and to involve them in the ongoing writing process. The base for my stays has always been the town of San Cristóbal de las

Casas, yet, I conducted ethnographic activities in a number of other locations (towns, villages, *ejidos*, or *rancherías*), in the territories of the following Municipalities: San Cristóbal de las Casas, San Juan Cancuc, Oventic (Zapatista municipality) Amatenango del Valle, Venustiano Carranza, Comitán de Domínguez, Frontera Comalapa, Chicomuselo, Las Margaritas, Las Rosas, Ocosingo, Palenque and Salto de Agua. Overall, I performed participant observation in the following events (where "event" is used in anthropologist Max Gluckman's sense, i.e. a productive instance showing the processual nature of social life, and the agency of the people involved in it) (Gluckman 1940): 4 regional assemblies; 2 state assemblies; 2 demonstrations; 2 public debate forums; 3 group visits to communities for solidarity, electricity or affiliation purposes; 1 training workshops for electricians. Except those held in the Municipality San Cristóbal, the participation to most of events lasted up to 24 or 48 hours. A one-week full immersion stay was done in the Municipality of Palenque in August 2018, namely in the village of San Martín Chamizal, where almost the whole population militates in Luz y Fuerza. Apart from the activities directly involving Luz y Fuerza, I accompanied its founder to hold 4 conscientization workshops across Chiapas. I participated in the events marking the 20th anniversary of the National Indigenous Council (CNI), on October 2016, at the Universidad de la Tierra - CIDECI, in San Cristóbal de las Casas. I also participated in the first international festival "ConCiencias por la Humanidad" organized by the EZLN on December 2016, held at the CIDECI. On October 2017, I attended at the zapatista *caracol* of Oventic, the public speech given to a crowd of ten thousand people by *Marichuy*, the CNI-EZLN nominated candidate for 2018 presidential elections. Additionally, I witnessed dozens of demonstrations and political initiatives regularly taking place all year long in the central *Plaza de la Paz* in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

The first six-months of fieldwork has been the most intense period of observations, visits and time spent with the activists in order to get a 360 degrees knowledge of the Organization and its people. The second phase has been more "targeted" towards activities specifically aimed at putting hypothesis to test, acquiring specific information and verifying interpretations. Overall, 12 formal interviews were conducted between the two sessions, being "formal interviews" face-to-face meetings between the interviewer and the interviewee, with one asking specific questions and the other providing answers. In 5 of the interviews, the interviewee was the founder of Luz y Fuerza. 6 of the

interviews were with different key-activists of Luz y Fuerza. In one case the interviewee had been the spokesperson of Palenque section of the National Health System Workers Syndicate, which established a strategic alliance with Luz y Fuerza. Interviews were open-ended and narrative-oriented interviews. Interviewees were mainly asked about their biographies, their history of social activism in general and specifically in Luz y Fuerza, their analysis of local and national contemporary reality, their ideological positions, the motivations beyond their preference for Luz y Fuerza, their interpretation of the political goals pursued, the question of electricity, human and economic relations within the Organization, their view about strengths and weaknesses of the Organization, possible developments and outcomes for their struggle. In the case of the syndicate representative, the interview especially focused on the relationship between the syndicate and Luz y Fuerza; the common struggles, affinity and divergences between them; his personal experience with Luz y Fuerza activists; potential developments of the existing alliance. Except for the interviews with the founder, all interviews were audio-recorded and both discourse and thematic analysis were performed on their transcriptions. Interviewees were selected based on the roles of responsibility they fulfilled or still fulfil in the Organization, their seniority in its ranks and also based on their availability usually showed to me. They were also among the activists who were more capable of communicating in spoken Spanish, which is the language I used during the course of the fieldwork.

However, it must be said that majority of the most insightful and rich ethnographic elements didn't emerged by these formal interviews. They were instead the result of countless informal exchanges and conversations I had with the activists - both key-research interlocutors (5 may be considered so) and "ordinary" ones - during hundreds of hours of travel and between moments of waiting for public transport connections we shared; during frugal meals we had before or after assemblies or events; around a cup of Chiapas-made coffee at a gas station at sunrise or in a café in the evening after a very long day of work; during walks to recover after too many hours of bad transportation; or also in their houses, with all those that invited me to spend time with them and their families; or getting some fresh air at night fall, sitting in the neighborhood, in some remote village, near the border with Guatemala. All these were the kind of situations that gave me the opportunity to learn more for my research. Most of the topics included in the formal interviewees were explored on these occasions, where everyone appeared

more at ease and spontaneous. Moreover, these exchanges allowed regular follow-ups on specific contingent cases, facts or events, precious in understanding many aspects of the Organization. They were never audio recorded. However, on the days that I wrote my field notes, after each revealing moment, I tried to keep as much elements as possible. The camera (shooting both pictures and videos) was used only during public events such as demonstrations or debate forums, convivial moments such as collective meals or during relaxation after some activity, on the occasion of interventions on the electric grid and during some visits to the communities. During assemblies or internal meetings, I considered using it indiscreetly which is not really desired by the activists.

Interviews with authorities were considered but eventually omitted, because they were not really essential for the research questions and on the contrary, were potentially prejudicial for the accomplishment of the research itself. Concerns about expulsion of foreigners allegedly involved in political activities also motivated this choice. An interview with the *Comisión Federal de Electricidad* (CFE), the Mexican state-owned electric utility, was officially requested on December 5, 2017 (the request was sealed and registered), at CFE headquarters in San Cristóbal de las Casas. But the response is still pending.

During all the fieldwork I benefited from the position of an invited PhD candidate at the Research Center on Chiapas and the Southern Border (CIMSUR) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in San Cristóbal de las Casas, under the precious scientific supervision of prof. José Ruben Orantes García. Finally, on 7 September 2017, a major earthquake with an estimated magnitude of 8.2 Mw struck Chiapas. This slowed down ethnographic activities for the weeks to come.

Documentary sources

To conclude, the sources used in the study deserve a final set of critical considerations. Statistical data employed in the first part of the work are issued by internationally reputable source and are accepted as reliable. Data is sourced from the databases of international institutions such as the World Bank or the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); worldwide recognized indexes such the Human

Development Index; multidimensional poverty indicators *grounded* in the local context of Mexico rather than on universal benchmarks (the CONEVAL poverty measurement); annual reports of Amnesty International; others. Clearly, none of them is immune from criticisms. World Bank researches were accused of being in some cases, poorly supported by evidences or biased in favor of WB policies (see Banerjee et al. 2006). There is an abundant literature of criticisms towards the Human Development Index, mostly related to the choice of indicators, to issues related to weighting and to several other methodological aspects. (see Kovacevic 2010 for a review). CONEVAL is an institution of Mexican government, therefore doubts about its complete independence in assessing such a politically sensitive phenomenon like poverty, raise. Additionally, some scholars harshly criticized CONEVAL methodology of poverty assessment, for underestimating – they say - the real number of poor people in the country (see Boltvinik and Damián 2016: 275-278). Amnesty International, as many other organizations in the field of human rights (Human Rights Watch, OHCHR, etc.), may be easily criticized for the absolutely western conception of human rights (see Langford 2018) at the base of their mission and reports⁴. The use of these information became nevertheless *mainstream* about the referred phenomena, also in academia. Therefore, a cautious and conscious use of these them is made in this study, reminding they are descriptive but not perfectly representative of reality.

Still in the part I, concerning news and chronicles, the sources are some of the main Mexican national newspapers, particularly *La Jornada*, for probably being the one most attentive to Chiapas and to questions related to the indigenous and EZLN. Moreover, the newspaper regularly hosts the columns of notable anthropologists, such as Claudio Lomnitz. Some international newspapers were also consulted, in particular the Spanish edition of the New York Times. Factual assertions from newspapers have been checked through comparison with several national and international newspapers, scientific sources and actors or experts on the field (such as researchers at the UNAM). In any case, journalistic information have been employed as completion or update of findings inferred by scientific literature or ethnographic activities.

⁴ For a critical analysis of the liberal origin of human rights as a concept, and the limits of the discourse of human rights in supporting indigenous peoples' agency, I recommend Carmack 2008

Regarding the indigenous question, most up-to-date and exhaustive information was found in the publications of Global Americans - an independent academic research center on Latin America. They were corroborated through the exam of scientific literature, and the official publications issued by the Congress of the Union (the bicameral legislature of the Mexican federal government) on law and norms. In general, for both non-scientific and scientific sources, primary sources have been always strictly privileged.

PART I

MEXICO TODAY

Introduction

It is a challenge to fully know a country through an ethnographic study conducted over a period of one-year. The researcher may achieve an idea clear enough about the region or locality where he carried out his ethnographic work. However, the induction mechanism from the specific micro-case to the general level is seductive and treacherous and often inaccurate. Mexico is a huge, multi-faceted, complex and complicated country. It is also tremendously diverse. Mexico displays the variety and richness of an entire continent, rather than of a single country. For these reasons, the first part of the work provides a set of information that should help, on the one hand, to gain an overall picture of the country. And on the other, to know about the concrete living conditions of the social groups concerned by this study.

Chapter 1 introduces key-sociodemographic and economic indicators, together with an overview on the liberal model of development the country adopted since the 1980s, and a general assessment on poverty and inequalities. Chapter 2 describes the state of insecurity ruling Mexico, with the escalation of drug cartels, the reaction of the State, the systemic corruption and the threats to human rights. Finally, chapter 3 assesses the "indigenous question", by illustrating the socioeconomic, political and cultural conditions of the almost 15 million Mexican indigenous people.

CHAPTER 1. Socioeconomic Facts

1.1 Country Profile

With a total population of 129,163 million people, Mexico became the 10th most populous country in the world (UNDESA 2017: 20) in 2017. According to the Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), in 2015 the total population (estimated by INEGI in 119,530,753 persons) distributed among the 32 federal entities (31 federal states and Mexico City, called "Federal District" until January 2016) composing the Federal Republic of the United Mexican States, as shown in the table below:

Table 1. Mexican population per federal entity, 2015.

Federal Entity	Population	Federal Entity	Population
México	16,187,608	Hidalgo	2,858,359
Ciudad de México	8,918,653	Sonora	2,850,330
Veracruz	8,112,505	San Luis Potosí	2,717,820
Jalisco	7,844,830	Tabasco	2,395,272
Puebla	6,168,883	Yucatan	2,097,175
Guanajuato	5,853,677	Querétaro	2,038,372
Chiapas	5,217,908	Morelos	1,903,811
Nuevo León	5,119,504	Durango	1,754,754
Michoacán	4,584,471	Zacatecas	1,579,209
Oaxaca	3,967,889	Quintana Roo	1,501,562
Chihuahua	3,556,574	Aguascalientes	1,312,544
Guerrero	3,533,251	Tlaxcala	1,272,847
Tamaulipas	3,441,698	Nayarit	1,181,050
Baja California	3,315,766	Campeche	899,931
Sinaloa	2,966,321	Baja California Sur	712,029
Coahuila	2,954,915	Colima	711,235

Source: INEGI 2016: 2.1

Mexico City is rated by United Nations as the 7th largest "mega-city" (cities with 10 million inhabitants or more) in the world, with a total population (including the city proper, the urban agglomeration and the metropolitan area) of 21.157 million inhabitants (UNDESA 2016: iv) in 2016.

In 2017 the overall national population was almost equally divided between males and females, with the latter being 500 thousand more of the population (UNDESA 2017: 20). The population pyramid is not really an expansive one as the extension of the adult class (25-59 years) is ongoing to the detriment of young adults (15-24 years) (*ibid.*). This could be an indicator of the demographic change in the country, which is experiencing the kind of age pyramid typical of "most developed" countries as illustrated in the following table. This representation is close to the examples of the population pyramids of some of the most developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) and France:

Table 2. Population by broad age group, 2017.

<i>Age (years)</i>	Mexico	Latin America and Caribbean	World	USA	France
0-15	27%	25%	26%	18%	19%
15-24	18%	17%	16%	12%	14%
25-59	45%	46%	46%	44%	46%
60+	10%	12%	13%	26%	22%

Source: UNDESA 2017: 17-21

In 2015, the Mexican population was a rather "young" one, with a median age significantly lower than most of the "global north" as shown in the following table:

Table 3. Median age of the total population (years), 2017.

Mexico	Latin America and Caribbean	Central America	Northern America	European continent	World
27.5	29.2	26.6	37.9	41.6	29.6

Source: UNDESA 2017⁵

The Human Development Index (HDI) summarises and integrates the information so far exposed. Although the HDI is not immune to criticisms and questions (see Kovacevic 2010), it represents a serious attempt to overcome economic growth as a sole indicator for assessing the development of a country. The HDI considers three dimensions: longevity and healthy life; knowledge; decent standard of living. The HDI report of 2018 ranks Mexico at 74 among a global ranking of 189 countries ranked. Mexico scored a Human Development Index of 0.774, placing the country in the higher zone of the category of "high human development" (UNDP 2018: 23). Table 4 shows in detail the data (from 2017) on which this value was calculated, and the comparison with regional and global peers:

Table 4. 2018 Human Development Index and its components (2017 data).

	Human Development Index (HDI)	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	Gross National Income (GNI) per capita
	- value -	- years -	- years -	- years -	- 2011 PPP ⁶ \$ -
Mexico	0.774	77.3	14.1	8.6	16,944
Latin America and Caribbean	0.758	75.7	14.4	8.5	13,671
World	0.728	72.2	12.7	8.4	15,295

Source: UNDP 2018: 23-25

⁵ Custom data acquired via website: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/> - accessed 12.10.2017

⁶ PPP: Purchasing Power Parity

In the economic aspect, the World Bank (WB) considers Mexico as the second largest economy in Latin America, after Brazil (World Bank 2018). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ranks it the world's 11th largest economy (in terms of GDP measured at purchasing power parity) (OECD 2017a). The Mexican economy registered a real GDP growth of 2.9% in 2016, and 2.1% in 2017 (World Bank 2019: 4), whilst Brazil, achieved a -3.3% economic growth in 2016 and 1.1% in 2017 (*ibid.*). The group of Latin American and Caribbean countries overall recorded an economic growth rate of -1.5% and 0,8% (*ibid.*) in 2016 and 2017 respectively. In 2017 Mexico had a public debt equivalent to 54.3% of its national gross domestic product placing the Country in the 94th position of the world public debt ranking. Mexico's economic growth is far from the 237.6% debt to GDP ratio of the first position holder – Japan. The country also ranks behind fifth place holder Italy which has a debt to GDP ratio of 131%; it also lags behind even Russia with a debt to GDP ratio of 15.5% which is near the bottom of the global ranking (International Monetary Fund 2018⁷). Inflation rate (on consumer prices) in the country amounted to 6.04% in 2017 and 4.90% in 2018 (OECD 2019: 32).

At the end of 2018, the labour force was estimated at 56.02 million people: 12.7% of the labour force was employed in the agricultural sector, 17.5% in industry and 61% in the service sector (STPS 2019: 4-5)⁸. According to governmental sources, unemployment rate was 3.3% (*ibid.*) in 2018. Comparable data analysis from the 2017 HDI report shows an unemployment rate of 3.5% for Mexico. The country outranks the unemployment rate of countries such as the USA which stood at 4.4%, Italy 11.3% and Spain 17.4% (UNDP 2018: 62). According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), Mexico is the 9th largest export economy in the world. In 2017, for the first time after decades, it achieved a positive trade balance (62.6 billion \$) (OEC 2019). The top exports of Mexico are cars, vehicle parts, delivery trucks, computers and crude petroleum, whose top destinations are USA, Canada and China (*idem*). Primary imports are vehicle parts, refined petroleum, cars, computers and petroleum gas, especially from the USA, Canada, followed by Germany (*idem*). This pinpoints the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the structure and the operation of

⁷ Custom data acquired via website and processed by the author: https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/GGXWDG_NGDP@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD – accessed 23.2.2019

⁸ Data elaboration is mine.

Mexican trade, with a preponderant role of automotive companies. It also highlights a well-known paradox of Mexican economy and politics: Mexico exports crude petroleum to USA it extracts from its relevant reserves, and buys it back refined from US oil companies at market price.

In line with this evidence, the main global international financial institutions agree on a positive and sometimes quasi-enthusiastic judgment on Mexico's economy. There are two recurring elements in the arguments and rhetoric these institutions posit: first is the concept of "resilience" in the economy of Mexico; second, is the full approval and rejoicing judgement on the most recent reforms and policies of the Mexican Government. These two elements often go together and what is more, tied by a cause-effect relationship: i.e., the Mexican economy is resilient thanks to the "excellent" structural reforms implemented by the government. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are expected to positively rate these reforms they "recommended" and strongly supported for the Mexican government as *sine qua non* - for instance - renewing Mexico's access to \$86 billions of "Flexible Credit Line Arrangement" provided by the International Monetary Fund itself (IMF 2017).

The IMF Executive Board states in its 2017 review on Mexico's qualifications to access the Flexible Credit Line arrangement:

«Mexico's economy has shown resilience to bouts of volatility reflecting country's very strong policies and policy frameworks. [...] This resilience reflects the country's very strong policies and policy frameworks, with the exchange rate playing a key role as a shock absorber. [...] In addition, the implementation of a broad range of structural reforms is expected to raise medium-term growth. » (IMF 2017)

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shares a positive evaluation too:

«Ambitious structural reforms and sound macroeconomic policies have ensured the resilience of the highly-open Mexican economy in the face of challenging global conditions.» (OECD 2017: 10)

However, right next to that, it significantly adds:

«Yet, growth has not been inclusive enough to achieve better living conditions for many Mexican families. Disparities between a highly productive modern economy in the North and in the Centre and a lower-productivity traditional economy in the South, have increased. Mexico can reignite growth by reprioritising its public spending towards infrastructure, training, health and poverty reduction. [...]«Incomes remains highly concentrated, many families live in poverty, insecurity is high and children's opportunities to do better than their parents could be improved.» (OECD 2017: 10) » (OECD 2017: 10)

All international actors recognize the problem of poverty in Mexico poverty is severe, enduring, highly-concentrated and unequally-distributed and continues to defy all ambitious structural reform or sound policy measures. The persistent and worsening poverty crisis in Mexico affects the same geographical areas and the same population groups.

1.2 The Liberal Turn

As anticipated in the introduction, a clarification about the use of the category of "neoliberalism" is needed. Research interlocutors constantly defined as "neo-liberal" or "neo-liberally-inspired" all those policies and reforms locally implemented by Mexican government but "imposed" by international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Generally, research interlocutors blame those policies and reforms as the fundamental cause of the people's suffering. And they retain Mexican government as a mere "intermediary" for a "global neoliberal capitalist power" actually ruling the world, after having usurped national sovereignties. "Neoliberalism" appears in this way as a kind of gigantic, all-powerful first cause for everything evil to happen and to decimate local livelihoods – to quote the explanation anthropologist James Ferguson provides in a sound analysis about the uses and misuses of "neoliberalism" concept. Research interlocutors are not the only ones to display such a vision. They are

in good company, with what Ferguson defines as "the antis" movements: anti-globalization, anti-neoliberalism, anti-privatization, anti-imperialism, etc. (*idem*: 166). Generally, they confirm geographer David Harvey's affirmation that neoliberalism "has become hegemonic as mode of discourse" (Harvey 2005: 3). As a matter of fact, if we look at contemporary anthropological scholarship, we'll find that the terms "neoliberal" and "neoliberalism" are nearly ubiquitous (Ganti 2014: 90). Overall, anthropologists have used "neoliberalism" predominantly as a term of critique, which indexes what anthropologist Sherry Ortner describes as a "*darker narrative*" (Ortner 2011). It is interesting to note that according to political scientists, neoliberalism acquired its negative connotations after the term began to be used in Latin America, first by Chilean intellectuals to highlight the economic reforms implemented by the Pinochet regime (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009: 139). According to the anthropologist Tejaswini Ganti, the notable economist Milton Friedman, and the role played by the University of Chicago's School of Economics (headed by Friedman) in training a generation of Latin American economist during the 1950s and 1960s, all contributed to the negative connotation attributed to the terms neoliberal and neoliberalism within social science scholarship (Ganti 2014: 93). These trained economists often referred to as the "Chicago Boys", radically restructured and transformed economies throughout Latin America, causing tremendous social inequality and several political and economic crises (*ibid.*).

Ganti explains that real engagement of anthropologists with the subject of neoliberalism began in the post-9/11 world, where the impact of market-oriented reforms, policy prescriptions, financial crises, and the so-called global War on Terror, became more tangible in field sites of anthropologists (*idem*: 90). The core of anthropological literature dedicated to neoliberalism, falls into two main categories (*idem*: 94). The first is especially concerned with policies and politics (*ibid.*). It emerges from a Marxist paradigm dedicated to questions of political economy, particularly on the effects of macroeconomics policies such as structural adjustment programs (first applied to Latin America and then all over the Global South), the contraction of the social welfare state, and the privatization of public services or goods (*ibid.*). The second is mainly concerned with ideologies and values. It derives from a Foucauldian framework that focuses on technologies of self and governmentality and investigates whereby subjectivities are formed and informed by the "typically neoliberal" values of individualism, entrepreneurialism, and market competition (*ibid.*). More recently, a third and small

current eventually emerged and it intersects the first two. It studies the agents and institutions (technocrats, bureaucrats, NGOs and mass media forms) involved in articulating or mediating neoliberal ideology and practice (*ibid.*).

The first two strands both consider neoliberalism as a force capable of putting a tremendous impact on the existence of people, their life-choices, social relations, and ways of inhabiting the world (*ibid.*). Thanks to the commitment of the discipline in elucidating local life-words, anthropologists have been in a privileged position to witness the effects of neoliberal policies on lives across the planet. Ganti reviewed a relevant selection of anthropological studies on neoliberalism, and affirms that they generally come to the following conclusions: «*global inequalities have risen sharply; most people are marginalized, dispossessed, and disenfranchised* (see Bourgois 2011; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000 quoted in Ganti 2014: 94), *as public resources have been privatized, cities increasingly gentrified* (see Amouroux 2009; Sampat 2010 quoted *ibid.*), *social welfare programs reduced or slashed* (see Yazici 2012; Morgen 2001 quoted *ibid.*), *and the rural and urban poor incorporated into market economies* (see Elyachar 2005; Karim 2011 quoted *ibid.*)» (Ganti 2014: 94). Such a negative evaluation corroborates Harvey's argument that neoliberalism is a class-based project seeking to restore the power of economic elites (Harvey 2005: 19).

The key popularity of the concept in contemporary anthropology, has also attracted a good share of criticisms, for being cursory and insufficiently theorized (Ganti 2014: 90). Those I find most relevant, question the actual utility of neoliberalism as analytical category, if used to explain and describe *all* contemporary socio-political-economic-cultural phenomena. It should not surprise many that in December 2012, the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory debated the motion (although it did not approve it), "The concept of neoliberalism has become an obstacle to the anthropological understanding of the twenty-first century" (see Eriksen et al. 2015). Ganti affirms that the ongoing debate over the use (or overuse) of neoliberalism invokes memories of earlier debates that animated the anthropological discipline (Ganti 2014: 99-100), respectively over the use of concepts such as "world system" (see Nash 1981 quoted *ibid.*) and "political economy" (Roseberry 1988 quoted *ibid.*). Some of the criticisms paraded at that time, resonates with contemporary criticisms about neoliberalism (*ibid.*). Then and now, the questions at stake are those of scale, comparison, representation, and relevance, to analyze the intersection between local life-words and broader processes of

capitalist transformation (*ibid.*). These kinds of debates are nevertheless constructive and necessary, inasmuch – concludes Ganti – they urge us to be more precise in our scientific production and allow us to reevaluate our scientific agendas for the future (*ibid.*). Our personal effort in this direction and for a responsible use of the concept, begins by clarifying the differences between "liberalism" and "neoliberalism."

According to an abundant literature examined in James Ferguson's analysis (Miller and Rose 2008; Rose 1999 quoted in Ferguson 2009: 172), liberalism was always about finding an equilibrium between two clearly distinct spheres: state and market, public and private (172). Whether in neoliberalism, in contrast, governmental mechanisms typically developed in the private sphere are applied to the state itself (*ibid.*). What entails that even core functions of the state are outsourced to private providers, or "run like a business" (*ibid.*). And at the same time, it requires new constructions of "active" and "responsible" citizens and communities, to produce governmental results that do not depend anymore on the direct state intervention (*ibid.*). As a result, the line between what should public and what private almost disappears (*ibid.*). And so does the distance between the state and the market, as market-based techniques of government enter the terrain of the state itself (*ibid.*). Therefore, in the strictest sense, neoliberalism refers to a macroeconomic doctrine, whose key elements include - in addition the afore mentioned application of the "business model" to the state – the advocacy of tariff elimination and currency deregulation, as well what is sometimes called "free-market fetishism" (see Peck 2008 quoted in Ferguson 2009: 170).

Often, "neoliberalism" is used to refer to a regime of policies and practices associated with or claiming to be inspired to this doctrine. But the practice is of course different from the theory itself. And it could not be otherwise, because, as Harvey observes, a perfect application of neoliberal doctrine would require an "utopian" world (Harvey 2005: 19). Harvey highlights that, far from a pure application of the utopian neoliberal doctrine, the dominant groups around the world have used neoliberal arguments to carry out what in reality is a class project (*idem*). In this sense, "neoliberalism" has come to define «*a set of highly interested public policies that have vastly enriched the holders of capital, while leading to increasing inequality, insecurity, loss of public services, and a general deterioration of quality of life for the poor and working classes*» - comments Ferguson (2009: 170). On this understanding is also based, at least in part, the idea of "neoliberalism" research interlocutors express. However, the actual policies of

neoliberal states may diverge from neoliberal doctrine also due to the general contingencies of democratic politics, and not necessarily and exclusively for the ill intentions of the rich (*idem*: 171). This aspect may also help to account for the otherwise paradoxical situations in which regimes implementing clearly neoliberal macroeconomic policies, have also seen substantial rises in social spending (e.g. India, Brazil and South Africa, among others) (*ibid*).

Finally, Ferguson offers an example on the meaning of neoliberalism applied to the African continent, that results very useful to decide which usage better fits the Mexican context (*idem*: 172-173). In Africa, neoliberalism appeared under the form of "structural adjustment", as the policy forced on African states in the 1980s by banks and international lending agencies, were named. These reforms aimed to remove tariffs, deregulate currency markets, and remove the presence of the state from production and distribution processes. Privatizations and free-markets fetishism were involved too. However, no new technologies of government foreseen in the neoliberal doctrine were really developed, such as the empowerment of prudential individual and communities an similar. What leads Ferguson to argue that in these terms, neoliberalism in Africa has been not "neo" at all: *«It was, in fact, largely a matter of old-style laissez-faire liberalism in the service of imperial capital. And it had disastrous and wildly unpopular results (especially, the selling off of precious state assets to foreign firms at fire-sale prices, massive deindustrialization, and increased unemployment)»* (*idem*: 173).

This have raised across the continent, the specter of a recolonization. For these reasons, "neoliberalism" can't be uncritically applied to the African case. If in Western Europe and North America, "neoliberalism" refers to an art of government, in Africa it was rather a *«crude battering open of the Third World markets»* (*ibid.*). For these same reasons, I find more appropriate to use the definition of "liberalism" and the adjective of "liberal" in the case of Mexico, although the research interlocutors prefer to the "neo" version. As we are going to detail – in fact – the form the supposed "neoliberalism" reached Mexico has been definitely more similar to the African case, than to Western Europe and North America.

Mexico "structural reforms" have been liberal in inspiration. Mexican liberal turn begun in the 1980s. Like several other Latin-American countries, after World War II, Mexico implemented the economic model of import substitution industrialization (ISI), a state-

led-growth strategy advocating the replacement of foreign imports with domestic production (Ruiz Nápoles 2017). In addition to the implementation of protectionist trade policies, this strategy implied state control and coordination of industrial, commercial and monetary policies in order to promote growth. As a result, between 1950 and 1981 the period of ISI implementation in Mexico, the country economy grew with a significant level of industrialization (Ruiz Nápoles 2017; Moreno-Brid and Ros 2009). In 1981 a major foreign exchange crisis triggered a growing deficit in the trade balance, building on a negative trend underway since the early 1970s (Ruiz Nápoles 2017). In the first part of 1982, the foreign exchange crisis turned into a foreign debt crisis. Several experts started pleading for liberal reforms of the economy and an abandonment of the ISI model for export-led growth strategies (see Levy 1982; Clavijo and Valdivieso 1983).

At that time, the doctrine of economic liberalization promoted by Reagan administration was already mainstream among many decision makers of The Cold War free block. International financial institutions started to intervene in Mexico. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund proposed/imposed in Mexico the same package of reforms they were delivering to all Latin American countries with high foreign debts. This economic reform package was known under the definition of "growth-oriented adjustment programs" or "structural adjustment programs." According to the US economist, Jeffrey Sachs, these programs included the following main provisions:

- «1) trade liberalization, especially the conversion of quantitative restrictions to low, uniform tariffs;*
- 2) real exchange-rate depreciation and unification of the exchange rate;*
- 3) an emphasis on the private sector as the source of growth, including the privatization of state enterprises;*
- 4) a general reduction in all forms of government intervention in markets (capital or factor), and in the overall level of government taxation and expenditure.» (Sachs 1987: 2)*

The name given to this package of liberal reforms for Mexico was "structural change program" and it represented the exact opposite of the previous State-led growth strategy. The objective was the complete liberalization of markets: domestic and foreign, goods

and services, labour and capital (Sachs 1987). For the Mexican economist Pablo Ruiz Nápoles, the reforms targeted state subventions, and fostered growth by increasing exports and especially manufacturing exports, which had to replace oil and primary products, which had monopolized Mexican exports up to this moment (Ruiz Nápoles 2017).

The first wave of structural reforms had a particular focus on macroeconomics. It was launched during Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado's presidency (1982-1988) and terminated at the very beginning of the 1990s. The key measures implemented included prices stabilization, public deficit control, restructuring of the external debt, free trade deals, opening to foreign direct investments (FDI) and resizing of public administration (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2016; Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017a).

The second wave included reforms undertaken during the presidencies of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo Ponce (1994-2000). The macroeconomic measures previously launched were consolidated and accompanied by a range of microeconomic interventions concerning: privatization of telecommunications (1989); privatization of banks (1990); the cancellation of the Land Reform (1992); mining, economic competition, metrology and standardization (1992); the opening of electricity production to independent (private) producers (1992); the autonomy of the Bank of Mexico (1994). It was during this same period that NAFTA – the North America Free Trade Agreement between Mexico, USA and Canada, came into force (on January 1, 1994). The free-float monetary exchange system replaced the fixed exchange regime (1994). The Value Added Tax (VAT) was also reformed and its value was incremented from 10% to 15% (1995). Airport services were privatized (1995), as well as harbours and satellite services (1996), the rail system (1997) and the production of natural gas (1998). Finally, the private pension system was reformed through the modification of the Law on the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) (1997) (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2016; Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017a; Elizondo Mayer-Serra 2017).

The third wave of structural reforms came with Enrique Peña Nieto's presidency (2012-2018). On one hand, it was focused specifically on macroeconomic measures, and on the design and consolidation of general regulatory frameworks on the other (Gutiérrez

Rodríguez 2016; Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017). On one hand, the structural changes were introduced in telecommunications, energetic (in particular electricity and oil)⁹ and financial sectors (2013-2014) (*idem*). On the other hand, the Federal Labour Law (2012), the General Law on Education (2013) and the Federal Economic Competition Law (2014) were approved, with relevant transformations in their respective fields (*idem*). The reform of the national treasury was also implemented during this phase (2013) as a result of a process started in the previous presidency (*idem*).

However, and unfortunately, the structural reforms have been far short of the great benefits their promoters assured the government they would bring. Information contained in the following table are self-explanatory, with the column 1970-1981 referring to the last decade of state-led-growth strategy and the further two to liberal "age", respectively before and after NAFTA enforcement:

Table 5. GDP, exports and employment. Average annual rates of growth.

	1970-1981	1982-1993	1994-2015
GDP in constant MXN Pesos	6.9	1.7	2.6
GDP real per capita	3.6	- 0.4	1.2
Exports in constant MXN Pesos	11.9	6.1	8.4
Employment	4.8	2.0	1.4

Source: INEGI (reported in Ruiz Nápoles 2017: 77)

The same Mexican government coined the emblematic expression "lost decade", referring to the missed economic growth opportunity throughout the decade between 1982-1993 (Ruiz Nápoles 2017: 80). Gross domestic product (GDP), exports and employment underwent very low growth rates and even negative figures at some points

⁹ Given the relevancy of the energetic reform for the subject of this study, it is worth mentioning one of the (few) critical analysis scholars have written on the matter. The energy engineer Rosío Vargas Suárez (2015) listed some relevant risks the energetic reform is going to engender for Mexico: a) the extinction of Pemex and CFE, insofar they will be obliged to compete in a free market, but under a regime of exception – they remain property of the federal state, unless they will have to operate under the rule of private law; b) the progressive loss of the oil rent, what will also result in a drop of poverty reduction and redistributive policies; c) energetic security is threaten, inasmuch Pemex and CFE will cease being state entities providing public services, to become companies seeking profit; d) the increase in fuel prices, as it will be the market to set them; e) land dispossession to the detriment of *ejidos*, villages, and indigenous communities, in both rural and urban areas, due to extractivist initiatives; f) further environmental damages, as well as the privatization and the exhaustion of water resources, due to a growing resort to fracking being planned.

(1985-86) (Ruiz Nápoles 2017: 77-80). However, the balance of trade had the most negative performance by moving from a plus 5 billion dollars in 1982 to a minus 15 thousand billion dollars in 1992, with the negative trend starting in 1988 (*ibid.*).

The rosy promises of NAFTA never materialized. Real GDP per capita in the period 1994-2015 stagnated at an average growth rate of 1.2% per year, far below any enthusiastic expectation NAFTA had generated (Ruiz Nápoles 2017: 77). After more than 30 years of negative outcomes, the balance of trade displayed a positive balance again only in 2018 (OEC 2019; Ruiz Nápoles 2017: 84). Employment did not substantially grow either. Between 1994 and 2015 employment saw an average growth rate per year, definitely lower compared to the first decade of structural adjustment programs (1982-1993) and especially in the last decade of state-led growth strategy (1970-1981) (Ruiz Nápoles 2017: 77). As easily predictable due to the lack of improvements in the market labour, migration flows towards USA have not stopped nor decreased substantially (Maronta 2017; Cornelius 2002).

Finally, one of the key-arguments, or probably the main argument, in support of the third wave of structural reforms was that according to OCDE estimations their implementation would have added - at least one percentage point per year to Mexican GDP growth rate (Elizondo Mayer-Serra 2017: 36). Unfortunately, Mexican GDP did not really correspond with the forecast, as the following trend of yearly growth rates show: 3.67% in 2011; 3.39% in 2012; 1.62% in 2013; 2.81% in 2014; 3.31% in 2015; 2.63% in 2016; 2.31% in 2017; 2.21% in 2018 (OECD 2019b). Robert Rennhack - the Deputy Director in the Western Hemisphere Department of the International Monetary Fund - publicly recognized, on April 2017, that structural reforms were not yielding the results wished¹⁰. Yet, both the Mexican government and policy makers never really questioned about the suitability and the efficacy of liberal "therapy" they were applying to the country.

The only prominent political actor that raised his voice against the liberal turn and, more generally, the Mexican political establishment backing it, was presidential candidate Luis Donald Colosio Murrieta who was running in 1994 elections for the Institutional

¹⁰ Gonzáles, L.M. and Y. Morales. 2017. "El desafío de México es romper el techo del crecimiento de 2.5%". *El Economista* (on-line). April 24. <https://www.economista.com.mx/economia/El-desafio-de-Mexico-es-romper-el-techo-del-crecimiento-de-2.5-20170424-0012.html> - accessed 7.12.2017

Revolutionary Party or *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), the ruling party at the time. His criticisms, even if moderate, were unfortunate. Two weeks after he declared his "doubts" in a famous speech in front of the Monument to the Revolution in Mexico City (March 6, 1994), his presidential campaign and his life were put to an end: he was shot in the head amidst a crowd in the city of Tijuana (March 23, 1994), in what it could be considered the Mexican version of the John F. Kennedy assassination (see Sánchez Ley 2013). The remaining politicians including Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, the candidate that replaced Colosio and eventually became president (1994-2000) just continued unperturbed in the economic direction which the country had taken since 1982.

During the third wave of structural reforms, the Peña Nieto government deliberately neglected all reforms concerning social security and health to the point that - according to the international organization promoting structural reforms in Mexico - had to compulsorily and irrevocably go along with the macroeconomic ones, in order to reduce inequalities and fight poverty. The legal proposal on universal pension for senior citizens (*Ley de Pensión Universal para Adulto Mayores*), as well as the legal provision on unemployment insurance (*Seguro de desempleo*), got stalled at the Senate in the second trimester of 2014, and in the following budget cutback of January 2015 (justified with the fall of international oil price) were simply discarded (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2016: 54). Among the few social measures implemented during the six-year term between 2012-2018, there were two cash-transfer programs: the "National Crusade Against Hunger" (*Cruzada Nacional Contra el Hambre*) (since 2013) and "*Prospera*" which replaced the previous program "Opportunities" (*Oportunidades*, 2000-2014) designed for the benefit of the population in extreme poverty. As Mexican economist Rodolfo de la Torre García underlined¹¹, these programs helped only to bring relief from extreme hunger, rather than building the conditions of empowerment to alleviate it in sustainably. In some areas, especially in remote and rural parts of the country, the management of programs has not been adequately monitored and often led to arbitrary acts and political nepotism by officials. An example of such incidents appeared in the national newspapers, and there are often reports by research interlocutors about political coercion and threats of excluding beneficiaries from programs for refusing to take part

¹¹ Enciso, L. A. 2016. "Prospera, insuficiente ante problemas del país: experto". La Jornada (on line). October 3. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/10/03/sociedad/033n2soc> - accessed 6.12.2017

in given political events¹². The overall result is that poverty and inequalities remain an intractable problem in contemporary Mexico.

1.3 Poverty and Inequalities

Since 2009, Mexico has been the first country in the world to devise, adopt and implement a national and official multidimensional poverty index, under the initiative and responsibility of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (*CONEVAL - Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social*) in compliance with the 2004 General Law of Social Development (*LGDS - Ley General de Desarrollo Social*) (CONEVAL 2010). The index represents a precious tool for assessing, analysing and possibly phasing out poverty. Its added-valued lies in its multidimensional approach to poverty, which is internationally comparable, but based on parameters and numbers (economic and not) actually grounded and relevant to the specific locality where the measurements are conducted. More specifically, this Mexican methodology for the measurement of poverty is inspired by Amartya Sen's capability approach (Sen 1999; Sen 1993). The specific multidimensional measurement framework implemented is akin to that of name Alkire and name Foster (Alkire and Foster 2007; Foster 2010). Income (as GDP per capita) is considered a relevant indicator, but in addition to income, it incorporates 7 dimensions representing the main social deprivations: educational gap; access to health services; access to social security; quality and spaces of dwelling; access to basic services in the dwelling; access to food; degree of social cohesion (CONEVAL 2010).

From the interaction between these economic and social indicators, the following definitions of poverty are derived:

¹² Enciso, L. A. 2017. "Destituye Sedesol a 4 por condicionar la entrega de apoyos de Prospera. Beneficiarios fueron obligados a asistir a acto de Roberto Albores". La Jornada (on line). April 26. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2017/04/26/politica/014n2pol> - accessed 6.12.2017

- «*A person is living in poverty when he/she experiences one or more social deprivations and does not have sufficient income to buy the aggregation of the basic food basket with the basic non-food basket.*»
- «*A person is living in extreme poverty when he/she experiences three or more social deprivations and does not have sufficient income to buy the basic food basket.*»
- «*A person is vulnerable due to social deprivation when he/she experiences at least one social deprivation, but has sufficient income to buy the aggregation of the basic food basket with the basic non-food basket.*»
- «*A person is vulnerable due to income when he/she does not have sufficient income to buy the aggregation of the basic food basket with the basic non-food basket, but has no social deprivations.*» (CONEVAL n.d.: 3)

The last CONEVAL (2017) poverty assessment, issued in 2017 with estimations about 2016 shows that people in condition of poverty were estimated to be 43.6% of the overall Mexican population, equivalent to 53.418 million people (CONEVAL 2017: 9-10). People in extreme poverty were the 7.6% of the overall population, i.e. 9.375 million people (*idem*: 11-12), which is nearly equal to the entire population of states like Sweden or Portugal. Between the period 2010-2014, the growth trend of people living in poverty are as follows: 46.1% in 2010, 45.5% in 2012 and 46.2% in 2014 (*idem*: 9). Poverty rate has fluctuated since 2010, with a significant reduction seen in the last two-year period. However, the country still has a very high incidence of poverty within the overall population - nearly one out of every two Mexican is poor. Extreme poverty on the other hand has had a more steady declining pattern, however, with a serious prevalence too. The rate of extreme poverty stood at 11.3% in 2010, 9.8% in 2012 and 9.5% in 2014 (*idem*: 11). The geographical distribution of poverty and extreme poverty is uneven between the 32 Mexican federal entities, as Table 6 and 7 fully detail:

Table 6. People in poverty in Mexico, year 2016.

Federal Entity	%	absolute value (million people)	Federal Entity	%	absolute value (million people)
Chiapas	77.1%	4.114	Nayarit	37.5%	0.470
Oaxaca	70.4%	2.847	Durango	36.0%	0.643
Guerrero	64.4%	2.315	Colima	33.6%	0.249
Veracruz	62.2%	5.049	Tamaulipas	32.2%	1.156
Puebla	59.4%	3.728	Jalisco	31.8%	2.560
Michoacán	55.3%	2.566	Querétaro	31.1%	0.636
Tlaxcala	53.9%	0.702	Sinaloa	30.8%	0.930
Tabasco	50.9%	1.228	Chihuahua	30.6%	1.150
Hidalgo	50.6%	1.479	Quintana Roo	28.8%	0.471
Morelos	49.5%	0.966	Aguascalientes	28.2%	0.370
Zacatecas	49.0%	0.780	Sonora	27.9%	0.831
México	47.9%	8.230	Ciudad de México	27.6%	2.434
San Luis Potosí	45.5%	1.268	Coahuila	24.8%	0.746
Campeche	43.8%	0.405	Baja California	22.2%	0.789
Guanajuato	42.4%	2.490	Baja California Sur	22.1%	0.176
Yucatan	41.9%	0.902	Nuevo León	14.2%	0.738

Source: (CONEVAL 2017: 23-31)

Table 7. People in extreme poverty in Mexico, year 2016

Federal Entity	%	absolute value (million people)	Federal Entity	%	absolute value (million people)
Chiapas	28.1%	1.499	Quintana Roo	4.2%	0.069
Oaxaca	26.9%	1.087	Zacatecas	3.5%	0.056
Guerrero	23.0%	0.825	Chihuahua	3.2%	0.121
Veracruz	16.4%	1.332	Tamaulipas	2.9%	0.104
Tabasco	11.8%	0.284	Querétaro	2.9%	0.060
Michoacán	9.4%	0.435	Sinaloa	2.9%	0.087
Puebla	9.0%	0.562	Durango	2.8%	0.050
Hidalgo	8.0%	0.234	Colima	2.6%	0.019
Nayarit	7.9%	0.099	Sonora	2.5%	0.075
San Luis Potosí	7.7%	0.214	Aguascalientes	2.3%	0.030
Campeche	6.7%	0.062	Jalisco	1.8%	0.002
México	6.1%	1.057	Ciudad de México	1.8%	0.002
Yucatan	6.1%	0.132	Coahuila	1.7%	0.002
Morelos	5.9%	0.115	Baja California Sur	1.6%	0.002
Tlaxcala	5.7%	0.075	Baja California	1.1%	0.001
Guanajuato	4.4%	0.258	Nuevo León	0.6%	0.001

Source: (CONEVAL 2017: 23-31)

In 2010 (more recent estimations at municipal level have yet to be carried out) the "poorest" municipalities in Mexico (i.e. with the highest percentage of people in poverty) were mostly located in the two "poorest" states in the ranking: San Juan Tepeuxila, Oaxaca (97.4% of the overall population, in poverty); Aldama, Chiapas (97.3%); San Juan Cancuc, Chiapas (97.3%); Mixtla de Altamirano, Veracruz (97.0%); Chalchihuitán, Chiapas (96.8%); Santiago Textitlán, Oaxaca (96.6%); San Andrés Duraznal, Chiapas (96.5%); Santiago el Pinar, Chiapas (96.5%); Sitalá, Chiapas (96.5%) and San Simón Zahuatlán, Oaxaca (96.4%) (CONEVAL 2011: 13).

The tables highlight a clear pattern that the heaviest burden of poverty weighs on southwestern states of the republic, namely: Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero. On the other hand, it appears that poverty substantially decreases the closer we get to the northern border with the USA and the capital Mexico City. The difference in poverty and extreme poverty incidences between the first and the last states in the charts is enormous, as if they did not belong to the same country. It is also worth mentioning that poverty in Mexico (as elsewhere in the world) is discriminatory: Mexican indigenous people are significantly more affected by poverty and extreme poverty than non-indigenous Mexicans. In 2016, 77.6% of indigenous population lived in conditions of poverty, 34.8% of which were living in extreme poverty. Compared to the non-indigenous component of the population, percentage of people living in poverty was 41%, 5.8% of whom lived in extreme poverty (CONEVAL 2017: 34). This fact is also coherent with the distribution of poor people per federal entity seen just above. Chiapas, Oaxaca and Veracruz are those with the highest absolute presence of indigenous people (INEGI 2017: 54).

To complete the general picture, it is important to look at some key-findings about wealth distribution. Mexican economists Campos, Esquivel and Chávez found that in 2012, the richest 1% of Mexican people owned 21% of total revenues, positioning Mexico at the first place for wealth concentration in a 24-country ranking they conducted (Campos Vázquez, Chávez Jiménez, and Esquivel Hernández 2014: 58). The lowest levels in their list were occupied by China, Denmark, Sweden, Mauritius and New Zealand, where the richest 1% respectively hold a share of the total national revenues between 6% and 7.5% (*idem*: 50). While at the bottom, Mexico was led by

Colombia (20.5%), USA (17.5%), South Africa (17%), Argentina (17%) and UK (15.5%) (*ibid.*).

In relation with wealth stocks (not revenues), inequality in Mexico appears even more shocking. In a report on extreme inequality in Mexico commissioned by Oxfam, Esquivel estimates that 10% of the richest Mexicans controlled 64.4% of the total wealth (Esquivel Hernández 2015: 16). Similarly, the 2013 Wealthinsight report on Mexico quoted by Esquivel, pointed out that in 2012 the Country had 145 thousand people with a net worth exceeding 1 million US dollars, corresponding to less than 1% of the overall population, which held 43% of the total national wealth (WealthInsight 2013 quoted in Esquivel Hernández 2015: 16). While millionaires from the rest of the countries examined in the report, on average owned 29% of the total wealth in their respective countries (*idem*). Moreover, between 2007 and 2012, the number of millionaires around the world decreased by 0,3%. Ironically, this trend did not apply to Mexican millionaires. On the contrary, during this period their number recorded a resounding + 32% (*idem*), as made clear by figures already presented in the previous paragraph.

CHAPTER 2. An Ordinary State of Insecurity

«Violence increased throughout Mexico. The armed forces continued to undertake regular policing functions. Human rights defenders and journalists were threatened, attacked and killed; digital attacks and surveillance were particularly common. Widespread arbitrary detentions continued to lead to torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions. Impunity persisted for human rights violations and crimes under international law. Mexico received a record number of asylum claims, mostly from nationals of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Venezuela. Violence against women remained a major concern; new data showed that two thirds of women had experienced gender-based violence during their lives. The rights to housing and education were compromised by two major earthquakes.»

Amnesty International Report 2018: 256

«Corruption in Mexico is not a fantasy. It is not the consequence of a distorted social perception neither, like the government and the political elite use to state. The list of proven cases during the six years-presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto is overwhelming: the White House¹³, the Malinalco House¹⁴, the arrangements with the OHL building company¹⁵, Odebrecht¹⁶ and the new airport of the capital¹⁷. This list was recently extended by Chihuahua corruption system where, following the framework typical of organized crime, dummy companies and false invoices were used to fund the 2016 election campaign of PRI candidate to state governor. The case resulted in the arrest of Alejandro Gutiérrez - former general secretary of PRI - and allegations involving the former Chihuahua governor, as well as high-ranking representatives of PRI and of federal government too. Civil society's claims were not enough to limit power abuses and the theft of public funds. July 1, 2018 presidential elections are approaching and a question raises: will candidates to the presidency assume these demands as

¹³ This is the case of a 7 million \$ mansion supposedly built by a federal government's contractor, for the presidential family. See: Redacción AN. 2014. "Mexican President's 'White House'". Aristegui Noticias. November 9. <https://aristeguinoticias.com/0911/mexico/mexican-presidents-white-house/> - accessed 1.3.2018

¹⁴ *Malinalco House* is a well-known case of a luxury building purchased from the same contractor of the federal government involved in the "White House" case, but this time supposedly at the benefit of former Finance Minister, Luis Videgaray. See: Montes, J. 2014. "Mexico Finance Minister Bought House From Government Contractor". The Wall Street Journal (on line). December 11. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-ties-emerge-between-mexico-government-and-builder-1418344492> - accessed 1.3.2018

¹⁵ An alleged scandal of corruption involving Spanish building company OHL and high-level PRI politicians, including president Peña Nieto and minister Videgaray. See: Lafuente, J. 2017. "La sombra de la corrupción del PRI y OHL que se extiende en más de 100 kilómetros del Estado de México". El País. June 2. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/06/01/mexico/1496336906_790354.html - accessed 1.3.2018.

¹⁶ Odebrecht, the Brazilian business conglomerate, supposedly corrupted high-level functionaries of Pemex, the Mexican state-owned petroleum company to obtain relevant contracts. See: The New York Times en Español. 2017. "El caso Odebrecht sacude a México por acusaciones contra el exdirector de la petrolera estatal". The New York Times - ES (on line). August 15. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/08/15/odebrecht-mexico-emilio-lozoya-pemex-corrupcion/> - accessed 1.3.2018

¹⁷ The reference is to the opaque procedures of planning and contracts assignment for the new international airport of Mexico City, whose inauguration was due for 2020. See: Villegas, P. and E. Malkin. 2017. "Los errores del pasado acechan al aeropuerto del futuro de México". The New York Times - ES (on line). November 21. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/11/21/nuevo-aeropuerto-mexico-texcoco-chimalhuacan-enrique-pena-nieto/> - accessed 1.3.2018

reliable commitments during their campaign?»¹⁸

Insecurity, violence, human rights violations, impunity, and corruption are a menace and intractable challenges confronting contemporary Mexico. This problem not only sullies the Country's international reputation, but destroys thousands of Mexican lives and seriously impacts millions more. Since December 2006, when president NAME Calderón (of PAN) militarised the so-called "war on drugs" at its highest level (Mercille 2011), the word "Mexico" almost became synonymous to danger and insecurity. Mainstream western travel guides such as French "Routard" or Australian "Lonely Planet", in their respective country profiles on Mexico, usually instill doubt about the country being a "narco-state" (from *narcos*, the Spanish for "drug trafficker"). They do not provide only a list of a few isolated places, but provide travel warnings on entire regions or states (like Sinaloa, Michoacán and Guerrero) they advise tourists to avoid. Media from all over the world spread horrific news and atrocious images on the endless violence perpetrated by the Mexican drug cartels or the authorities, and occasionally by both the drug cartels and rogue Mexican authorities who collude with the cartel in joint criminal ventures. This happened in the case of the Ayotzinapa massacre which occurred on September 26, 2014, in the town of Iguala (Guerrero) where 6 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College were killed, 25 were wounded and 43 forcibly kidnapped. After more than four years they are yet to be found¹⁹. The episode produced indignation and protests worldwide: the Spanish jurist Baltazar Garzón called it the "shame of humanity" (cited in Lorenzen Martiny and Orozco Reynoso 2016: 175)

2.1 Intentional Homicides

The year 2017 has been the deadliest year in Mexico's recent history (i.e. since 1997, when comparable records began): 25,339 intentional murders were registered (SESNSP 2018a: 3), amounting to a yearly rate of 20.51 per 100,000 people (SESNSP 2018b: 3).

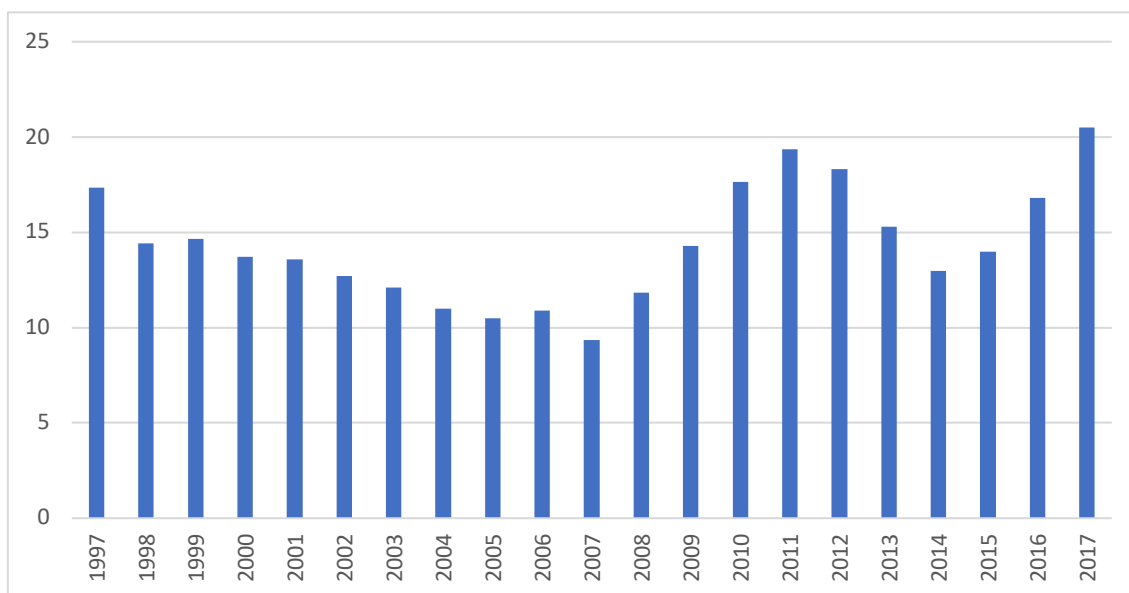
¹⁸ Pérez de Hacha, L. 2017. "La ficción del combate a la corrupción". The New York Times - ES (on line). December 27. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/12/27/corrupcion-pena-nieto-duarte-alejandrogutierrez/> - accessed 1.3.2018. - Translation from Spanish to English is mine.

¹⁹ For an exhaustive and reliable information on Ayotzinapa tragedy (and in particular, on the different forms and levels of implication on the events by the local drug cartel "*Guerreros Unidos*", municipal polices, state police, federal police, federal ministerial police and Mexican army) as well as on the still running and systematically misdirected investigations in regard, I recommend the reading of the reports issued by GIEI (2015; 2016), the group of international, independent and interdisciplinary experts appointed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to make light on the case.

2017 overtook the previous homicide record of 2011 - when president Calderón's drug war reached its climax with 22,409 persons killed (SESNSP 2018a: 3) at a rate of 19.37 per 100,000 people (SESNSP 2018b: 3). In addition to intentional murders, 15,879 non-intentional homicides occurred during 2017 mainly from traffic related accidents (SESNSP 2018a: 3).

According to David Shirk and Joel Wallman (Shirk and Wallman 2015), after the 1910 revolution and the post-revolutionary political violence that characterized the 1920s and 1930s, Mexico had known a constant decline in violent crimes, particularly homicides. However, the 1980s brought a phase of major socioeconomic and political turmoil, with periodic increases in violence. This continued well into the mid-1990s, when the homicide rate took a downward trend. In 1997, the homicide rate was 17.35 per 100,000, but in 2007 this declined to 9.34 per 100,000 which was the lowest level of violence registered in 20 years (SESNSP 2018b). With the start of the war on drugs, its effects were clearly visible on the homicide rate in Mexico:

Figure 1. Intentional homicide rate in Mexico per 100,000 inhabitants, 1997-2017



Source: (SESNSP 2018b)

Undeniably, Mexico stays below the average rate of violence for Latin American and the Caribbean countries. In 2015 - the last year for which comparable data is available - the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated 22.7 deaths per

100.000 people for the whole region and 16.3 for Mexico²⁰. Countries of the same region such as El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela and Jamaica hold the leading position in world homicide ranking. The homicide rate in El Salvador, Honduras, Venezuela and Jamaica stand at 108.6, 63.8, 57.1 and 43.2 per 100.000 people respectively. Brazil and Colombia follow a little below, with rates of 26.7 and 26.5 per 100.000 people respectively²¹. For the record, it has also to be mentioned that the world's rate was 5.3, not far from Argentina's 6.5 or Chile's 3.6 (in 2014) in the same region²².

Two elements are especially noteworthy in the case of Mexico. The first is the trend in the last ten years (2007-2017). During this period homicides reached increments up to 100% or more, compared to the beginning of the period (9.34, in 2007) (SESNSP 2018b: 3). Additionally, this happened after a previous ten years-period featured by a continuous and substantial decrease of homicides (from the 17.35 registered in 1997) (*ibid.*). According to statistics from the UNODC database, only Mexico and El Salvador have had such a relevant growing pattern of homicides between 2007 and 2017, while the general tendency all over the world (except for countries in war) has been that of stability or a decline. The second element is the alarming and high concentration of homicides in specific federal entities. Here are the states with the worst trends:

- Colima: 93.61 homicides per 100,000 persons in 2017, whereas in 2007 had 5.6.
- Baja California Sur: 69.15 in 2017, 4.79 in 2007.
- Baja California: 58.36 in 2017, 16.80 in 2007.
- Guerrero: 64.26 in 2017, 23.88 in 2007.
- Sinaloa: 43.98 in 2017, 26.91 in 2007.
- Chihuahua: 41.72 in 2017, 18.27 in 2007, passing through a striking 110.71 in 2010.
- Morelos: 30.36 in 2017, 6.54 in 2007 (SESNSP 2018b: 3).

It is not by accident that all the federal states appearing in this list are somehow associated with the production and/or transit of illicit drugs (Shirk and Wallman 2015). Although homicides are the most reliably recorded crime, given the alarming number of missing persons all over the Country and the mass clandestine graves periodically

²⁰ Source: UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Intentional Homicides Victims. On-line database: <https://dataunodc.un.org/crime/intentional-homicide-victims> - accessed 20.2.2018

²¹ *Idem*

²² *Idem*

discovered and associated with Mexican crime organizations, the number of homicides could potentially be higher than estimated (*idem*).

2.2 Enforced Disappearances, Extrajudicial Killings and Clandestine Mass Graves

The last governmental report on *desaparecidos*, released at the end of 2016, shows there were 29,485 missing persons accounted for since when records began in 2006 (SEGOB 2017: 24). The 2018 Amnesty International report on Mexico gives contradicting estimates of up to 34,656 people missing at the end of 2017 (Amnesty International 2018: 258). These figures consists of both voluntary and enforced disappearances. The report only take into account disappearances officially reported to the authorities and on which an inquiry was opened: which means that the actual figure is likely to be higher than the official one.

Concerning mass clandestine graves, a report by Mexican independent medium "*Animal Político*"²³ states - citing official sources - that between December 1, 2016 and June, 2017, 1,588 graves were found across 23 different states. The graves contained an overall number of 2,674 bodies and 11,429 remains and osseous fragments²⁴. Legitimately, the authors observe that all the world countries that have been affected, or are still affected by large-scale clandestine mass graves, were all ruled by «dictatorial, totalitarian or segregationist regimes» and/or are in war or internal declared conflicts²⁵: these had been the cases of Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Ukraine, Bosnia, Sudan, Rwanda, Congo, Syria, Iraq, Cambodia, Indonesia, Korea, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Chile and

²³ CMDPDH. 2017. "Dimensionando el problema de las fosas clandestinas en México". *Animal Político*. November 20. <http://www.animalpolitico.com/blogueros-verdad-justicia-reparacion/2017/11/20/dimensionando-problema-fosas-clandestinas-mexico/> - accessed 1.3.2018

²⁴ Due to the nature of the phenomenon, the difficulties to access information and the discrepancies of data, all the figure should be considered as approximated estimations.

²⁵ Despite the military rhetoric of "drug war" adopted since the beginnings of its implementation by president Calderón and soon become an expression of current use at official and common level, Mexican State never recognized or declared the existence of any "armed internal conflict". The war against drug cartels officially falls into the paradigm of public security, although it is conducted with army and navy at the forefront, through military strategies and methods, and especially, with casualties typical of a war. At stake there is more than a simple lexical detail. The declaration of an internal armed conflict would entail, for example, the enforcement of the Geneva Conventions, with which both formations would be obliged to comply, thus substantially improving the protection to civilians (at least on paper). As a matter of fact, intentional homicides, torture and inhuman treatments, deliberate violence of any kind and sexual violence as a weapon of war would be prohibited and prosecutable by the International Criminal Court. For an accurate discussion on the often dramatic conditions of Mexican civilian people amidst the drug conflict, and on this latter's nature of truly civil and economic war see Schedler 2015.

Argentina. What is shocking is that in Mexico, mass graves are often discovered by family groups and local organizations, rather than by authorities or official forensic experts (Amnesty International 2017: 251). Such a dramatic scenario naturally makes one wonder how many of the estimated 30 thousand missing persons could be buried in clandestine mass graves across the country.

Although the extreme and growing rate of violence should be ascribed to the powerful organized crime groups devastating several states of the Mexican confederation, all prominent national and international human rights agencies unanimously agree on the responsibilities of state authorities too in the surge in violence.

«[...] Many enforced disappearances, acts of torture and extra-judicial killings are alleged to have been carried out by federal, state and municipal authorities, including the police and some segments of the army, either acting in their own interests or in collusion with organized criminal groups.».

stated Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at the end of his visit to Mexico, in October 2015 (OHCHR 2015). There are several resounding cases of unlawful killings of civilians by Mexican security forces all of which remained unpunished (Amnesty International 2018: 258-9).

On 19 June, 2016 in Nochixtlán town (Oaxaca state), police bloodily repressed a demonstration against the government education reform, killing at least eight people and wounding dozens more. Medias footage contradicted the official government report according to which security forces were unarmed (Amnesty International 2017: 251). The investigation of the Mexican National Human Rights Commission on the facts occurred in May 2015 as part of a security operation in the municipality of Tanhuato (Michoacán state) concluded that at least 22 of the 43 civilians killed during the operation were arbitrarily executed by the federal police, with at least 13 resulting fatally shot at the back (CNDH 2016). In addition, the police tortured two detainees, burned one man alive, and finally altered the crime scene by moving bodies and planting firearms on the victims (*idem*). So far, by the end of 2017, nobody has been charged (HRW 2018: 366; Amnesty International 2018). In January 6th 2015, another massacre took place at the hands of the federal police officers and security forces in

Apatzingán (Michoacán state) where 16 unarmed protesters in the public square were executed. Nobody has been prosecuted for these killings neither (Amnesty International 2018). The so-called "Tlatlaya massacre" in which 22 civilians were killed (among whom at least 12 deliberately executed) by the Mexican army, in the Municipality of Tlatlaya (Mexico state) on 30 June, 2014 remains unpunished too (HRW 2018: 367; Amnesty International 2018: 258) .

In 2017, the National Human Rights Commission issued a special report on enforced disappearances and clandestine mass graves. 3,800 cases were examined from the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (SINPEF), corresponding to 4756 missing persons. In 27% of the cases, the complainants (usually relatives) ascribed the disappearances of the missing persons to public officers (belonging to local, state or federal authorities), in 10% of the cases to organized crime members, and for the remaining 63% they were not able to provide any relevant information (CNDH 2017: 82).

Between January 1, 2012 and June 30, 2016, among the cases in which the CNDH has been involved, 389 missing persons were found, 330 of whom were alive and 59 dead (CNDH 2017: 84). 304 of the "solved cases" showed a «*possible*» participation of state officers in the kidnappings; 9 cases were attributed to organized crime-related actors and in the remaining 76, no specific information could be obtained (*ibid.*). Anyway, regardless of those responsible being state or non-state actors, they enjoyed almost «*absolute impunity*» (Amnesty International 2017: 252), as the investigations are usually flawed and overly delayed. The authorities generally fail to search for the victims immediately (*ibid.*) and family members of the disappeared people are often subjected to death threats while they are searching for justice and the truth regarding the whereabouts of their relatives (*ibid.*).

2.3 Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

At the end of 2014, after an in-depth visit across the Country, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Méndez, denounced that torture and ill-treatment were generalized in Mexico and frequently perpetrated by municipal, state and federal police, as well as by federal

ministerial police and armed forces (UNGA 2014). Most victims of these crimes were detained for alleged links with organized crime. Actually, the state of exception motivated by the war on drug, suspends the constitutional and legal rights to detainees accused of being linked to organized crime. This means that detainees may be subjected to *arraigo* detention (extrajudicial detention in absence of any formal charges) and that Public Prosecution Service could freely extend the period during which a person is detained or held before appearing before a judge. The common pattern of violations observed by the UN Special Rapporteur was as follows:

«Generally speaking, people report having been detained by individuals dressed as civilians, sometimes hooded, who drive unmarked cars, do not have an arrest warrant and do not give the reasons for the arrest. When people are arrested at home, such individuals generally enter the home without a warrant and property is damaged and stolen. During their arrest, people are hit, insulted and threatened. They are blindfolded and driven to unknown locations, including military bases, where the torture continues, consisting of a combination of: punches, kicks and beatings with sticks; electric shocks through the application of electrical devices such as cattle prods to their bodies, usually their genitals; asphyxiation with plastic bags; waterboarding; forced nudity; suspension by their limbs; threats and insults. Occasionally, days go by without anyone being informed of the detainee's whereabouts or without the detainee being brought before the ministerial police or judicial authority. Victims have often been paraded before the media as criminals without having been convicted; this in itself constitutes degrading treatment.» (UNGA 2014: 7)

He also expressed specific concern about the use of sexual violence as a form of torture (which may include *«forced nudity, insults and verbal humiliation, groping of breasts and genitals, insertion of objects in the genitals and repeated rape by multiple individuals»*) (UNGA 2014:8), in particular against women detainees. Authorities often classified these cases as negligible conducts, exposing the victims to re-victimization and blame when they filed complaints or underwent medical examinations. In addition, a kind of "social discriminant" could be noticed in the perpetration of these criminal acts:

«Generally speaking, victims of torture and ill-treatment are people who are poor or from marginalized social sectors, a situation that exacerbates problems of stigmatization and inadequate safeguards. The Special Rapporteur draws attention to the many cases in which people with no apparent link to the criminal conduct under investigation report having been detained, forced to sign statements under torture and, in some cases, sentenced on the basis of these statements.» (UNGA 2014:8)

Finally, the document denounced *«a disturbing level of impunity» (ibid.)*, proven by a large mismatch between the higher number of complaints and testimonies presented to authorities and the very few investigations launched and the low rate of convictions.

This report raised vehement protests and violent criticisms from Peña Nieto's administration that did not agree with its contents nor accepted any of the recommendations contained therein (Lorenzen Martiny and Orozco Reynoso 2016: 174). The Special Rapporteur himself, Juan E. Méndez, was subjected to *«virulent personal attacks by some politicians» (OHCHR 2015)*, as stated by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, some months after the publication of the report. This is an example of the denialism and acritical refusal of any public criticisms typical of Mexican political authorities (*idem*). Today, more than three years later, all main human rights organizations certify that not only were Méndez's analysis truthful and reliable, but the situation he outlined has substantially worsened (HRW 2018; Amnesty International 2018; 2017). Mexican authorities reacted in a repressive manner.

2.4 Threats Against Journalists and Human Rights Defenders

As a matter of fact, Mexico is not a country where people awareness about this dramatic circle of violence and human rights violations can raise. It is not a safe country for journalists and human rights defenders, either. International NGO "Committee to Protect Journalists" considers Mexico the deadliest country for media outside conflict

zones²⁶. According to the Attorney General's Office as quoted by Human Rights Watch, from January 2000 to October 2017, 104 journalists were killed and 25 had disappeared in Mexico (HRW 2018: 369). 11 journalists were killed in 2016²⁷, 12 in 2017 (Amnesty International 2018: 259) and according to International NGO "Article 19", attacks against the press have increased by 163% during the period 2010-2016²⁸. Journalists covering stories linked to organized crime or political corruption (especially at the local level) are the main targets of attacks and harassment, by both government authorities and criminal groups (HRW 2018: 369). More than half of attacks against the press in 2017 are thought to have involved public officials, although none have been held accountable: after all, 99.75% is the impunity rate Article 19 estimates for crimes against freedom of expression²⁹. And yet, attacks against journalists are just a part of a «systematic state policy designed to curtail the right to freedom of expression and information in the country»³⁰, being other concrete threats:

«the closure of historic archives on grave human rights violations and atrocities; denying or selectively withholding access to information as a means of discrimination and control over marginalised communities; the manipulation of media editorial lines through the discretionary allocation of government advertising; the enactment of bills criminalising the search for information and the right to protest; and government digital surveillance against lawyers and human rights defenders, among others»³¹.

It is not by chance Mexico occupies the position of 147 out of 180 countries in the 2017 rankings of the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders 2018).

What concerns human rights defenders specifically is, the Mexican Congress passed a law in 2012 introducing a national protection mechanism to ensure the life, integrity, freedom and safety of defenders and journalists ("*Ley para la Protección de Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas.*") (Cámara de Diputados 2012). By

²⁶ Beiser, A. 2017. "In absence of fresh military conflict, journalist killings decline again". December 21. Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/reports/2017/12/journalists-killed-iraq-crossfire-murder-mexico.php> - accessed 1.3.2018

²⁷ Article 19. N.D. "Mexico and Central America." Electronic document, <https://www.article19.org/regional-office/mexico-and-central-america/> - accessed 1.3.2018

²⁸ *idem*

²⁹ *idem*

³⁰ *idem*

³¹ *idem*

October 2016, 617 people between human rights defenders and journalists had received protection under this law (HRW 2018: 370). But protection has been often slow to arrive and inadequate (HRW 2018: 370; Amnesty International 2018:). For example, the mechanism does not include any strategy or tool to contrast or respond to digital attacks and unlawful surveillance for those under its protection. In January 2017, a network of people using the internet to harass and threaten human rights defenders and journalists all over Mexico was discovered (Amnesty International 2018: 260). In June of the same year, evidence was found of surveillance against them by means of a software that the government was known to have acquired (*ibid.*).

In January 2017, Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, visited Mexico. He found that human rights defenders in the country faced elevated levels of insecurity and violence (OHCHR 2017a). According to Forst, they were very likely be obstructed and threatened in their search for justice. And whenever they denounced these violations, the risk of being physically attacked (or to have a relative threaten or aggressed too) sensibly heightened, especially if their accusations address armed forces, police or investigative authorities. He warmly warned on a diffuse attitude of defenders' criminalization, shown by the authorities: «*This is done through the deliberate misuse of criminal law and the manipulation of the state's punitive power by both State and non-State actors to hinder and even prevent the legitimate right of human rights defender to promote and protect human rights.*» (*idem*). Their criminalization is usually accompanied by public de-legitimation through statements by public officials diffused by media on accusations of defenders being linked to organized crime, committing crimes, threatening national security or obstructing development (*idem*). This shows an attempt to isolate defenders and deprive them of the support and trust of civil society, whose rights they are defending at risk of their own lives. "Impunity" was - once again - the word the Special Rapporteur used to describe the general outcomes for violations against human rights defenders.

2.5 Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women is endemic in Mexico. In August 2017, INEGI (the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography) released new alarming data on gender-based violence. Out of an overall population of 46.5 million women aged 15 or above living in the country, 66.1% (30.7 millions) had experienced gender-based violence at least once in their life (INEGI 2017: 8). 43.9% suffered gender-based violence committed by their partners (*ibid.*). 34.3% were victims of sexual-violence in public/community spaces (*ibid.*). Up-to-date and fully comparable figures on gender-based violence at world level are unfortunately very scarce (which represents a further major obstacle in tackling the problem), but the United Nations 2015 Report on Women confirm the gravity of the Mexican situation. In 2011, 38.9% of women in Mexico had experienced sexual violence (irrespective of the perpetrator) at least once in their lifetime (UNDESA 2015: 145). What represented the second highest rate after Costa Rica's (41%, assessed in 2003) among the nearly 40 countries featured in the report, whose rates did not exceed 25% (*ibid.*).

Since 2007, Mexico introduced the "Gender Alert" mechanism (within the framework of the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence - *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*), a set of governmental and emergency actions to face and eradicate femicides and major threats to women's fundamental rights, in specific territories (SRE 2007). In February 2018, 12 states had the mechanism activated: Mexico State, Morelos, Michoacán, Chiapas, Nuevo León, Veracruz, Sinaloa, Colima, San Luis Potosí, Guerrero, Quintana Roo, Nayarit and Veracruz (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres 2018). However, by the end of 2017, alert mechanisms did not reduce violence against women and girls (Amnesty International 2018: 260). Furthermore, according to Human Rights Watch (2018: 370), Mexican law does not offer adequate protection against domestic and sexual violence. Some provisions, moreover, clearly contravene international standards. For instance, considering the "chastity" of the victim as a parameter to determine the severity of punishments for certain sexual offenses (*ibid.*).

2.6 Systematic Impunity and the Lack of Rule of law

The usual outcome of human rights violations above quoted, but more generally, of all crimes occurring in Mexico, is impunity, indeed. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders stated that - according to official statistics - 98% of all crimes in Mexico remain unsolved and a vast majority of them were never even properly investigated (OHCHR 2017a). Impunity is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that goes beyond the mere percentage of crimes that should have been punished and rather were not. The Centre of Studies on Impunity and Justice (CESIJ) - an international research centre based in Puebla, Mexico identifies three major dimensions at stake when it comes to impunity: security, justice, and human rights (CESIJ 2017). The three dimensions should be analysed through two axis: functionality and capacity (*idem*). Which means that countries not only need to dedicate relevant resources to security and justice, but it is also essential that such institutions function properly and respect human rights. According to these criteria and based on a wide set of statistical indicators, since 2015, CESIJ elaborates the Global Impunity Index (GII). GII's 2017 edition positions Mexico 4th in the world impunity ranking of 69 countries. It has a score of 69.21, where zero means no impunity at all and 100 corresponds to the highest level of impunity in a given period (*idem*: 37). This result turns Mexico into the country with the highest rate of impunity in the American continent (*ibid.*).

Such a low ranking is mainly due to major limitations in the functionality of Mexico's security system and in the structure of its justice system (CESIJ 2017: 11-12). The first problem shows that Mexico has enough police forces (recently incremented up to 359 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants, while the worldwide average is 319 police officers per 100,000), but they are not effective enough at the local, state and federal levels (*idem*:134). The second case signifies that the country doesn't have enough judges. The world average is 16.23 judges per 100,000 inhabitants, whilst in Mexico there are just 4,2 per 100,000 compared to Croatia – a country with less impunity in the 2017 GII – which has 45 per 100,000 (*idem*). An adequate number of judges would directly ease the problem of overcrowding in prisons where almost half (43%) of the detainees are individuals waiting for judgment (*idem*: 12). Eventually, the plague of human rights violations affecting the country completes the factors generating such a level of impunity (*ibid.*).

Beyond the analysis of the IGG, it could also be added that it is not exclusively a matter of "quantity" that leads to the malfunctioning of the justice system, but also the issue of "quality" - how justice is delivered and within what kind of normative framework. Since June 2016, the new adversarial criminal justice system based on oral trials fully entered in force, replacing the old written inquisitorial criminal system, what represented an indubitable advance (Amnesty International 2018: 257). However, many problems of the previous system such as violations of the presumption of innocence and the use of evidence collected in violation of human rights or of illicit evidence remained (*ibid.*). Furthermore, in 2017 the Congress introduced bills aimed at reducing fair trial guarantees and extending the application of mandatory pre-trial detention without a case-by-case pronouncement by a judge (*ibid.*).

Despite the recent reforms, the justice system still lacks external accountability mechanisms (CESIJ 2017: 12). This is generally the condition of all Mexican institutions at any level of government where no supervision and/or auditing of institutions exists. This lack of probity in turn opens doors to corrupt use of resources. As a matter of fact, in recent years there has not been a positive correlation between the increase of resources allocated to government institutions and the reduction of violence and impunity in the country. On the contrary, things have worsened (*ibid.*). Thence, by crossing IGG results and components with other social, political and economic indicators, clearly there emerges a direct correlation between impunity and social inequality, violence, insecurity, lack of rule of law and corruption (*idem*).

Socioeconomic exclusion - a dimension we tried to assess in chapter 1 - drives impunity and aggravates its impacts on the lives of marginalized people. This finally means that impunity reduction entails the improvement of socioeconomic inclusion, especially at the benefit of the poorest groups of the population. The generalised insecurity and the disturbing violence ongoing in the country since 2006 particularly, during Peña Nieto's presidency are favoured and promoted by systematic impunity which is clearly linked with the lack of rule of law. It is not accidental that the WJP (World Justice Project) Rule of Law Index 2017-2018 ranks Mexico 88th out of 113 in its world country ranking; four positions worse than in 2016, with an overall score of 0.45 (where 1 indicates the strongest adherence to the rule of law) (WJP 2018: 3). Similarly, the Fragile State Index 2017 (an annual ranking of 178 sovereign countries based on the

different levels of pressure they face that impact their level of fragility) places Mexico at the 88th position, among the countries with "elevated warning" on state fragility (FFP 2017: 6). And finally, there is corruption.

2.7 Corruption

"Corruption" combined with its related adjectives is probably among the most pronounced words in contemporary Mexico. It is the leitmotif in most thoughts, opinions and discussions, either public or private, about public institutions of any level or kind. Ask any Mexican - the level of education, social class, political positions or age notwithstanding - about the country's most serious problem and she/he would most likely reply "corruption". Not surprisingly, the 2017 Corruption Perception Index ranks Mexico at the 135th position out of a list of 180 countries, in good company with Honduras and Russia among others, with a constantly negative trend since 2014 (Transparency International 2018) and 31 positions lost between 2008 and 2014 (Amparo Casar 2016: 17). Mexican sociologist María Amparo Casar (*ibid.*) did a systematic study on Mexican corruption, comparing the main national and international indicators on the matter. Her findings are revealing.

First of all, the frequency of the word corruption appearing in national press exponentially grew. In 1996 it appeared in 518 articles, while in 2015 in 38,917 or an increase from 1.4 mentions per day to 107 (*idem*: 9-10). In addition to the impact of social networks, which became a powerful megaphone for denounces and popular indignation. The fact that civil society is more and more aware of corruption has not produced any improvement in terms of acts committed or punishments so far (*ibid.*). In 2013, 79% of Mexicans believed that corruption was a serious issue in the country and 89% believed that corruption happens frequently (*idem*: 25). On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 no corrupted at all, 5 extremely corrupted), people attributed 4.6 to political parties and police forces, 4.5 to civil servants, 4.3 to legislative power and judiciary power (*idem*: 31). And more than a mere perception stays the number of Mexican governors accused of corruption between 2000 and 2013: 42, of whom 17 went under investigation and 9 were condemned (*idem*: 69). During the same period in the USA, 9 governors were under investigation all of whom were eventually charged with corruption (*ibid.*). Still in 2013, 61% of interviewees declared that during last 12 months, she/he or a member of

the family had paid a bribe to police authorities, 55% paid a bribe to the judiciary system and 31% to construction authorities (*idem*: 52). In 2010, it was estimated that each Mexican family used 14% of the annual average revenues to bribes (*idem*: 61). Finally, in terms of wider economic costs, corruption in Mexico has been assessed in 9-10% of the overall Mexican GDP (*idem*: 59).

It is undeniable that under the growing pressure from civil society to fight corruption, the government has put some relevant legislative steps forward, such as the introduction of the National Anticorruption System (SNA - *Sistema Nacional Anticorrupción*) on July 2016. But such developments are just on the paper, nothing changed. In December 2017, three on the six authorities composing SNA were yet to be appointed. And the first cases of alleged corruption the Citizens Participation Committee (part of SNA too) asked to investigate (namely the software Pegasus case and the Odebrecht case) were buried by the rest of SNA's components³².

Corruption in Mexico is structural. Its causes are to go through the last two hundred years of history (since the very beginnings of independent Mexico). And not only within its national borders but also outside, in the relationship with its northern neighbour, as noted by anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz³³ among others. Corruption may be also tightly twined with violence and the human rights violations mentioned beforehand.

In April 2017, the former Veracruz state governor, Javier Duarte Ochoa, after six months on the run, was captured in Guatemala and extradited to Mexico three months later. He was accused to have stolen about 10 million US dollars of public money, during the six-years he served as elected governor (2010-2016) for PRI³⁴. The legacy of

³² Pérez de Hacha, L. 2017. "La ficción del combate a la corrupción". The New York Times - ES (on line). December 27. <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/12/27/corrupcion-pena-nieto-duarte-alejandrogutierrez/> - accessed 6.3.2018

³³ Lomnitz, C. N.D. "Three Causes Behind Mexico's Crisis of Corruption and Impunity". Huffington Post (on line). https://www.huffingtonpost.com/claudiolomnitz/mexico-corruption-causes_b_6186682.html?utm_hp_ref=latin-america - accessed 6.3.2018

³⁴ Semple, K. 2017. "Javier Duarte, Mexican Ex-Governor, Accused of Diverting Money, Is Captured". The New York Times (on line). April 16. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/16/world/americas/mexico-javier-duarte-captured.html> - accessed 6.3.2018

his office is a disaster³⁵. The number of homicides in the state increased by 158% during his administration. 17 journalists were killed and 3 disappeared, turning Veracruz into the most dangerous state for the press. The same happened with forced disappearances, with Veracruz having reached the first position in the country, just after Guerrero. On August 2017, the biggest clandestine mass grave ever discovered in Mexico was unveiled near Veracruz harbour with at least 245 persons. Between 2013 and 2016 the state's economic growth rate has been zero. The public debt doubled since 2010. During the six years, the number of working poor increased of 9% and people in poverty increased from 57.6% to 60% of the overall population. Impunity of course, ruled and generated a sort of delirium of omnipotence.

The enforced disappearances of at least 15 youngsters (boys and girls) by some "special corps" (specifically created to fight the war on drug) of Veracruz state police occurred in different moments of 2013 but was formally investigated just at the end of 2017³⁶. Each of the youngsters was arrested in the street or just in front of school, only due to their "suspicious attitude" and found in possession of undefined "compromising" evidences which would have supposedly linked them to organized crime. They were all brought to unknown locations, tortured and/or sexually abused and eventually, disappeared. In at least one case the same police forces sexually abused also the relatives of the disappeared persons, while they were seeking information on their beloved³⁷. Veracruz District Attorney's Office, which was investigating these cases, declared that they were not isolated cases but rather part of "an institutional clandestine policy"³⁸ based on summary judgements and on the systematic violations of constitutional and human rights, for which also the former state's secretary of security is now prosecuted.

³⁵ Montalvo, T. L. and M. Ureste. 2017. " Lo que dejó Duarte a Veracruz: récord en homicidios, fosas, deuda y más pobreza". *Animal Político*. Abril 17. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2017/04/duarte-veracruz-violencia-deuda-fosas/#78447730> - accessed 6.3.2018

³⁶ Angel, A. 2018. "Operativo Tiro de Gracia: Detienen a cúpula de la policía de Javier Duarte por desaparición forzada". *Animal Político*. February 18. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/02/detienen-policia-javier-duarte-desaparicion-forzada-15-personas/> - accessed 6.3.2018

Angel, A. 2018. "Caso por caso, la forma en que la policía de Javier Duarte desapareció a 15 jóvenes (primera parte)". *Animal Político*. February 14. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/02/duarte-policia-jovenes-desaparecidos/> - accessed 6.3.2018

³⁷ Gómez, E. 2018. "Veracruz: policías también violaban a familiares de víctimas de desaparición". *La Jornada* (on line). February 13. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2018/02/13/veracruz-policias-implicados-en-desapariciones-violaban-a-familiares-9945.html> - accessed 6.3.2018

³⁸ Angel, A. 2018. "Caso por caso, la forma en que la policía de Javier Duarte desapareció a 15 jóvenes (tercera parte)". *Animal Político*. February 16. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/02/duarte-desapariciones-jovenes-policias/> - accessed 6.3.2018

At this stage, it has to be acknowledged that if Mexico is the insecure, violent, fragile and corrupted country it looks, for sure a major responsibility belongs to the drug industry herein established and on the consequent war on drugs started since 2006. Some aspects and debunk some myths on the matter need qualification.

2.8 The "War On Drugs"

First of all, the presence of the drug industry in Mexico is not so recent. Based on the historical reconstruction proposed by Shirk and Wallman (2015), by definition, illicit drug trafficking in the American continent dates to 1914 when the United States and other countries started to regulate and eventually outlaw the free trade of psychotropic substances. With the Volstead Act and the beginning of prohibition in 1919, Mexican smugglers developed networks to supply alcohol into the USA. Later on, when heroin and eventually marijuana were prohibited too, Mexican smugglers entered this new "business" and established their centres of operation especially in the states of Chihuahua, Durango, Guerrero, Michoacán and Sinaloa. Until the 1970s, Mexican traffickers remained secondary suppliers to the US market of heroin, which was monopolized by French and Italian criminal organizations. But in the middle 1970s, they became the first heroin suppliers as the European channels of provision were shut down by international police operations.

The 1980s brought the boom of cocaine business. Initially, Mexican traffickers were just intermediaries on commission from Colombian cartels to deliver Colombian cocaine into USA. With the increase of counter-drugs efforts targeting Colombia, Mexican groups could gain increasing power up to reach a dominant position in the cocaine market. By the mid-80s, the two Mexican cartels of Guadalajara and Gulf of Mexico reached the top of the trafficking pyramid. At the beginning of the 1990s the Guadalajara cartel broke into three groups: Juárez, Sinaloa and the Tijuana cartels. In the early 2000s the Tijuana and Gulf cartels suffered the arrest of their respective leaders, which at the end of the decade led to the fragmentation into new autonomous organizations such as the Teodoro Garcia, the Zetas, La Familia Michoacána, and the Beltran Leyva Organization. Further splintering and internal conflicts resulted into the emergence of the New Generation - Jalisco Cartel and La Resistencia organization (both

from the Sinaloa Cartel) and the Knights Templar (from the Familia Michoacána). In 2017, the remaining active groups are considered to be: New Generation - Jalisco (retained to be the most powerful), Sinaloa, Gulf, Zetas, Juárez, Tijuana and Levya³⁹. Such an impressive rise of Mexican drug enterprises could not happen without the complicity and backing of the political system and the state in general. Authors like legal anthropologist Carlos Flores Pérez, affirmed that in the case of Mexico, illicit arrangements between drug traffickers and state authorities «*might be better understood not as criminals corrupting the state but criminals as subjects of the state*» (Flores Pérez 2009 quoted in Shirk and Wallman 2015: 12). From 1929 to 2000, Mexico was ruled by a single party, PRI. At least until the end of the 1980s (the first non-PRI governor ever elected dates of 1989), PRI had complete control over every political and state office across the country. Which means that for a long time political power in Mexico was likely to be much more unified, compact, centralized and hierarchical than in any other Latin American country. According to Shirk and Wallman, this resulted into a double mechanism of high-level corruption at the top of the state, and "daily" corruption from below of government agents, ensured Mexican cartels had an ideal and protected environment where to prosper and expand.

This "perfect" system started to fail when PRI's monopoly suffered its very first major defeat, with the election of the concurrent PAN (National Action Party) party's candidate at the 2000 presidential elections and more so, in the following presidential elections in 2006. In 2006, the second PAN president in the history of Mexico (Felipe Calderón), declared war on drugs, and violence burst in Mexican society. Analysts usually propose two main theories to explain the outburst of violence inducted by the counter-drug campaigns launched by the new government (Shirk and Wallman 2015).

The first explanatory model looks at violence as a "side-effect" of the political democratization process which led to the end of PRI's hegemony and by consequence, to that diabolically "perfect" criminal system above described (*idem*). It began occurring that each of the three different levels of power - municipal, state and federal – were respectively held by one of the main different political parties: PRI, PAN or PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution). A situation of fragmented power where potentially, one

³⁹ Nájara, A. 2017. " Los mapas que muestran los radicales cambios de influencia territorial de los carteles del narcotráfico en México". BBC Mundo (on line). 11 Julio. <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40576103> - accessed 6.3.2018

criminal group could have acquired protection from - for instance - PRI municipal authorities and another concurrent group from the PRD state governor, within a country ruled by a PAN president. That finally resulted in an everyone against everyone war, with state agents against traffickers, traffickers against traffickers and state agents against state agents. In 2012, PRI gained the presidency again, but the violence has not stopped. On the contrary, it increased, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter. This means that at this point it was impossible to re-build those configurations of "state-sponsored protection racket" like before.

The second model attributes violence to the "war of succession" triggered in the criminal groups, as a consequence of the removal (arrest or killing) of their leaders by the government's counter-drogue initiatives (*idem*). In some cases, even just the well-publicized rumour about the authorities' particular pressure and commitment in capturing a specific leader, could be enough to produce distrust, betrayals and eventually "reconfigurations" within a given group. As a matter of fact, the "decapitation" of a cartel had often led to its split into new groups which are likely to get into a violent contention of the original territory and business. This is what finally increased the overall complexity and the general level of conflict.

The two ways of looking at drug-related violence are both credible and clearly related to one another. But to properly complete the picture, it is necessary to frame those facts within a wider geopolitical scenario acknowledging the hegemonic role USA play across the American continent. I find some of the critical thesis proposed by the geographer Julien Mercille (2011) particularly relevant and original in this regard.

First of all, the USA has always been aware of the level of involvement of Mexican governments in the drug business. Because Mexico was an anti-communist ally during the Cold War, they always preferred to this and the recurring electoral frauds that kept PRI in power. Mexico has been a very close ally indeed, thanks to its huge reserves of oil essential in case of war, and also for the regular economic activities. Secondly, neoliberal reforms and in particular NAFTA - the fundamental block of USA foreign policy, in particular under the Reagan presidency - have played a primary role in the boom of Mexican drug industry. NAFTA created 500-600 hundred thousand new jobs in Mexico: true (Mercille 2011: 1642). But at the same time, it caused the loss of around

2.3 million jobs in agriculture, due to cheaper imports of corn from subsidised U.S. agribusinesses (*ibid.*). Among this mass of newly unemployed peasants, those unable to reasonably resettle by immigrating to the USA or to the northern regions of Mexico, brought an excellent supply of desperate manpower for criminal organizations. On another side, NAFTA liberalised commerce across the US-Mexico border, facilitating the traffic of relevant quantities of drugs.

Thirdly, the USA represent the main consumer market for drugs produced in the southern American continent. A widely cited RAND report concluded that treatment of drug-addicts and prevention were the most effective method to reduce drug consumption (Rydell and Everingham 1994 quoted in Mercille 2011: 1650). Rather than security campaigns targeting "source countries" like Mexico, interdiction or domestic users' prosecution. But huge interests make governments preferring wars to treatment.

Indeed, it has been estimated that 87% of firearms employed by drug cartels originate from the USA (Mercille 2011: 1643). But in order not to displease gun lobbies, Washington never really took actual measures to stop such a flow of death to the south. And on the other side of the battle camp, the Mexican army has been since the Cold War times backed by the Pentagon, in terms of resources, equipment, training and strategies. Between 2008 and 2010 alone, the USA delivered to Mexico 1.5 billion \$ through the Merida Initiative - a security cooperation agreement between the two countries mainly aimed to train and equip Mexican military and police forces involved in the war on drugs. As most of the equipment planned to purchase by the Initiative were made in the USA (armoured vehicles, Bell helicopters, UH-60 helicopters, among others), it stands to reason how the Mexican war on drugs represents an extremely lucrative business for the US military industry. What would finally elucidate a common saying about the drug war I often heard among my informants on the field, reciting: «Mexico supplies the money, United States supply the arms, and the people supply the dead».

But possibly, the political "benefits" this war brings to governments are even more "profitable". Following Mercilles' analysis, since the 1960s, the Mexican government often deployed the army for declared anti-drugs purposes, but in reality it is to repress leftist oppositions and more generally, peasants and marginalised groups. It is

emblematic of the case of the Operation Condor conducted between 1970s and 80s (not to confuse with the most infamous operation managed by CIA in South-America during the 1970s), with the declared purpose to eradicate the opium and marijuana fields with herbicides and to dismantle the criminal organizations behind them. 7000 soldiers (accompanied by 226 DEA advisers) invaded the northern states of Chihuahua, Durango and Sinaloa, among the poorest areas in the country, epicenter of many peasant land occupations during the previous years. The operation resulted not to a single arrest of a relevant trafficker, instead hundreds of desperate peasants were arrested, tortured and jailed. Nowadays, several analysts have started to see in such a pattern in the antinarcotics campaign of the time, a precedent for the current war on drugs. Since president Calderon declared the on-going war on drugs, many people from the marginalised groups and/or militating in social movements, denounced of having been persecuted under deliberately false accuses of arms or drug possession.

In conclusion, the war on drugs notably instituted and normalised a state of exception in Mexico. According to philosopher Giorgio Agamben, a state of exception is the suspension of the juridical order itself, creating «*an anomic space in which what is at stake is a force of law without law*» (Agamben 2005:39). Agamben retains that such a dispositif (in Foucault's sense) of government became a ruling a paradigm for modern states since World War I and had a great development with the George W. Bush's US presidency and his bloody borderless "wars on terror":

«Indeed, the state of exception has today reached its maximum worldwide development. The normative aspect of law can thus be obliterated and contradicted with impunity by a governmental violence that - while ignoring international law externally and producing a permanent state of exception internally - nevertheless still claims to be applying the law». (idem: 87)

The internal security law approved by the Mexican congress at the end of 2017 which was strongly criticised by all international human rights agencies - just exactly went this direction. It allows the use of the armed forces in regular law enforcement without guarantees for transparency, accountability and civilian oversight (Amnesty International 2018: 257; OHCHR 2017c). It does not meet international human right standards neither (OHCHR 2017b). Moreover, it doesn't contemplate any roadmap nor a

timetable for returning to a truly civilian security approach and concluding the state of exception (*idem*). What raises high concerns about the democratic governance of the country is because as in Agamben's terms, «*It's when the blending in the state of exception, and the exception as the rule, that the juridico-political system becomes a "killing machine"»* (*idem*: 86) and people have to live in «*a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism»* (*idem*: 3).

CHAPTER 3. The Indigenous "Question"

3.1 Socioeconomic Profile of Indigenous Peoples of Mexico

There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people living in the world, across 90 different countries (UNDESA 2009: 1). Between 40 and 60 millions of them live in the Americas (Zolla and Zolla Márquez 2010: 41), with an overall 782 different peoples across the continent, according to an estimation made by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) (*idem*: 42). Mexico, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru host 80% of the American indigenous population (*idem*: 41). In the American continent, Mexico is considered to be the country with the largest indigenous population and the greatest variety of native languages spoken in its territory (Broch Hansen, Jepsen, and Leiva 2017: 116). Estimates may vary according to the definition of indigenous people and particularly the criteria selected for counting them. Due to the exceptional diversity of indigenous peoples in the world, the UN-system body has never adopted a unique and official definition of "indigenous people" (OHCHR 2013: 6). It rather chose to implement a wider understanding, based on the following elements clearly borrowed from the well-known description of the concept of indigenous proposed by Martínez Cobo at the beginning of the 1980s (UNDESA 1982):

- a) « *Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.*
- b) *Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies*
- c) *Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources*
- d) *Distinct social, economic or political systems*
- e) *Distinct language, culture and beliefs*

- f) *Form non-dominant groups of society*
- g) *Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. » (UNPFII5 2006: 1)*

Mexican Constitution goes this way too and at Article 2 states:

«The Mexican Nation is unique and indivisible.

The nation is multicultural, based originally on its indigenous peoples, described as descendants of those inhabiting the country before colonization and that preserve their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or some of them.

Consciousness of indigenous identity will be the fundamental criteria to determine to whom apply the provisions on indigenous people.»⁴⁰. (Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017b)

Since 1895, the date of the first Mexican Census, the criterion Mexico has used to identify and count indigenous people has been the spoken language (HLI⁴¹). It has to be mentioned that indigenous languages in Mexico show an outstanding variety. The Mexican National Institute of Indigenous Languages identifies 11 language families, from which is derived 68 language groups, leading to 364 language varieties (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas 2008: 38). From the last general census (in 2015), it came out that 7,382,785 persons aged 3 or above speak an indigenous language. What corresponds to 6.5% of the overall national population (INEGI 2016: 2). The most spoken language groups are: Náhuatl (23.4%), Maya (11.6%), Tzeltal (7.5%), Mixteco (7.0%), Tsotsil (6.6%), Zapoteco (6.5 %), Otomí (4.2%), Totonaco (3.6 %), Chol (3.4 %), Mazateco (3.2 %), Huasteco (2.4 %) y Mazahua (2.0 %) (INEGI 2016: 3).

However, since 2000 the general census also recorded the self-defined ethnicity ("*Autoadscripción indígena*"). Looking at this information, in 2015, 24.4 million

⁴⁰ Translation from Spanish provided by the Institute of Juridical Investigation at UNAM: <https://www2.juridicas.unam.mx/constitucion-reordenada-consolidada/en/vigente> - accessed 12.04.2018

⁴¹ *Hablante Lengua Indígena* (Indigenous Language Speaker)

Mexicans aged 3 or above recognized themselves as indigenous, irrespective of their ability to speak any indigenous language (*ibid.*). That represents 21.5% of the national population; three times the share defined by the linguistic criterion alone. This clearly questions the criteria according to which the indigenous population is measured and the accuracy of the census on this subject with all the political impact of such a discrepancy.

Anyhow, the profile of Mexican indigenous people outlined by the 2015 census is still based on only the linguistic discriminant. According to it, the states with the highest presence of indigenous population are Oaxaca (32.2% of the overall population was indigenous), Yucatán (28.9%), Chiapas (27.9%), Quintana Roo (16.6%) and Guerrero (15.3%) (INEGI 2016: 4). According to the definition of the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples' development (CDI), indigenous municipalities are those that in addition to indigenous "traditions and customs" have at least 40% of indigenous speakers among their population. In 2015, 494 municipalities all over the country fitted within these criteria and appeared particularly numerous in the states of Oaxaca (245), Yucatán (63), Puebla (46), Chiapas (41) and Veracruz (35) (INEGI 2016: 5). It is the state of Chiapas that boasts with the record of municipalities where more than 99% of the population are indigenous speakers. There are 7 in total and namely: San Juan Cancuc, Santiago el Pinar, Chalchihuitlán, Aldama, Mitontic, Chamula and San Andrés Larráinzar (*ibid.*). The 2015 census did not measure the territorial distribution of indigenous people, but the 2010 edition did. And it shows that indigenous people are more likely to be settled in rural areas, in communities with less than 2.5 thousand inhabitants; 62% of them lived in this kind of settings (CEDRSSAR 2015: 6). A rather different pattern was observed for non-indigenous populations, which are more likely to live in big cities (47.7%) than in rural communities (23.2%) (*ibid.*).

Looking at the demography of indigenous Mexicans, in 2015 51.3% of them were women and 48.7% men (INEGI 2016: 2). In terms of distribution by age groups, the demographic pyramid is not really different from the national population, albeit with slight differences. 45.3% of indigenous people were younger than 30, while the national proportion was 50.9% (INEGI 2016:3). Fertility rate among indigenous and non-indigenous women are different too, with respectively 2.98 and 2.17 child per woman (*ibid.*). The real and important divergence from the overall Mexican population is the

overall socioeconomic conditions in which indigenous people live. As already mentioned in chapter 1, indigenous people are far more likely to be in conditions of poverty than non-indigenous. As matter of fact, it resulted that in 2016, 77.6% of them were living in conditions of poverty and 34.8% lived in conditions of extreme poverty (CONEVAL 2017a: 34), while non-indigenous Mexicans had 41% of the population living in poverty and 5.8% in extreme poverty (*ibid.*). Some more insightful details are following.

In 2015, the school attendance of the age group 6-14 resulted almost universal for either indigenous and non-indigenous population: 92.7% for the first and 96.7% for the latter (INEGI 2016: 9). However, if among non-indigenous children aged 6-14 one in ten is not able to read and to write, the ratio doubles for indigenous children (INEGI 2016: 10). This finds confirmation in the percentage of illiterates, i.e. people aged 15 and above incapable to read and to write: 23% of indigenous versus 4.2% of non-indigenous (*ibid.*). The years of schooling of people aged 15 and above amounted to 5.7 years for indigenous people and 9.4 years for the rest of Mexican population (*ibid.*). And coherently, 13% of indigenous speakers are unable to speak any other language than the mother tongue, which clearly represents a relevant limit to a full participation in the wider society (INEGI 2016: 3).

As a matter of fact, looking at the labour market, indigenous people are largely disadvantaged compared to non-indigenous groups. Regarding the distribution for working activity, figures show that indigenous people are more likely to be employed in low-skilled, precarious or even unpaid jobs than the rest of the Mexican population (INEGI 2016: 10). More generally, indigenous people have less opportunities of accessing formal employment. In 2014, 85.5% of indigenous people (including in this case, both indigenous speakers and self-defined indigenous) had informal employment, at a rate 25.5% higher than the non-indigenous (CONEVAL 2017b: 64). As known, informal employment represent a major factor of vulnerability. First of all, the salaries they offer were estimated to be - in 2015 - 38% lower than those provided by formal jobs, in addition to being unstable and inconstant (*ibid.*). Informal employment also prevent the access to social security, health services and to a "decent" work, as defined

by the International Labour Organization⁴². In 2014, 82.5% of indigenous people (both speakers and self-defined) had never paid contributions to the social security system in their life (CONEVAL 2017b: 65). Among many other implications, the consequence of this is that at the end of their professional life, they will not benefit from any kind of pension.

Finally, as easily predictable indigenous people have lower revenues than the rest of the Mexican population. In 2014, 70.2% of them earned up to a minimum wage, which corresponded to the amount of 2,200 Mexican pesos per month (between 150 and 170 US\$, at that time). 26.2% earned between one and three minimum monthly wages. And only 2.5% earned between 3 and 5 minimum monthly wages (CONEVAL 2017b: 66). Conversely, for non-indigenous population, the proportion of wages earned are as follows: 38.6% up to one minimum monthly wage, 46% between one and three and 9.1% between 3 and five (*ibid.*).

Poorer life conditions affecting indigenous groups are even more evident when it comes to housing conditions. In 2015, 9.1% of homes hosted at least 1 indigenous speaker (INEGI 2016: 11). 13.4% of them had dirt floor, compared with the only 2.6% of homes with no indigenous speakers (*ibid.*). 59.8% of houses with any indigenous speaker had no running water inside, more than twice the rate for houses with no indigenous speakers (22.5%) (*ibid.*). 14.3% of "indigenous houses" had no water facilities at all, more than three times the rate for dwellings with no indigenous speakers (4.2%) (*idem*: 12). Finally, only 25.5% of the former had a drainage system whilst 4.1% of the latter could not count on such a facility (*ibid.*).

All things considered, it is more than reasonable to expect that the poorer life conditions affecting the Mexican indigenous population in comparison with the overall national population are reflected also in their health. However, and unfortunately, the institutions of the Mexican National Health System do not produce specific data in their epidemiological records (no ethnic or language information is considered, what makes

⁴² «Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.» - Source: ILO website - <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm> - accessed 12.04.2018

impossible to discern indigenous and non-indigenous patients and users) (Broch Hansen, Jepsen, and Leiva Jaquelin 2017: 117). The only relevant indicators available are about child mortality and child undernutrition (Secretaría de Salud 2013). For child mortality (aged 0-1), the following rates were recorded between 2000 and 2010:

- 2000: 34.4 deaths per 1.000 live births among indigenous people, 21.6 per 1.000 among non- indigenous people (CONAPO 2005: 34);
- 2005: respectively 27.9 per 1.000 and 17.3 per 1.000 (*ibid.*);
- 2010 (projections based on 2000 and 2005 assessments): 22.8 per 1.000 and 14 per 1.000 (*ibid.*).

In 2012, 35.2% of indigenous children (aged 0-5) were not tall enough for their age, what represents a clear symptom of chronic undernutrition; for non-indigenous children the rate was of 11.9, instead (Secretaría de Salud 2013: 61). And even if further data is missing, the social determinants of health as declared by the World Health Organization (see Wilkinson and Marmot 2003) are reliable enough to conclude that general conditions of iniquity experienced by indigenous people of Mexico are coherently and necessarily replicated in their health conditions. Iniquitous conditions, are far from being exclusive to indigenous people from Mexico, but rather a common denominator for all indigenous groups in the Americas and in the world (see: World Bank 2015; Broch Hansen, Jepsen, and Leiva Jaquelin 2017; UNDESA 2009).

3.2 Legal Framework and Political Participation

It has to be recognized that in the past 20-25 years, Mexican legislation has reached significant progresses in guaranteeing and improving indigenous rights. The main problem, however, is that most of the innovations introduced remain a dead letter. the chronology of approved legislation to improve the inclusion of indigenous people, According to one of the most recent and exhaustive reports available on the matter from Global Americans (2017), a young independent research centre on Latin American studies, the chronology of approved legislation is as follows:

- 1990. Mexico ratifies ILO (International Labour Organization) Indigenous and Tribal People Convention n.169⁴³, which triggered a global trend to increase indigenous people's guarantees worldwide and acted as forerunner for the 2007 UN Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People (see UN 2008).
- 1992. Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution is reformed to recognize the pluricultural composition of the Mexican State.
- 1996. The Federal Government and the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the guerrilla army risen up on January 1 1994 to advocate indigenous rights) signed the "San Andres Peace Accords" (see EZLN and Gobierno de Mexico 1996). Through these accords the State got committed to:
 - a) recognize indigenous peoples in the Constitution, together with their right to self-determination;
 - b) enlarge the political participation and representation of indigenous peoples, with the recognition of their political, economic, social and cultural rights;
 - c) ensure indigenous people the full access to justice and recognize their internal normative systems ("*usos y costumbres*": customs and traditions);
 - d) promote cultural policies in favour of indigenous cultures;
 - e) guarantee multicultural education;
 - f) satisfy indigenous peoples' fundamental needs;
 - g) further and stronger social policy specifically addressing indigenous children and women;
 - h) promote the participation of indigenous peoples in sustainable development, improving production and employments;
 - i) protect indigenous migrants .
- 2001. Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution is reformed and broken down into two sections. Section A focuses on the rights of indigenous peoples, while Section B commits the government to create all the necessary organisms to meet the requests of indigenous population. The following indigenous rights were recognized:

⁴³ For the text of the Convention, see ILO website:
http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314 - accessed 18.4.2018

- a) application of normative systems ("*usos y costumbres*") to resolve indigenous peoples' internal conflicts;
 - b) the right to choose authorities and representatives according to indigenous norms and traditions;
 - c) the right to access and preserve land and property;
 - d) the right to preserve and enrich indigenous languages;
 - e) the right to choose representatives for the city council in municipalities with indigenous populations.
- 2003. Approved on March 13, the General Law on the Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples (*Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas*) officially acknowledges the status of indigenous languages as national languages and states that they will be valid for any public matter. The Law leads to the creation of the National Institute of Indigenous Languages ("*INALI - Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas*").
 - 2003. Approved on June 11, the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination ("*Ley Federal Para Prevenir y Eliminar la Discriminación*") foresees affirmative action policies for indigenous peoples (together with other vulnerable social groups). The Law also establishes the National Commission to Prevent Discrimination ("*CONAPRED - Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación*").
 - 2004. The Law on the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (*Ley de la Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas - CDI*) passed on May 21. The newly created Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) replaces the former National Indigenous Institute ("*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*") whose establishment dates to 1948. CDI becomes in this way a decentralized organism with the core mission of promoting, monitoring and evaluating all programs, initiatives and policies regarding indigenous peoples.

- 2010. The Ministry of Education and the General Education Law ("*Ley General de Educación*") go through ample reforms that includes the reformulation of articles 21 and 33. Among the main modifications is the fostering of intercultural bilingual education, requiring teachers in indigenous regions to certify that they have bilingual credentials, and promoting the production of bilingual education materials.

- 2013. The recently elected federal government under the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) releases the National Development Plan 2013-2018 ("*NDP - Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*") and the Special Program for Indigenous Peoples 2014 -2018 ("*Programa Especial de los Pueblos Indígenas*"). Among the NDP's provisions is the promotion of the social and economic development of the indigenous people, fostering their participation in planning for their own development. On the other hand, the Special Program specifically admits that the right to prior consultation (of natural resource development projects that may affect them) has not been fully implemented and calls for its active implementation.

All these provisions were enacted by the federal government of the United Mexican States. Additionally, several states of the Confederation have adopted specific legislations for their indigenous peoples, and a number of ministries and institutions count on offices and departments specialized on indigenous issues. In short: no one could assert that Mexican laws do not recognize, protect or make provisions to improve indigenous peoples' conditions and foster their inclusion into Mexican society. Some main organisms to translate into practice the objectives foreseen by law are clearly designated and operating.

For sure this "system" is perfectible in many forms and under many aspects, but overall, Mexico has a legislation about indigenous peoples, more progressive than the majority of the world's states. It is among the (only) 22 countries in the world to have ratified and enforced the ILO Convention n.169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, while USA, Canada, Australia, the majority of European countries and many more, did not subscribe⁴⁴. "Law", however, does not automatically mean "justice". In real life, there

⁴⁴ Source: ILO website. "Ratifications of C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (169)". - http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314:NO - accessed 18.04.2018

are probably infinite variables capable of making even the best laws powerless and eventually, useless. That is the case for Mexican indigenous peoples too: despite the seemingly good laws for their benefit, they remain overwhelming poorer and more disadvantaged compared to the rest of Mexican society. A very telling example on how this may concretely happen is offered by the indigenous peoples' right to free, informed and prior consultation.

3.2.1 The Case of Indigenous Peoples' Right to Free, Informed and Prior Consultation

The Mexican Constitution, at article 2, section B, fragment IX, explicitly states:

«B. In order to promote equal opportunities for indigenous people and to eliminate discriminatory practices, the Federation, the Federal District, the States and the local councils shall establish the necessary institutions and policies to guarantee indigenous people's rights and comprehensive development of indigenous communities. Such institutions and policies shall be designed and operated together with them.

In order to eliminate the scarcities and backwardness affecting indigenous towns and communities, authorities are obliged to:

[...]

IX. Consult indigenous peoples' opinion and recommendations while preparing the National Development Plan, the State plans and the local plans and, if appropriate, incorporate their recommendations and proposals.⁴⁵»

(Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017: 5)

Indigenous Peoples' Right to Free, Informed and Prior Consultation to has been acknowledged in the state constitutions and legislations of 25 of the 32 Mexican states, namely: Baja California, Campeche, Colima, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Estado de México, Michoacán, Morelos,

⁴⁵ Translation from Spanish provided by the Institute of Juridical Investigation at UNAM: <https://www2.juridicas.unam.mx/constitucion-reordenada-consolidada/en/vigente> - accessed 12.04.2018

Nayarit, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sonora, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, and Yucatán. The states of Durango and San Luis Potosí have also approved specific laws on the right of consultation. A general law defining how prior consultation should be concretely implemented in the country is missing or does not exist (Global Americans 2017). What complies with ILO 169 Convention, according to which prior consultations should be planned and set according to the single case at stake, and their terms agreed upon with the groups that would be concerned by the specific project or policy. Yet, if not a general one, some different laws on the implementation of prior consultation do exist. For instance, the Law on the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples establishes that consultations with indigenous peoples should take place for the creation of development plans. However, consultations are operated through an Advisory Council, which is proposed and appointed by the same CDI (the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous People), not by the concerned indigenous communities. This is a paternalistic measure greatly affecting the direct and faithful representation of people's will. The General Law of Sustainable Forest Development ("*Ley General de Desarrollo Forestal Sustentable*") (Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2015) determines that when forests are close to areas inhabited by indigenous peoples, they should be involved in the definition of the forest programs. It does not mention, however, how this objective should be reached.

In addition, most recently, the Law on Hydrocarbons (Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2016) and the Energy Reform (Anglés Hernández, Roux and García Rivera 2017) include the right to prior consultation, but at the same time, both provisions permit the establishment of exploitation projects even at the refusal of the indigenous communities (Anglés Hernández 2017). Given that the legislative apparatus that should guarantee indigenous peoples' rights to prior consultation is deliberately ambiguous or inapplicable, things cannot be better in reality. Research carried out by Global Americans shows that consultations in Mexico are usually façade initiatives to validate projects already approved and/or ongoing (Global Americans 2017). Most of the time, they are implemented just after some indigenous communities or groups publicly complained on projects about they were not consulted or informed about, and they found out by themselves. It is very difficult, so far, to identify at least a single case

in which prior consultations were properly and successfully carried out, according to the laws.

More interestingly, the consultations that take place usually fall into this pattern:

- a) governments and companies promoting the projects usually provide uncomplete, ambiguous or incorrect information to the concerned communities;
- b) before and during the consultations, both governments and companies operate to divide the indigenous communities from within, in accordance with the old *divide et impera* principle;
- c) violence against the opponents to the projects are a constant, often committed by armed gangs hired for the purpose;
- d) repression by the authorities is usual too, in particular with the imprisonment of indigenous leader (*idem*).

The case of the Ikojt people of San Dionisio del Mar, Oaxaca, that strenuously and eventually successfully opposed the installation of a huge wind park in their territory, it is just one among the many that could be mentioned, to represent the described pattern, especially in its violent and anti-democratic connotations (Mejía Carrasco 2017; Howe, Boyer, and Barrera 2015; Zanotelli 2016). Thus, it has not been by chance that the National Commission of Human Rights issued, on July 2016, a recommendation on prior consultation of indigenous peoples (recommendation 27/2016) (CNDH 2017b) which calls for a federal and state law regulating prior consultation. The recommendation brought to the General Law of Indigenous Consultation law initiative ("*Ley General de Consulta Indígena*")⁴⁶. But its approval is still pending in the Mexican congress.

In conclusion, the right to prior consultation is just one case but emblematic of how the political legitimated spaces for indigenous peoples to express their positions and visions are granted, but just on paper. In reality, their voices are very hardly listened and even more infrequently, their opinions considered and their will adopted. This invokes the wider and more fundamental question of the participation of indigenous peoples into Mexican politics.

⁴⁶ For the content of the law initiative, see:
http://sil.gobernacion.gob.mx/Archivos/Documentos/2017/04/asun_3534517_20170427_1490391014.pdf
- accessed 18.04.2018

3.2.2 The Indigenous Participation in Mexican Politics

When it comes to the political participation of indigenous people in Mexico, a compelling reference should be made to the EZLN - Zapatista Army of National Liberation ("*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*") and its development over the last 25 years. In the very first hours of January 1, 1994, the day NAFTA entered into force, EZLN, a rebel army of mainly indigenous composition, attacked the town of San Cristóbal de las Casas and several others in the state of Chiapas, declaring war on the Mexican government.

Since the 1970s and up until the beginning of the 1990s, at least 200 thousand settlers, resettled from Chiapas coastal plantations and highlands villages to the virgin Lacandón Rainforest, seeking fertile land to feed their families and communities (Nash 2005: 180). That happened particularly thanks to Article 27 of the 1917 Mexican Constitution, which allowed landless people to occupy portions of free territory (property of the nation) and eventually to ask for their formal property, to be granted by a presidential decree (Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017b). However, in 1992, Article 27 was submitted to significant reforms, inspired by the liberal impetus ruling Mexico since the early 1980s (Nash 2001: 80-81; Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017b). As a consequence of the reform in the original agrarian reform law (reached through almost ten years of civil war) (Plana 2003) Lacandón Rainforest colonizers started to be faced with the possibility of never gaining title to the lands they had colonized and the risk of being expelled from them at any time (Nash 2001). On October 12, 1992, - 500th anniversary of the "discovery" of the American continent by Columbus - indigenous peoples of Chiapas sent Mexican government a first "warning". More than 10 thousands of them marched to San Cristóbal de las Casas - that used to be the principle site of colonial domination in the region - and invaded it (Nash 2001; Gilly 1999). Then, in the very heart of the town, Santo Domingo square, one of the marchers knocked off its pedestal the hollow metal statue of Spanish conqueror, Diego Mazariegos, and boys rushed in to completely destroy it (Nash 2001: 121).

Things deteriorated irreparably with the entry of Mexico into Northern American Free Trade Agreement. Indigenous crops - their only economic source of subsistence - and in particular corn crops, would have never resisted the (unfair) competition of USA state-

subsidized farms in Mexican market, that NAFTA was going to allow. «*Their cry of "Basta!" (Enough) when they rose up in arms on January 1, 1994, resonated throughout a world that has also had enough of the assault on human survival implicit in the crises of global capitalism*» (Nash 2001: 12), wrote anthropologist June Nash, who had conducted ethnographic research in Chiapas since the 1950s.

Generally, the EZLN uprising had been a reaction to what historian Adolfo Gilly defined - quoting Thomas Benjamin - the "bloody populism" of the Mexican government (Gilly 1999: 68). Indeed, since 1974, date of the First Indigenous Congress held in San Cristóbal de las Casas and in particular across all the 1980s, the government on the one hand adopted a modernizing and paternalistic language toward indigenous peoples, and on the other hand, it repressed them bloodily (*idem*). This, passing through the "legendary" (and not last) electoral fraud operated by the PRI government at the 1988 presidential elections, with the PRD candidate Cuhatemoc Cardenas swindled out of a clear victory (*idem*; Plana 2003). That case confirmed how Mexican political system ruled by the PRI "dictatorship" allowed no space for democratic change, and neither for the democratic expression of discontent. To some extent, the 1994 EZLN insurrection was a reaction to the previous 500 years and 2 years of indigenous peoples' genocide.

The negotiations between EZLN and the government that followed the armed uprising, led to the signature of the San Andrés Peace Accords, in 1996⁴⁷. The government failed to fulfil many of the agreements included in the Peace Accords (Global Americans 2017; Mora 2010; Le Bot 2013: 42). They were acknowledged by the 2001 Indigenous Law ("*Ley indígena*"), but very partially and in an "impoverished" form (Samáno R, Durand Alcántara, and Gómez González 2001). This represented a clear betrayal of the San Andrés Accords by the government, as EZLN denounced soon after the promulgation of the Law (EZLN 2001). The most fundamental discrepancy between the Accords and the Indigenous Law was that indigenous communities should have been recognized as "entities of public law" ("*entidades de derecho publico*") (Le Bot 2013: 42). On the contrary, the Law only accorded them the status of "public interest entities" ("*entidades de interés publico*"), which made a huge difference in legislative terms

⁴⁷ See page 84 for the main contents of the San Andrés Peace Accords

(*ibid.*) and reproduced a paternalistic relation of tutelage (Mora 2010: 296). Nevertheless, EZLN insurrection did change things.

The San Andrés Peace Accords represent a milestone in Mexican law, indeed: for the first time the government made a commitment to recognize the right of indigenous peoples (Global Americans 2017). Since 2001, article 2 of the reformed Constitution includes recognition of the Mexican state as a pluri-cultural nation where indigenous peoples and communities have the right to self-determination (*idem*; Cámara de Diputados del H. Congreso de la Unión 2017). From the same article, originated the establishment of a range of policies and institutions which aimed to improve the social inclusion and sustainable development of indigenous peoples, as illustrated earlier in the paragraph.

But there is also a wider contribution the EZLN offered, which goes beyond the local level to the global level and speaks in universal terms to all humanity, about culture and in particular, about the concept and the practices of democracy. In a famous interview with a Mexican newspaper after a visit to Zapatista communities in 1996, the sociologist Alain Touraine described in these terms what he witnessed:

«Now it is a question of going from revolutionary to something that does not have a name yet, but that ties democracy to the defence of cultural rights, the capacity of communication to the defence of diversity. The union of identity is that of specificity with the universal. I believe that international opinion appreciates a great deal what the Indian communities of Chiapas are located in a space, a time, a culture, they speak a universal language. In some way, the ski masks signify "we are you", the universality. I am at the same time a member of my community but with the voice of my mountain I speak with the phrase, I am you, that, along with the phrase, to "command while obeying", is of the greatest definitions of what is democracy.⁴⁸» (Nash 2001: 157)

Looking at the current representation of indigenous peoples within the Mexican political system provides a discouraging picture. Certainly, all Mexican parties, mention

⁴⁸ Interview appeared in *La Jornada*, August 10, 1996. Emphasis in original. Translation by Nash.

indigenous peoples and their rights among their charters, but it is more likely to be just words and nothing more. None of them really put the indigenous "question" at the core of their vision and programmes (Global Americans 2017). It should not surprise that indigenous peoples are almost absent from the Mexican Congress. Although official data in regard are inexistent, going through the profiles of each of the 500 current deputies at the 2012-2018 Congress, only 5 on 500 identify themselves as indigenous (*idem*): only 1% of legislators, while indigenous peoples represent between 6.5% and 21.5% (depending on the criteria of estimation, as earlier explained) of the overall Mexican population.

Still according to the investigation Global Americans, the 5 indigenous legislators have proposed a total of 23 bills during their terms, most of them about cultural topics. The 2 on the 23 were approved by the Congress referred to non-controversial secondary topics. One was about allowing indigenous deputies to speak in their indigenous language at the Congress and receive simultaneous translation. The other granted indigenous radio stations a tax exemption. The remaining rejected bills instead regarded more significant issues, that would have granted a minimum enhancement of political participation of indigenous communities and an increased use of indigenous languages and translations. No bills at all were proposed about more fundamental and urgent matters, such as prior consultations, basic services or social rights.

It has been therefore not by hazard in late 2016 the EZLN together with CNI – National Indigenous Congress came out with a new strong initiative, to draw attention on the political representation of indigenous peoples. They proposed to constitute an Indigenous Governing Council represented by an indigenous woman, a CNI delegate, to run as an independent candidate to the presidency of Mexico in the electoral process of 2018 (EZLN 2016a). This was done with the declared and clear purpose not to reach the power, but with the purpose to organize and mobilize from below indigenous peoples and the "civil society", to struggle the power in its uninterrupted ride of violence, death, destruction and impoverishment (*idem*).

In May 2017, EZLN and CNI informed that María de Jesús Patricio Martínez (also known as *Marichuy*) from the Nahuatl people was going to be their representative (EZLN 2017). *Marichuy* is a poor indigenous woman, as she used to introduce herself

on public events. This summarizes the core political vision of the Zapatistas, that combines class, ethnic and gender perspectives together (Nash 2001: 244). In addition, it reiterates a typical Zapatista practice of putting women forward as "poster children" for indigenous rights and as a challenge to oppressive power relations (Speed 2006). Accordingly, change in Mexico would have to start by the most marginalized among the marginalized people: indigenous, poor, peasant women. This is also the result of a long and complex process that saw EZLN being the first to provide a public forum for indigenous women (see Hernández de Castillo 2006: 63), which led to the foundation of the National Council of Indigenous Women in 1997. This was a movement geared towards striving for the inclusion of a gendered perspective within the national indigenous movement, and the wider goal of forging a more multi-ethnic, democratic and fair Mexico (*ibid.*).

At the end, *Marichuy* was not able to collect the necessary numbers of signatures to run as an independent candidate in the Presidential elections. Actually, only 2 of the 48 aspiring independent candidates succeeded in being admitted to run in the polls. One was the wife of former president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and the other was the governor in office of the state of Nuevo León. Nevertheless, the deep motivations that led to the attempted candidature of *Marichuy* remained. And the EZLN and CNI struggle goes on (EZLN 2018).

PART II

THEORY

In this second part we are going to define the theoretical premises laying at the base of the study and contextualizes it within the last decade of anthropological regards on social movements. It is organised in two chapters. The first chapter sets some key premises on understanding social movements and rebuilds an essential genealogy of the main theories on social movements elaborated by social sciences since the late nineteenth century. It therefore specifically focuses on the anthropology of social movements, by illustrating its positioning within the wider field of social movement studies and by reviewing the literature on some of the most notable social movements that emerged in the world during the last decade. The second chapter dedicated to political autonomy and retracing the theoretical-political-ideological processes that led to its affirmation as a leading paradigm in contemporary indigenous struggles, in Latin America and beyond. Finally, it provides an overview of the last 50 years of indigenous and peasants mobilizations in Mexico, particularly in Chiapas, with a spotlight on the key-phases marking the passage from institutional indigenismo to the actual claims for autonomy and self-government.

Chapter 4. The Anthropology of Social Movements

4.1 Four Standpoints on Social Movements

James C. Scott wrote that every institutionalized power in history has generated some forms of autonomous response or reaction from people (Scott 2009). The reason Social sciences and anthropology in particular is increasingly investigating social movements as the anthropologist Stefano Boni argues - is because of their uncommon ability of laying bare the limits of democratic institutions (Boni 2012). What we do exactly mean when we talk about social movements?

Following Boni (*idem*), and far from pretending to provide an ultimate definition, for the purposes of this study we will consider social movements as forms of conflictual political activism, operating outside of conventional institutional channels of political participation (such as parties and administrations), and performed by informal networks of both individual and collective subjects. During the last decades, these networks have usually been shaped in flexible, inclusive and somehow unpredictable forms, as expressions of a civil society in constant flux. They usually lacked, especially in their beginnings, centralized authorities and "official" doctrines. And having abandoned any faith in Marxists paradigms, they do not aim anymore to take power. They rather stand for a redistribution of power; reaffirming the will of the people over the institutional one (Holloway 2002). Yet, how can a social movement come into being? Why? And under which circumstances?

First, social movements arise for a clear reason – discontent (Boni 2012: 37). A discontent about the way power is exercised by legitimate political institutions, among other reasons. In the following paragraph we will provide a review of reasons that make people from all over the world, discontent and dissident, and that encouraged them to

get together in social movements. To give just some examples, reasons for opposing institutional policies may include: claims for civil rights, for truth, or justice; demands for fairer and more redistributive economic policies, for more inclusive social policies, or for the defense of public services and against their privatization; the defense of environment from threats represented by initiatives of aggressive exploitation of natural resources or the realization of infrastructure megaprojects; etc.

Second, the appearance of any social movement implies the existence of a community, made by persons feeling part of a shared identity and destiny (*idem*: 38). Often marginalized and stigmatized by the decline of the public realm and the growth of collective impotence brought by globalized modernity (Bauman 1999), communities sometimes react. And through a direct and public mobilization, they try first of all to reaffirm their existence. And whenever possible, to struggle, negotiate and/or build alternatives. Communities represent the base for social movements from which they certainly draw human, intellectual, and technical resources required for the struggle (Boni 2012: 39). In addition to some basic and often egalitarian political forms, available in the communities, that may become the decision making structure of movements.

Third, a social movement should be able to attract and motivate individuals to be active actors (*ibid.*). Making them not to repeat the old, corrupt and unpopular dynamics that dominate parliamentary democracy. As a matter of fact, people are likely to join social movements because of a deep disaffection towards political parties. Hence, social activists must definitely not replicate the same hierarchical structures and lack of transparency for which the political systems they oppose are often reproached. The fourth and last premise is usually a corollary of the previous ones: the determination to undertake the steep way of the conflict with the institutions (*ibid.*). Only a widely shared persuasion and strong perseverance in this direction, throughout the whole membership, allow a movement to tackle threats, legal consequences, mediatic criminalization and violent repression very likely to occur while opposing institutions.

With all the aforementioned premises satisfied leading to a social movement being established, it should count on a fundamental toolkit to efficaciously pursue its political goals. The first tool is communication (*idem*: 40). Both internal communication,

among members and external communication addressing actual and potential allies. This entails a more general audience, which may include the wider society, as well as the institutions targeted by the dissenters. For a social movement, effective communication primarily means, the capacity to produce "alternative" information, i.e. counter-narratives and visions other than the "official truth" released by authorities and official/mainstream media. Thus, the ability to disseminate such information is required too, bypassing censorship - particularly under authoritarian regimes - and/or the control or the monopoly of information channels hold by authorities and official/mainstream media.

The second tool is action clearly targeting the "adversary", i.e. the institutions held responsible for the discontent that created the movement (*idem*: 40-41). Two modes are contemplated, and implemented according to the movement's goals, moral and political orientations, history and ongoing circumstances: civil resistance and direct action (*ibid.*). Both are forms of struggle that aim to "hit" the institution(s) held responsible for something unwelcomed. Even if it often resorts to illegal acts, civil resistance generally recognizes institutions and the authority of the state, aiming to put pressure on them (*ibid.*). While the second mode is direct action, this doesn't recognize state sovereignty, complies with community decisions and protect these latter by the state interferences and/or reactions (Graeber 2009: 201-211, quoted in Boni 2012: 41). Given the particular relevance it performs in the framework of this study, a focus on the theories and practices of civil resistance is required.

According to the philosopher Gene Sharp, considered the most influential scholar on civil resistance - civil resistance is «*a technique of action by which the population can restrict and sever the sources of power of their rulers or other oppressors and mobilize their own power potential into effective power*» (Sharp 2005: 39). Sharp bases his understanding of civil resistance on a specific Gandhi-inspired conception of power, which deems rulers dependent on the consent of the ruled (Ritter 2015a). Accordingly, no leader - no matter how powerful he or she may ever be - can hold power without the support and cooperation of key-social groups acting as the ruler's "pillars of support" (Sharp 2005: 35).

Just to give a practical example, no leader personally represses protesters in the streets. He/she relies on security forces under his/her control, to execute such a kind of tasks. Consequently, if police and coercive forces in general, refuse to repress demonstrations, the ruler has lost his/her coercive power at once (Ritter 2015a). What civil resisters therefore seek is to dismantle the relationships on which the power depends, by convincing the pillars of support to withdraw their cooperation from the government (Sharp 1973; 2005). This purpose can be reached through acts of *omission* (Sharp 2005: 41), that is, the refusal to perform usual acts or duties, such as go to work. Another method is through *commission* (*ibid.*), which is the performance of acts usually not performed or actually forbidden to perform, such as rallies, marches, sit-in, occupations of territories and/or facilities, roadblocks, etc (Sharp 2005; Auyero 2003). Sharp drew up a list of 198 nonviolent methods capable of weakening a regime through omission, commission or a combination of the two (Sharp 1973). What suggests that almost infinite variations on nonviolent tactics are possible, according to the activists' imagination and real circumstances.

Some clarifications are however required, as Daniel Ritter recommends (Ritter 2015a). First of all, nonviolent action is not the same as pacifism or passive resistance, as it is often wrongly understood (*idem*: 469). Civil resistance is neither passive nor conflict evading. Civil resisters refuse violence, but they do not eschew conflict. On the contrary: nonviolent resistance is exactly meant to be employed in conflict situations, or even to foment conflicts. Secondly, a strategy of not implementing violence is not necessarily an act of civil resistance (*ibid.*). Institutionalized and routine political actions, such as vote casting are clearly not civil resistance acts, despite their nonviolent character. Thirdly, civil resistance does not necessarily require a moral commitment to nonviolent ideals. Often times, the choice of nonviolence results from purely pragmatic considerations. Finally, nonviolent resistance is to ensure that no violence will occur and that there will be no casualties. On the contrary, nonviolent tactics do not offer any guarantee about the reaction of the state or of any other adversary (Sharp 1973: 70–71; Sharp 2005: 21– 22; Schock 2005: 6-12). Many nonviolent struggles have led to considerable casualties (Ritter 2015: 469).

And yet, nonviolence rewards more than violence. The political scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan carried out the challenging task of analysing over 300

cases studies on violent and nonviolent campaigns for regime change, the end to foreign occupation or secession. Their most impressive finding is that «*between 1900 and 2006, nonviolent resistance campaigns were nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial success as their violent counterparts*» (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011: 7). "*Participation advantage*" is what the authors believe ensures nonviolent campaigns a greater success rate compared to violent movement (*ibid.*). As a matter of fact, civil resistance «*facilitates the active participation of many more people than violent campaigns, thereby broadening the base of resistance and raising the costs to opponents of maintaining the status quo*» (idem: 10-11).

In this short but much needed excursus about civil resistance, we repeatedly referred to the potential or actual reactions of the rulers towards social movements and campaigns. Far from any simplistic reading, the relationships between a social movement and institutions are complex and surely not reducible to a mere action-repression pattern. Back to Boni's analysis, although a social movement arises outside institutions, these latter remains a crucial reference, to which the movement addresses its demands, complaints and pressure, and with whom it may start dialogue and negotiations (Boni 2012: 41). Some social movements eventually transform themselves into associations or political parties, just to gain a formal status recognized by elected governments (*ibid.*). This is a true reason why the challenge for social mobilizations is keeping their autonomy and independency (*ibid.*).

On the other side, institutions mainly see social movements as a thorn in their side, for many reasons (*ibid.*). Social movements unveil troublesome facts or issues, that institutions would have preferred to hide. Secondly, typical parliamentary strategies such as negotiations, compromises, allocations, or lobbying, may often not work with protesters which makes a movement unmanageable, and consequently, a potential threat to the status quo. Political institutions usually react with a strategic combination of coercion and assimilation (*ibid.*). Their first and most "spontaneous" response to social mobilizations is typically repression, with the declared purpose of restoring law and order through arrests and police operations. However, mere repression may reinforce public dissent, rather than discourage it. Thus, repression is alternated with techniques of seduction and cooptation aimed at neutralizing the politically disruptive power of the popular mobilization and to eventually assimilate it into the establishment, in order to

control and take advantage of it. Generally, this may consist in offering the movements' key-actors political candidatures or positions in the institution, as well as in drawing militants into networks of political clientelism, driving them to abandon their activism (Auyero 2006). In addition, in an attempt to gain electoral consensus, social movements might be offered alliances by ruling political parties as it has often been the case with Latin-American leftist parties (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 223-249, quoted in Boni 2012: 42).

Finally, a last crucial aspect in social movements' trajectories has to be mentioned: the goals. Normally, goals set by every movement are multiple. However, there is always a foremost and fundamental goal - a solution to the discontent that gave birth to the movement (Boni 2012: 43). The evaluation of the actual efficacy of the movement in reaching the specific purpose cannot exclusively rely on its self-representations and "choreographies" (i.e. demonstrations and symbols). The fundamental matter – Boni writes – is to assess if the movement was actually able to reduce power from the institutions and eventually change the expected course of things (*idem*: 44). If so, the question is how the movement could succeed (no secret agreements or clientelism involved? – for instance) and on what relevant matters was the success achieved. Thereafter, a second and wider goal is usually at stake for social movements (*ibid*). That is, to grab sovereignty from the state and transfer it to society. Movements call into question the exclusive authority of political institutions. And at the same time, they affirm with their action, the opportunity and the will to go beyond the democratic mandate and exercise power directly. In this sense, social movements voice the discontent of those sectors of civil society dissatisfied with having their political dimension reduced to only the vote (*ibid.*).

Clearly, the two goals are interconnected and dependent on each another (*idem*: 45). The achievement of significant margins of direct representation and possibly, of self-government, necessarily sets as precondition, the achievement of tangible results in the specific disputes the movement struggles for. If this latter can be assessed rather accurately and in a defined period, the former objective should be observed on the long term (*ibid.*). And it can therefore consist in how much was the movement able to impose a participant and direct democracy complying with citizens' needs, over an unpopular, unfair and indifferent electoral democracy (Graeber 2008). Although they do

not always state it openly, this is generally, the ultimate and systemic alternative espoused and pursued by social movements .

What should be clear is that social movements do not aspire to be a completion of political institutions nor to substitute them (Boni 2012: 45). Rather, they express a vision of shared power and egalitarianism, a claim to a direct and horizontal participation, autonomy and self-government. Finally, the fundamental exigence social movements express by challenging the state, is the diffused re-distribution of power and the re-allocation of authority from institutions to society (*idem*: 46).

4.2 Social Sciences' Approaches to Social Movements: Main Theoretical Frameworks

Generally speaking, we may identify two main paths of development in social movements studies (Koensler 2012: 48). The first orientation tends to abandon the classic thesis according to which collective action is irrational. And it rather proposes a more accurate exam of social actors' motivations (*ibid.*). In this sense, as authors like Susanna Barrows pointed out, a fundamental shift happened, from the view of social movements as deeply irrational, to the assumption of their irrefutable rationality (Barrows 1981). Later, the second orientation moved the view to the single actors, their actions and their cultural productions (Koensler 2012: 48). The sociologist Charles Kurzman explains that the change in this case happens from a focus on the big interpretative frameworks that aims to explain entire societal macro changes, to the micro-analysis of specific and delimited contexts (Kurzman 2008).

Similarly, a radical change has occurred about the relationship between social change and social movements. For a long time during the twentieth century, social movements were likely to be considered as the expression of unsuited social groups, unable to keep pace with the changes their society, and more generally the world was experiencing . Thence, during the 1970s, things started to be seen differently. Scholars, particularly in sociology, began to no longer look at movements as products or even "victims" of rapid social changes or as in Durkheimian terms an anomy. On the contrary, for the first time social movements were being considered as actors of social change. As Alberto Melucci tellingly observed, social movements speak first, and announce the possible

change, even before the forms, the content and the directions of this change became visible (Melucci 1991 [1982]: 7). In this section, we are going to shortly rebuild five main epistemological phases social movement studies have passed through, in the evolution we have just enounced.

Looking back at the founders of sociology (with which anthropology shares a lot of "pioneering" past), it is evident that the notion of social movements is rather unclear or most probably, absent, although the interest in social change, was clearly present in their studies (Montagna 2012: 58). Following sociologist Nicola Montagna's epistemological analysis, in the classical Marxist philosophy, conflict and status quo change are at the very heart of the analysis of capitalist society (*ibid.*). Class struggle is the fundamental principle at the base of historical materialism and, therefore, of social change. The Durkheimian view, in turn, was inspired by the fear of social disorder and the need of explaining the reasons and the logic beyond it (*ibid.*). Accordingly, social conflict arises when people start to feel and live the division of labor as iniquitous. Popular classes rise up when they are unhappy with the role they have been assigned, they harbor further aspirations and by consequence, try to depose those who execute the functions they would like to obtain (*ibid.*).

In Max Weber sociology, the existence of inequity is a necessary but not sufficient condition to produce collective action (*ibid.*). The work of the sociologist Gustav Le Bon is contemporary of Weber's, but rather oriented towards psychology and surely pervaded by the terror of masses accessing politics and influencing the events (Le Bon 1982 [1895]). He saw mass movements as composed by individuals "impulsive" and "barbaric", lacking reason, personal autonomy and moral judgment, and constituting, while in the mass, a "mental unity" (*idem.*). A view this one taking to extreme what anyhow was a quite common consideration of social movements, during the nineteenth century: they were feared and pathologized, but at the same time, retained as permanent components of contemporary societies (Montagna 2012: 59).

The first real change of attitude arrived from the Chicago School between the 1920s and 1930s. Scholars such as Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and especially, Herbert Blumer laid the basis for the study of collective behavior to become an autonomous field in social sciences (Della Porta and Diani 2006). A field that would be further developed in

the post Second World War period and until the 1960s, with authors like William Kornhauser, Neil Smelser and Joseph Gurr, among others, whose works represent the nucleus of the so-called "Collective behavior theories", also known as "Breakdown theories" (*idem*). However heterogenous, this corpus of works shared three main elements in the study of social movements (Montagna 2012: 61). First, collective phenomena in general (social movements, but not exclusively) are considered as an extension of the elementary elements of collective action, taking shape in phases of rapid social change, as traditional institutions lose their regulatory and mediation capacity. Secondly, social movements appear whenever people experience socioeconomic deprivation and they are discontent with that. At least, when they are able to reach a common interpretation on the causes and those responsible for the conditions in which they live. Thirdly, social movements are made up of individuals and groups whose aspirations - economic, professional, and social – are somehow frustrated.

The collective behavior studies surely represented a relevant step forward, compared to the vision of social movements as forms of "mass psychosis" previously sustained by Le Bon. Overall, the authors of this trend still considered social movements in rather reductive and somehow skeptical terms (*ibid.*). As a matter of fact, they interpreted collective phenomena as the sum of individual behaviors, instead of the result of a coordinated effort of diversified groups of individuals aiming to produce a common political action. Furthermore, the focus is still on the causes of mobilizations (e.g. frustrations, social tensions), rather than on the organizational processes leading to them. Finally, and in any case, compared to institutions, the innovation potential of social movements is still considered marginal.

The series of protests bursts in the 1970s highlighted the limits of the previous theoretical approaches (*idem*: 62). At that moment, it became clear that social movements could not just be reduced to social groups frustrated and/or unable to adjust themselves to transformations, as Jean Cohen remarked (Cohen 1985 quoted in Montagna 2012: 62). Civil rights movement, student activism(s), women's rights movements and anti-war movements, proved that movements could be and actually were promoters of new instances and alternative visions of life and society. The "Resource Mobilization Theory" (*RMT*) that rose in USA just at the beginning of the 1970s, acknowledged this new evidence (Montagna 2012: 62). And moved the attention

from "why" movements come into existence, to "how" do they do it. What in turn, required the implication of economics and politics in the analysis. Consequently, social movements result as fully rational entities (and no more "foolish", as before considered). And they exist mainly because of the availability of both material and symbolic resources, and thanks to their ability to manage them, as "political entrepreneurs".

Discontent and frustration are still considered by RMT, but played a secondary role, far from being the leading trigger former theories saw in them (McCarthy and Zald 1977 quoted in Montagna 2012: 63). In the roadmap RMT traces on social movement formation, three premises appear. First, rational cost-benefit estimation: individuals are more likely to participate in collective movements if material and symbolic benefits exceed the costs (e.g., workload, time, or risks). Second, the ratio between available material and symbolic resources and the possibility to mobilize them: the more resources are available and used, more activists may join the movement. Third, the presence of organizational and solidarity structures, capable of mobilizing resources. This is because as authors like the sociologist Charles Tilly explained, social movements never rise in contexts of social disintegration or individualistic atomization (Tilly 1976 quoted in Montagna 2012:63). On the contrary, they necessarily rely on pre-existing forms of organization (*idem*). In sum, RTM surely represented a turning-point in the studies of social mobilizations, after which they are not regarded anymore as expression of deviance or social organizations. However, the prevalent emphasis this theory puts on rationality, may risk reducing social movements to a matter of mere cost-effective calculations. While it is commonly known how much passions, emotions, ideals and irrationality are involved in social mobilizations.

Simultaneously with RMT, another theory emerged in the USA, that has been considered either as integration or as an alternative to RMT - the "political opportunity structure theory" - later renamed the "political processes theory" in the 1980s and 1990s (Montagna 2012: 63). Like RMT, this theory is built on actors' rational choice and on the conviction that they pursue specific goals, through costs-benefit assessments. But in addition, the availability of given external conditions is considered as a necessary precondition for any movement to exist. However, in this case a crucial role is not attributed to subjective conditions (as RTM does, with internal organizational

capabilities), but rather to external variables and namely, to the political and institutional environment (Della Porta and Diani 2006).

Overall, the thesis claimed by political processes theory is that the presence of "strong" (i.e. omnipresent and in some measure, authoritarian) states with centralized institutions, weaken civil society and eventually favor violence (*idem*). On the contrary, "weaker" states promote the development of civil society and by consequence, a civilized and peaceful dialectic between institutions and collective action (*idem*). The origins of this vision is to be found in Alexis de Tocqueville's classic *Democracy in America*, where the theory of political environment was firstly enounced and the examples of "strong" and "weak" states, were respectively inspired by the first half of the XIX century France and USA (de Tocqueville 2002 [1835]). Peter Eisinger has been the first to apply Tocqueville's thought in analyzing the 1960s cycles of protests in the USA (Eisinger 1973). He came to the interpretation that protests occur in presence of flexible and open systems (the weak states Tocqueville wrote about). Whereas among closed systems (the strong states), protests are not feasible nor fruitful (*idem*). The successive applications of the theory, led to the belief that political opportunities located in the external environment are numerous and in constant evolution: for example, political stability/instability, movements' options for alliances, industrialization processes, wars, etc. (Montagna 2012:64). Moreover, political opportunities offer social movements the conditions to exists. But also, social movements contribute, in turn, to create further political opportunities.

While the RMT and the political opportunities theory were being developed in the USA, in Europe, the waves of social struggles from the 1970s, led to the formulation of what could be called the "new social movement theory" (NSM). During the 1980s, authors such as Alberto Melucci and Alain Touraine, laid the foundation for this theoretical model, where the adjective "new" refers to the same social movements. They are new, in as much as they deal with different topics and they adopt new organizational forms, compared to the "traditional" twentieth century movements, like the labor movement and nationalist ones (Montagna 2012: 66). For the NSM theory, the industrial conflict is crucial not anymore. However, social conflicts continue. They just moved to further fields of society, addressing other themes involving new groups whose identity is no longer defined by their social class (Cohen 1985 quoted in Montagna 2012: 66).

At the very beginning of the 1980s, Jurgen Habermas affirmed that contemporary conflicts were not anymore about resources distribution. They rather represented the attempt of resisting the colonization and commodification of the «*grammar of forms of life*» (Habermas 1981: 33). That's why protests began to invest themes such as personal identity, body, health, environment, cultural and linguistic heritages. Therefore, social movements were not performing anymore a class struggle (Melucci 1995). But rather – as Alain Touraine highlighted - a struggle for the control of mainstream cultural models, that are the models through which the relationship individual – society is organized by rule (Touraine 1985). If – as RTM affirms - social movements change as societies evolve, thus, in post-industrial societies, whose primary production are symbolic goods, codes and information, mobilizations progressively invest all aspects of social and cultural existence (Melucci 1996). Reason for which – Montagna writes – new movements appear less "socio-political" and more "socio-cultural" (Montagna 2012: 66). In addition, they mark a growing distance between civil society on one side, and the state on the other, while the distinction between private and public spheres is destined to disappear (*ibid.*).

During the last two decades, several new directions unfolded in social movements studies, mainly from further developments and re-elaborations of the theories we have reviewed so far. Among the recent orientations, we will recall in particular one, not least for the useful analytical elements it may offer to this study: the "framing theory". Based on the original definition elaborated by the sociologist Erving Goffman, the frame is a schema of interpretation making reality meaningful. Frames allow individuals or groups to «*locate, perceive, identify and label*» (Goffman 1974: 21) an infinity of events and occurrences, thus giving sense, organizing experiences and finally, orienting their action. At the end of the 1980s, the sociologists Robert Benford and David Snow (1988; 1992) were the first to apply the concept of frame to social movements. The framing theory that resulted from that, focuses not on "why" but rather on "how" (i.e. through which processes) social movements take shape. According to this theory, the fundamental challenge for every social movement is to produce a "frame alignment", between the individual frames and the frames of the social movement (Snow et al. 1986). In other terms, frame alignment is «*the linkage of individual and social movement organization interpretative orientations, such that some of individual*

interests, values, and beliefs and social movement organization activities, goals and ideology are congruent and complementary» (Snow and Benford 1988: 197). Mobilization and activation of participants are contingent upon the completeness, robustness and thoroughness of such a frame-alignment effort. This, in turn, depends on the successful accomplishment of three core framing tasks:

1. "diagnostic framing": a diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration;
2. "prognostic framing": a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done;
3. "motivational framing": a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action (*idem*: 199).

Where the first two are aimed at achieving consensus mobilization, and the third task concerns action mobilization and should provide the motivational impetus for participation. Overall, the more the three tasks are effectively developed and harmonically interconnected, the higher the chances of success for the mobilization effort (*ibi*).

4.3 Anthropology and Social Movements Studies: Gaining Legitimacy

In 1992, Arturo Escobar openly criticized the excessively marginal involvement and interest of anthropologists in the study of social movements (Escobar 1992). He also proposed some possible tracks to explain such an inattention. First of all, he referred to the too narrow understanding of the concept of politics, often adopted in anthropological studies, that used to consider the political "sphere" used as apart from the cultural one. Escobar with his concept of "cultural politics" contributed to overcoming such an *impasse*, affirming that even cultural practices had to be viewed as one of the essential dimensions of social, political and economic institutions (Escobar 1992: 65). Another explanation – continued Escobar - had to be identified in the narrow use of the term "practice" too. Due to that, anthropologists have most likely addressed their views on practices reproducing social life, rather than on those transforming, changing, altering, and innovating it, especially if performed by collective subjects (*idem*).

However, June Nash remarked in 2005 (Nash 2005: 22) that even if they have for a long time ignored the national and international interferences in their local field sites, anthropologists eventually became part of the principal observers of social movements. And particularly of social movements produced by indigenous people, women, and the disinherited usually seeking a new relationship with the states in which they live. Albeit often underestimated, it is probably in these social circuits, once considered marginal to global processes, that the major transformations are occurring, says Nash. And thanks to the "peripheral vision" they cultivate and typically the holistic analysis they perform, anthropologists are in a privileged position to assess these new directions (*ibi.*). It is therefore not by coincidence that mainstream research on social movements has especially focused on struggles in the cosmopolitan centers of the Global North. Anthropologists of social movements have had an intensive frequentation of local and micro settings, both in the Global North and South, in addition to a number of transnational movements trying to transcend the north-south dichotomy (Juris and Khasnabish 2015: 579).

In fact, Juris and Khasnabish further argue that anthropologists are suitably situated to observe and directly experience the everyday realities of movement activists (Juris and Khasnabish 2015). From there, they are able to examine ongoing practices of social movements, their forms of interaction and emotional dynamics. They are also able to interrogate the flow of encounters between activists, organizers, allies, opponents and the wider society (*idem*). Similarly, ethnographies can help in going beyond traditional static accounts of movements "successes" and "failures", that rest upon political categories many radical movements refuse and resist (*idem*: 579). And they emphasize less evident, expected and predictable aspects, which may trigger more relevant and durable effects (Haiven and Khasnabish 2013). Moreover, ethnography is also able to reveal crucial empirical issues and to generate critical theoretical insights, otherwise not accessible through traditional objectivist methods. Ethnographic thick descriptions surely offer a precious contribution to grasp «*the complexity, contingency, promise, and limitations of contemporary activism*» (Juris and Khasnabish 2015: 580).

Drawing on the main theories in the study of social movements which were explored in the previous paragraph, anthropology has primarily relied on new social movement

(NSM) theories, particularly with respect to the relevance of culture (and also identity) in contemporary social movements (*idem*: 581). Anthropologists went further, with relevant theoretical and methodological innovations coming from Latin America where much of the early anthropology of social movements flourished. Hence, we may affirm that they diverged from NSM theory in at least two ways (*ibid.*). First, anthropologists such as the already mentioned Escobar, grasped from the observation of local experiences the conviction that struggles of social movements are at once cultural and material, as well as symbolic and political (see Escobar and Alvarez, eds., 1992). Secondly, based on cultural studies approaches to culture, anthropologists have started looking at culture and identity not only as produced by social movements, but also as discussed, challenged, and contested within the same movements. With these latter therefore emerging as complex fields, far to be social and ideological homogeneous, and sites of struggles themselves, not just vehicles for struggles (Juris and Khasnabish 2015: 581).

This means that anthropologists explore the "internal side" of the politics and the poetics of cultural production taking place in a movement. They don't just focus on the formal properties of the structure of movements like mainstream accounts on social movements usually do (*idem*: 582). They rather illustrate the cultural nature of the movement struggles, engaged in building alternative interpretations of naturalized categories such as women, nature, race, economy, citizenship, democracy, to oppose the hegemonic (in Gramscian terms) cultural and political understandings. Movements create new meanings, subjectivities, and imaginaries, both locally and transnationally (*ibid.*). This transforms not only the cultural "battle-field", but simultaneously transforms the political, institutional and the material ones (Álvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998). In that, ethnographic approaches have been particularly fruitful in the examination of internal contrasting logics of action and production with the movements, which may include contrasts over visions, identities, strategies, decision making, and organizational forms (Kurtz 2002; Lichterman 2005).

Finally, one last domain in which ethnographic regard has been valuable is the knowledge-making activity of social movements, also defined as "cognitive praxis" by sociologists Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (Eyerman and Jamison 1991 quoted in Juris and Khasnabish 2015: 583). As anthropologists Maribel Casas-Cortés, Michal

Osterweil and Dana Power suggested, social movements should be considered as knowledge producers operating in multiple kinds of knowledge practices, that exist in parallel with scholars' knowledge production activities (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2013: 199). Among others, Arturo Escobar offered outstanding accounts of the production of knowledge about biodiversity, nature and territory by indigenous movements from Colombia and Latin America (Escobar 2016; 2014; 2008). The acknowledgment of the fact that social movements and their activists produce their own knowledge, necessarily entails a reconsideration of the status and the role of ethnography in knowledge production.

The first consideration we may infer from that is, anthropologists of social movements increasingly are at this point, just a voice in a "crowded field" of knowledge producers, as Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell (2013: 199) pointed out. Secondly, as anthropologist David Graeber affirmed, anthropologists are good in performing a holistic observation of social movements and in communicating their representations back to not only the academic world and scholars in general, but also to the same activists (Graeber 2009). This implies that anthropologists can contribute with their own embedded knowledge to the practices of knowledge of the movements they study, in as much as they co-produce ethnographic knowledge *with* those movements (see Paley 2001). Moreover, Juris suggested that anthropologists engaged in studying global justice movements, can contribute with their knowledge and writing, to activists' own strategy-making and theory-building (Juris 2008).

While Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish went even further, affirming that anthropologists can support activists under possible hard times experienced by their movements, such as fragmentation and demobilization (Haiven and Khasnabish 2013; 2012). This may happen in the form of helping them to revitalize and transform into action the radical imaginary at the base of the movement, as well as by identifying and addressing internal (and also external, I add) barriers and threats that inhibit the action and reproduction of the movement (*idem*). In these sense and ways, ethnographic knowledge can go beyond the simple contribution to science and to academic debates. Thus it can be useful and applicable for the same social actors that have been the object of the anthropological study.

Nevertheless, as the anthropologist Paul Lichterman (Lichterman 2013) lately pointed out, despite the added value their application may bring to the study of social movements, ethnographic methods are still underused in the mainstream literature of social movements. Recent relevant writing and theorizing on social movements made primary use of ethnographic methods (see Juris and Khasnabish 2013), and not only in anthropology, but as well as in critical geography, just to cite an example. Yet, such contributions still remain somehow excluded by mainstream trends in the study of social movements, that are mainly part of political science and sociology. The reason for such a neglect is, at least in part, epistemological: according to Juris and Khasnabish, while sociologists and political scientists are more likely to consider empirical data (including ethnographic observations) as «*grist for the mill of theory building*» (Juris and Khasnabish 2015: 579), interpretivist anthropologies view theory as a framework for analysing particular cases, defining new concepts through the same ethnographic encounter.

Nonetheless, in the last 15 years the anthropology of social movements established itself an emerging and flourishing field of investigation (EASA 2018). Alluding to Alexander Koensler (Koensler 2012), we may define anthropology of social movements as a rib of political anthropology, whose principal interest lays in the relationships between the agency of social actors and the sociopolitical structures. It is noteworthy that a social movement can be hardly reduced to a delimited empirical phenomenon to observe on the field. As Alain Touraine noted, the definition of social movement refers to particular processes, rather than to specific fixed entities (Touraine 2003).

4.4 2008-2018: A Decade of Anthropological Regards on Social Movements

Since in the 1990s, globalization with the inherent expansion and articulation of capitalist investments, production, and markets in new areas have triggered the emergence of social movements mobilized to defend local people's lands, cultural identities, and autonomy (Nash 2005b). Improvement of communication systems, the development of a global civil society based on grassroots movements in addition to the affirmation of United Nations and NGO action, allowed an unprecedented flow of global awareness on iniquitous distribution of wealth and misfortunes of any kind. Populations that felt most threatened by these changes responded by seeking "a place"

in new global configurations, by means of redistribution and integration (*idem*). New actors emerged as social movements and invented original forms of expression for their causes, showing a major cultural diversity within the "global ecumene", in the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz's terms (1996). And they came to develop what anthropologist Marc Edelman called "transnational activist networks" (Edelman 2001). This led to articulate the demands of social movements in the most universal terms ever seen, and brought the issues of global social justice at the forefront more frequently and loudly than ever before (Nash 2005b). During such an epoch-making phase, anthropologists became more attentive and committed to social movements rising worldwide around a variety of topics and causes. At the point that they became – as we earlier argued quoting Nash – among the main observers of contemporary mobilizations. To highlight a less exhaustive but partially representative review of anthropological regards on globalization and its opponents, four "classical" thematic areas identified by June Nash in her 2005 (and still unsurpassed) reader on anthropology of social movements will be explored (Nash 2005: 12): fragmentation and recomposition of civil society; fundamentalist reactions to secularization; deterritorialization and the politics of the place; privatization, individualization and global cosmopolitanism.

Beginning with the first area, with globalization a number of exclusionary factors came to split civil society by widening poverty and deepening the iniquitous distribution of wealth. These exclusionary factors are - according to Nash (*idem*) - produced by the intrusion of Western values and institutions into native territories. As well as by deindustrialization or offshoring. Or by global financial upturns (such the one of 2008) and consequent austerity measures. Elements that limited the capacity for growing strata of population, to access essential services such as housing, health and school education, but also political representation and economic opportunities in general. This culminated into massive waves of migration towards richer and more productive regions, within the same country, or abroad, from the global "south" to the global "north", or within the same "north", like witnessed in the European Union; migration from southern member countries to central and northern countries. However, these circumstances have also produced mobilizations of people to remove the barriers affecting their existence. These mobilizations most likely relied on civil society and networks. Whereas they remained

independent from political parties, often seen as a "part of the problem" rather than "part of the solution". In this sense, the re-composition of civil society we referred to.

Looking at events in the last decade, the global wave of social protests that started in 2011 in numerous countries worldwide definitely fit into this first category. The Occupy Movement has been one of the most resounding events and after its very first manifestation at New York Zuccotti Park in September 2011, it spread to over 80 countries around the world sharing the emblematic slogan «*We are 99%!!*». David Graeber, not only wrote a passionate book about the 2011 protests (Graeber 2013), but he has also been one of the most visible figures of Occupy Wall Street movement. It is surely worth mentioning the Series hosted on the Cultural Anthropology website entitled «*Occupy, Anthropology and the 2011 Global Uprising*» (Juris and Razsa 2012) with anthropological coverages of Occupy from all over the world. As well as the insightful analysis on radical political imagination in the "dark times" of austerity, developed by Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014; Khasnabish and Haiven, Eds., 2017).

Occupy Movement has been just the last expression of 2011 protests performed in reaction to the austerity politics implemented in the aftermath of 2008 financial crisis. Generally, it aimed to attain a higher and more direct citizen participation in the democratic process, and limiting the interferences of global financial powers and related interests. Among the other most notable cases, was the Syntagma Movement in Greece about which the Cultural Anthropology website hosted two special series, respectively entitled «*Beyond the "Greek Crisis"*» (Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos (Eds.) 2017) and «*Greece is Burning*» (Faubion, Georges, and Van Steen, Eds., 2016). The 15-M (as "15 May") Movement in Spain, also known as *Indignados* ("Outraged") Movement (Postill 2013; Feixa and Nofre, Eds., 2013). In particular, the so-called Arab Spring, as some analysts observed, was considered the main inspiration and trigger for this cycle of protests.

This Arab Spring is the outbreak of revolts that began in Tunisia in December 2010, where protests led to the government being overthrown. These events progressively expanded most notably (but not only) to Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain, where local regimes were toppled and/or major violence erupted, including riots,

insurgencies and civil wars. These revolts aimed to reverse the ruling authoritarian regimes. Even if the term "revolution" mobilized to describe them is more a projection of western observers' categories than a faithful representation of facts (Brownlee and Ghiabi 2016). Anthropologists promptly looked at the Arab Spring as a wide phenomenon, like in the collection edited by Kjethil Fosshagen (Fosshagen, Ed., 2014), who eventually dedicated primary attention to the Egyptian case (see Abu-Lughod 2012; Ali Agrama 2012; Ghannam 2012; Hamdy 2012). With the exception of Egypt, most of the countries that saw major revolts soon collapsed into civil wars and/or chaos (see Yemen, Syria and Libya).

Moving to the second category on the list, the last decade witnessed a substantial increment of fundamentalist reaction to secularization. In 2005, Nash wrote that global commoditized exchanges in increasing domains of life were progressively causing alienation from spiritual communities of faith. This in turn was causing religious fundamentalist reassertions and more militants expression of faith among the different confessions (Nash 2005: 15). Meanwhile, global politics became progressively informed by discourses – more or less explicitly – employing religion as a legitimation for war and terrorism. It did happen in the so-called wars on terror that followed September 11, 2001, on Al Qaeda side as well as among the US administration and troops (Brahimi 2011; Cady 2008). The use of religion that has been furtherly intensified with ISIS overflowing affirmation since 2013. Such a phenomenon was first of all witnessed in Iraq, since USA troops withdrawal. Then, it occurred in Syria, already tormented by a civil war. It was registered in Libya, felt in chaos after the violent deposition of Gaddafi. And allegedly, it happened also in Europe and USA, inasmuch ISIS claimed responsibility for many of terroristic attacks that shook several countries worldwide since 2014 (Lister et al. 2018).

Proceeding along a path earlier opened in particular by the work of Talal Asad (Asad 2007), anthropologists engaged in an interpretation of ISIS phenomenon that goes beyond the aspects of physical violence and terror usually emphasized in the popular notion of "clash of civilizations". Some of them analysed ISIS as a socio-political movement and as a *de facto* state, with the different sources of authority and tools of power pertaining to each (Günther and Kaden 2016). Especially outstanding is the work of Scott Atran on contemporary violent extremisms, based on intensive ethnographic

fieldwork among ISIS fighters in Iraq and young adults in the slums of Paris, Barcelona and London. ISIS - Atran argues, is a mobilizing myth that aims to change and eventually save the world. It is capable of playing an extraordinary moral appeal on young people in the transitional stages of their existence and in search of a meaningful path in life (Atran 2016; Bartlett 2016).

Shifting on a different but not really unrelated level, anthropologists also recorded the secularization push performed by several western governments on wearing hijab, burqa, niqab and even the burqini in public. It has been the case in Belgium, France, Holland, Denmark, Germany and Austria, that banned - at different degrees - Muslim headwear in public⁴⁹, driven by the principle of state secularity, as well as by public security concerns and by a declared interest in protection of women's rights. This often aroused intense debates and mobilizations across the respective societies particularly in the French society (Fedorak 2017; Abu-Lughod 2013; Bowen 2011; Bowen 2008; Van Nieuwkerk 2004). However, not all phenomena of secularization and fundamentalism pertain to Islam and European countries. From the other side of the world and in totally different contexts - for instance - anthropologists have attentively reported about the self-immolations of nearly 150 Tibetans since 2008 (McGranahan and Litzinger 2012b). These are usually young and current or former monks using a "new" form of political protest against Chinese policies over Tibetan regions (Makley 2015; Shakya 2012; McGranahan and Litzinger 2012a). Last but not the least, insightful comparative analyses on secularization processes undergoing in different Asian countries (among which China, India, Thailand, and Indonesia) are surely worth mentioning too (Bubandt and Van Beek, Eds., 2012). Finally, a last reference is due to millenarian movements, commonly and somewhat imprecisely also labelled as "cargo cults". Although they are probably not anymore *a la mode* in contemporary anthropology as they used to be between the 1950s and 1970s (Lindstrom 2018), in Melanesia they haven't disappeared and new insightful readings of them at the light of globalization, has been produced (Tabani and Abong, eds., 2013; Tabani 2013; Lindstrom 2011; Iteanu 2017; Otto 2009).

⁴⁹ For a timeline of the legislation passed, see: Weaver, M. 2018. "Burqa bans, headscarves and veils: a timeline of legislation in the west". The Guardian (international edition). May 31. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/headscarves-and-muslim-veil-ban-debate-timeline> – accessed 23.10.2018

Deterritorialization and politics of place are the following thematic area. Nash – quoting Appadurai and Gupta and Ferguson (Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997) – asserted that "deterritorialization" of people, communities and industries «*is taken to be axiomatic in global flows*» (Nash 2005: 16). That, being total flexibility what worldwide deployment of capital demands. And being labour the main component of flexibility in the production system (*ibid.*). Thus, deterritorialization first of all means an uninterrupted movement of human, economic and financial capitals, not anchored anymore to any specific territory, but rather flowing from time to time and from place to place, according to the needs and priorities of the global capitalist powers at the moment (*ibid.*). Deterritorialization also represents a direct and ruthless offensive over territories, regardless of their inhabitants and their survival, rights, will, needs and views. In such a framework, contestations and the violations of indigenous rights on traditional territories occur (*ibid.*). As well as invasive agents of global enterprises encircle local communities, often with the backing of state forces (*ibid.*). The trend that privatizes the most fundamental rights to water, land and basic resources for survival never stopped, neither the new megaprojects that aim to integrate communication, production sites and markets in different sides of a continent or between different continents, or to exploit natural resources for energy production, threatening people to be removed from their place in their home environment (*ibid.*).

Nevertheless, villages, indigenous communities, tribes, or simply and more generally, citizens, often do not easily surrender and respond to the attacks of global capitalism, by putting forward alternative development enterprises. Alternative identities. Alternative visions of the world, of the relations with environment and of citizenship(s). Or in other terms, by performing "place politics", as Arturo Escobar defined them (Escobar 2010). These are an emerging form of politics bearing a new political imaginary affirming a logic of the difference (instead of a standard/universal one) and the potentiality of a plurality of actors and actions on the everyday life (*idem*). According to such a vision, places are sites of living cultures, economies and environment, before being nodes of a global and totalizing system: in this, their potential to embody an alternative to capitalist modernity. Place politics found magnificent expression in autonomic claims and initiatives developed particularly – yet not only – by indigenous social movements from Latin America, especially since the 1990s. Where for autonomy we may refer to both *de jure* and *de facto* autonomies, or in other words, formally and legally acknowledged by

the state, or not. And that may entail variable forms and degrees of autonomy, eventually reached or just aspired.

Starting with Mexico – being the focus of this study – anthropologists and social scientists at large in last two decades have regarded very closely at the events, discourse, and the practices of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), whose hooded faces burst into the global imaginary through the armed uprising which "welcomed" the NAFTA agreement on January 1, 1994. Although EZLN may appear not relevant anymore among northern/western media and political circles, neo-Zapatistas are far from having disappeared. Some scholars are still following up the developments of a ground-breaking movement that abandoned guerrilla struggle, and as sociologist Yvon Le Bot remarked, despite a limited capacity for action reached outstanding expressiveness and exemplariness, turning it more into a cultural movement rather than a social and political one (Le Bot 2013: 60). Among the most recent and relevant contributions from the last decade I would mention the works by Xochitl Levya Solano (Levy Solano 2017) who is based in Chiapas, as well as the aforementioned Alex Khasnabish (Khasnabish 2010) and Yvon Le Bot (Le Bot 2013).

Nevertheless, the MAREZ - Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities established by EZLN are far from being the only autonomic experiences in contemporary Mexico. In a valuable collection coordinated by Giovanna Gasparello and Jaime Quintana Guerrero (Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero 2010a) we may discover how many and how different forms of autonomy are undergoing in the country: the historically-rooted autonomic aspirations and experiences of the Yaqui people in the state of Sonora and the Triqui people in the state of Oaxaca; autonomous responses to the state of insecurity brought by the war on drugs, with the creation of community police corps and a community systems of security and justice notably in the state of Guerrero; cultural production and diffusion by means of autonomous community radios, still in Guerrero; and, lastly, small local solidarity economies advancing in several regions of Chiapas. Moreover, Mexico is definitely not an isolated case in Latin-America.

The whole continent has been going through major autonomic processes at least since three decades ago. The extensive anthology edited by Miguel González, Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor and Pablo Ortiz-T (Eds. 2010), introduces several representative

cases of autonomy from Panamá, Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile. All autonomies examined are indigenous, and are therefore analysed in light of the long history of indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination. This has recently entered a new phase of intense dialectic with national states, often tending to establish themselves - at least on paper - as multicultural states and urged to decentralization/regionalization policies by liberal reforms packages (González 2010). The "side-effect" of liberal reforms whether it is potentially favourable to indigenous autonomic claims or on the contrary damages them is still unclear (*idem*). In the next paragraph we will focus specifically on indigenous autonomies which has a special relevance to the topic of this study.

Yet, many forms of place politics exist. A number of compelling cases are reported about communities in resistance against specific initiatives of natural resources exploitation and/or megaprojects. In Mexico again, international resonance was reached by the organized struggles of local communities from the Oaxacan coasts of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, against the Mareña Project which aimed to establish one of the largest wind farms on the continent. Protesters eventually won the battle and in 2013, the project was withdrawn. Analysing this case, the anthropologists Cymene Howe and Dominic Boyer, who have been conducting fieldwork in the region since 2009, highlighted that when renewable energy transitions and climate mitigation match liberal development schemes inspired by the logics of extraction, collaborative and horizontal modes of activists response and opposition are reinvigorated (Boyer and Howe 2019; Howe, Boyer and Barrera 2015). This holds true for a country like Mexico, where conflicts around energy-related modernization schemes are not new, mainly in the areas of petroleum extraction (Breglia 2013) and mining (Liffman 2012). However, this is not exclusively in Mexico.

Recent anthropological contributions have underlined the frequent clashes between energy development schemes (whether state or industry-led) and indigenous people, particularly about rights to land and resource use (Colombi 2012; Smith and Frehner, Eds., 2010). The controversial construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) across Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation in northern USA is just one of the most recent (2016) and well publicized episodes of this kind. #NoDAPL - the movement opposing the project had an exceptionally transversal composition including more than

three hundred indigenous nations from the US and Canada. There is also a range of sympathetic social movements (like Idle No More or Black Lives Matters, among others), simple citizens, artists, intellectuals, and scholars (Dhillon and Estes, Eds., 2016). American anthropologists as well decided to publicly stand in defence of the rights and the environment of indigenous peoples affected by the pipeline, and urged the Federal government to stop the violence against protesters meted out by the police forces (AAA 2016; Berkeley Anthropology Faculty 2016). #NoDAPL delayed but could not stop the pipeline, whose construction has been supported by a presidential memorandum soon after the coming into office of the Trump administration (The White House 2017). Nevertheless, as the anthropologists Jaskiran Dhillon and Nick Estes have argued in the introduction to a dedicated series that appeared on the Cultural Anthropology website (Dhillon and Estes, Eds., 2016), #NoDAPL protesters have been «*directly challenging the fossil-fuel industry's centrality in colonial accumulation and demonstrating that climate change is indelibly linked to historic and ongoing colonialism and Indigenous erasure and elimination*» (*ibid.*).

Finally, it stands to reason that resistances to megaprojects may also take place in contexts not involving indigenous populations. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, for instance, the NO TAV movement in north-western Italy has been struggling to prevent the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway to pass through the Susa Valley since in the mid 1990s. In a notable essay recently published, the anthropologist Marco Aime has gone beyond the demonization of NO TAV activists the state and mainstream media have portrayed since the very first demonstrations (Aime 2016). He has rather analysed the processes that led to a shared/collective knowledge within the Movement, and not only in regard to the railway. A knowledge allowing many among the community in resistance, to develop an in-depth reflection on key contemporary questions such as development models, democratic representation and commons. That eventually played an essential role in turning NO TAV into a movement not just "against something" but rather "for something".

The fourth and last disciplinary field in Nash's categorization is what she called privatization, individualization and global cosmopolitanism. «*Privatization and the individualization of human responsibilities, duties, and claims on society are aspects of modernity that are intensified with globalization.*», wrote Nash (Nash 2005: 19). Global

capitalist enterprises can expand and grow if and only if the private rights to control property and resources are assured (*ibi.*). As Carl Marx already envisioned and feared, money exchange have increasingly informed and mediated social relations, emptying them of every institutional and affective content (Marx 1971: 156-8 quoted in Nash 2005: 19). The commoditization of social relations have actually taken place and increasingly dominates social exchanges (Nash 2005: 19). What is especially evident in global metropolis where money exchange became a substitute for traditional forms of reciprocity and redistribution (*idem:* 20). This necessarily and inseparably goes together with the isolation effect, or in Marxist terms, the alienation of individuals in society. That is – in turn - the result of the commoditization of the products of human labour: money not only determine the value of the product, but also erase the moral relation between the producer and the consumer (Marx 1971: 59 quoted in Nash 2005: 20). Hence, many actors and groups from different areas of the world have been reacting to the privatization and individualization of global exchanges, and introducing a strong moral component able to challenge the alienation produced by commoditization.

The very first and immediate case Nash mentioned is fair-trade associations, as they directly challenged the politics of commoditized food markets. As a matter of fact, in its earliest formulation, the fair-trade movement emerged in opposition to deregulation promoted by later liberal policies (Moberg and Lyon 2010). With states' progressive renounce to their regulatory prerogatives over markets, fair trade sought «*to extend a preferred retail niche to products grown and manufactured under ethical conditions*» (Moberg and Lyon 2010: 4). What also implies rewarding producers with fairer (higher) payment for their labour. Despite that most of the problems pointed out by the ethnographic anthology coordinated by Lyon and Moberg (Lyon, S. and Moberg, Eds., 2010) remained unsolved, global fair trade sales kept constantly growing and reached 8.5 billion euros in 2017 (Fair Trade International 2018; Fair Trade International 2009), from 2.9 billion euros in 2008 (Fair Traide International 2009: 19).

Moving after a common thread, during the last decade, food has turned into a point of convergence for actions and reflections on contemporary economies, and probably the main field in which to build an alternative economy – argued the anthropologist Valeria Siniscalchi (Siniscalchi 2015), quoting the anthropologists Jeff Pratt and Peter Luetchford (Pratt and Luetchford 2014). The notion of "food activism" became a quite

popular and surely ample conceptual container, capable of embracing a range of rather different sorts of militancies (Siniscalchi 2015) from very specific and targeted protests to modes of production, distribution or consumption, "alternative" to the "standards" of agribusiness and "conventional" agriculture. Performed either by local, national or transnational associations and/or organizations aiming to totally or partially change the "conventional" food system.

As two evocative anthropological anthologies respectively edited by the above mentioned Pratt and Luetchford (2014) and by Caroline Counihan and Siniscalchi (2014) show, a multitude of food activisms have appeared in some countries such as Italy, France, Belgium, Spain, UK, Cuba, Canada, USA, Sri Lanka, and USA. Each of them has its rationale, proper goals, set of strategies and practices but they all share the central role of the individual, through whose practices performed within a wider dimension of collective mobilization may contribute to change the system. This social dimension of commodity exchange became a per se value, to preserve and reintroduce whatever has disappeared. Becoming this latter the cornerstone of new and other forms of conceiving and practicing economic exchanges, alternative to neoliberal capitalist model (Siniscalchi 2015).

However, reactions to "the isolation effect" of globalization (Trouillot 2001: 126) are not only expressed over market exchanges, food and goods in general. Several forms of "global cosmopolitanism" (Nash 2005: 21) have been emerging and some of them eventually came to assume large dimensions and left their mark on the global arena. Just to mention one for its dramatic urgency- the so-called European refugee crisis. A definition, this latter, that political institutions and governments Europe-wide love to ascribe to the flow of people from Middle Eastern and African countries, that have since 2015 been increasingly crossing (or trying to cross) the Mediterranean sea, the Balkans, and the English Channel to enter Europe (Fernando and Giordano 2016). Some anthropologists refuted the notion of crisis applied to the 2015 migration phenomenon, depicted as extraordinary or unprecedented (see Cabot 2018; 2016). However, depicting contemporary flows as critical events, offers the powers the premise to declare and establish "states of emergency" (see Fassin and Pandolfi, Eds., 2010), as a means to normalize permanent "states of exception", as defined by Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 2005).

The management of the so-called crisis has seriously challenged the political architecture and the cohesion of the European Union. It soon became a key-argument and rallying point for far-right, ultranationalist, xenophobic, and populist political parties and administrations all over the continent. The events of Brexit in 2016, the 2017 French presidential elections (with the National Front reaching the run-off) and the 2018 Italian elections (which saw the success of the 5 Stars Movement and the Northern League), are among the most recent and clear evidence of the appeal anti-migrant discourses have been able to play among large social groups. However, European civil society has also been animated by a vehement impulse of empathy and solidarity towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in general. A number of local, national or international initiatives, movements, and organizations have surged to offer migrants support, hospitality and inclusion. Dozens of these organizations concerned with current migration flows are operating in each of the European countries more directly. Several NGOs got directly involved in search and rescue operations (SAR) of migrants in the Mediterranean.

Such forms of social mobilization are echoed on the other side of the Atlantic, where the coming into office of the Trump administration made the current political climate in the United States, particularly unwelcoming towards immigrants. Actual and pending legislations and administrative policies include banning Muslims, banning refugees, the further militarization of the southern border including the building of a colossal wall, ending family-based immigration policy, terminating Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) as well as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programs (Duncan, Heidbrink, and Yarris 2018). Like in Europe, non-negligible sectors of US society are reacting to the anti-migrant political momentum (*idem*). Some of the reactions are from already established migrant rights movements such as the New Sanctuary Movement, the US Immigrant Rights Movement, or the Student Immigrant Movement. Some of the response came through locally-based initiatives for instance from universities (Castañeda 2018; Yarris, Heidbrink, and Duncan 2016).

These events illustrate that the political trend related to nationalism, xenophobia, intolerance, and exclusion are global (Duncan, Heidbrink, and Yarris 2018). The reaction seen in collective mobilizations to defend and support of migrant rights, rather than opposing them, is also global (Eggert and Giugni 2015). The political agency and

the activism of migrants is a field anthropologists and social scholars in general have still not explored much. However, this is a political phenomenon that is likely to increasingly inform global politics.

Chapter 5. Autonomy

A common theme among many of the social movements mentioned in the previous paragraphs, is the growing autonomy sought by activists. This is equally a key-aspect of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, the Mexican movement under study in this work. In this section some essential landmarks in the discourse of autonomy will be set with core attention on Latin America and its indigenous people. In the context of indigenous struggles in Latin America, autonomy has historically been conceived in two senses: as an end or as a process (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010). Autonomy as an end corresponds to autonomic regimes, as they have been established in places such as Nicaragua and Colombia, or as constituent element of new multicultural states like contemporary Bolivia and Ecuador (*idem*). Whereas autonomy as a process – with the prime focus of our study - is about struggles conducted with an "*autonomic grammar*" (*idem*: 65), by peoples and organizations using strategies to gain greater freedom, self-government, territorial and cultural control.

Autonomy as a process is aspired by many indigenous communities and movements, the most notable case is the neo-Zapatista autonomic project implemented in Chiapas by EZLN. This finds a strong philosophic base in the thought of the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. He argued an autonomous society issues its own laws (from the Greek *autós*, "self", + *nómos*, "law") and differs from a heteronomous society (from the Greek *héteros*, "other, different") in as much as the latter is based on absolute power in addition to rigid and sacred institutions (such as ancestors, God, nature, reason, laws of history, competition) (Castoriadis 1999a [1975]; Castoriadis 1999b; see also Melenotte 2015). The autonomy project is at the same time individual and collective. To become

autonomous, a society requires the practice of direct democracy and the economic practice of self-production. Once the power is enforced from individuals, the effective participation in decisions that affect the group is allowed and encouraged. Castoriadis advocates for a form of direct democracy in which not only are citizens equal in a public sphere, but in which also the fundamental and often common opposition between state sphere and public sphere is surpassed. Lastly, he strongly insists on the transformative potential of the praxis of everyday life, rather than on single, sudden, and clamorous, acts or events such as a *coup* (Castoriadis 1999a [1975]: 130).

Another relevant philosophic link may be set with the works of the anthropologist Pierre Clastres - a fellow of Castoriadis in the anti-authoritarian French movement. There is a link particularly with his theory about the possibility for "primitive" societies to refuse the state (Clastres 1974). Against the arguments on the ineluctable affirmation of the hierarchical and coercive forms of government in modern societies, Clastres opposes the small political units observed in Amazonia, where the entire social body prevents the chief from transforming his position of social prestige into a coercive political power. From a less philosophical and more historical post-Marxist and anarchists perspective, James Scott recently reaffirmed the capacity of indigenous and/or nonstate societies to shape alternative and effective forms of politics. In his book "*The art of not being governed*" (Scott 2009), Scott elaborates a comprehensive history of the populations that avoided the state or have been expelled from it. Not being governed for these populations is an art and a precise a choice, not a chance. They settled on the peripheries of power centres where many indigenous populations in Latin-American still live today. These are the par excellence alternatives to the state. They generated "unruled" regions, where they survived and often prospered. This constitutes a counter-narrative to the "official" story of modernity, according to which unavoidable contact with technology and the modern state led people to assimilation.

5.1 A struggle between paradigms

Given this essential philosophical background, I found extraordinarily interesting and fruitful the historical and theoretical analysis on autonomy developed by Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010), a Mexican sociologist based in the CIESAS branch of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas: a point of view if not really

emic or local, definitely from within my own fieldwork. She observes that, today, the autonomic proposal features most of the indigenous struggles all over Latin America. She analyzes that both autonomy as an end and autonomy as a process represent the proof of the progressive establishment of a theoretical-political, conceptual and programmatic field, fundamentally inspired by the right to self-determination. From this view, she proposes to start thinking of autonomy in terms of a paradigm like in the Thomas Kuhn sense (Kuhn 1970) - the autonomic paradigm.

In her historical re-enactment, she argues that autonomy as a paradigm is still under construction. It appeared in Latin America during the 1970s and 80s, at the moment indigenous movements started to aim at peoples' right to self-determination. It came to challenge the hegemony of old established paradigms: namely the colonial, the assimilationist and the integrationist paradigms. Born together with the human rights paradigm which is also based on the principle of equal rights, it had to "fight" for its own identity and independence from other more mainstream paradigms. One of the main "opponents" has been the "paradigm of minorities" (ethnic, linguistic and religious) (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 67). This had been elaborated in Europe during the first decades of the twentieth century, and it has more recently flown into the "paradigm of multiculturalism" (*ibid.*). It is actually the paradigm of multiculturalism that – according to Burguete Cal y Mayor – now plays the role of main rival of the autonomic paradigm.

The current ongoing affirmation of autonomy as a paradigm, is the final moment of a three-phases historical process, that saw, at each moment, a fundamental opposition between paradigms. These phases are: decolonization, resistance and, now, reconstitution (*ibid.*).

5.1.1 Decolonization: Self-Determination Paradigm VS Colonial Paradigm

World War II and the generalized horror produced by the Holocaust represented a turning point in the twentieth century. The newly created United Nations Organization (UN) soon took measures to protect "minorities" with the approbation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocides on December 9, 1948 (UN 1948a). This was followed one day after by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948b). Yet, until the 1960s, the United Nations exclusively considered nation-states as legal

entities of international law. With resistance, gradually, developments in doctrines and norms led to the recognition of other kinds of collective entities.

The true breaking point came with the decolonization theory and its strong claims for equal rights and the end of discrimination which openly challenged the colonial paradigm and the theoretical-political-ideological base of colonial empires, according to which a people had the right to subjugate other peoples that are considered "racially inferior". As a result, in the second half of the twentieth century colonialism started to lose legitimacy among European societies. Furthermore, the explosion of nationalist struggles in some colonies dramatically began to oppose colonialism and raised the demand for self-determination to be recognized by the rest of the world. The wide geopolitical and economic circumstances were also favourable. Capitalist yearnings galvanized by the free-market doctrine required further free markets and free consumers. The US president Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), also contributed with his public stance that favours self-determination for all people around the world. All these factors, in addition to the advocacy made by activist movements and within the UN system, realized their first achievement with the passage of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples, promulgated by a group of eminent experts on July 4, 1976, in Algiers. The principles of the Universal Declaration of the Rights still continues to regulate international relations in the world.

However, since the notion of "colonized people" did not cover them, this first significant development not included indigenous people (Rouland, Pierré-Caps, and Poumarè 1999 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 72). Emergent indigenous leaderships at UN, together with a group of concerned scholars and the first international NGOs (such as IWGIA – International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs), referred to the UN Committee of the 24 (Special Committee on Decolonization) asking the extension of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples to indigenous peoples (UN 1960). The Committee of the 24, unsure on whether indigenous could be really considered as "peoples", turned to the UN Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which finally appointed the special rapporteur José R. Martínez Cobo to investigate the matter.

Martínez Cobo's conclusions are widely known, with the first official (yet not definitive) definition of indigenous peoples and the formal pronouncement in favour of the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights and in particular, of that to self-determination (UNDESA 1982). Cobo's recommendations also led to the overtaking of ILO 157 Convention, with the attainment of ILO 169 Convention and, much later, in 2007, the elaboration of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN 2007). In the last thirty years of the twentieth century, this new legal and political framework offered the basis for the development of a new paradigm – the paradigm of indigenous autonomy; understood as the guarantee to the right to self-determination for indigenous peoples.

Things started to change on the theoretical side too, with significant impulses from scholars standing for indigenous decolonization. An example among others is the anthropologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen (Stavenhagen 1963 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 73), with his fundamental concept of "internal colonialism" that describes the conditions of indigenous people. The anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, also redefined the concept of "*indio*" as a colonial category (Bonfil Batalla 1972 quoted Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 74) as well as the anthropologist Héctor Díaz-Polanco's theoretical-political elaboration of autonomy, which strongly contributed to de-legitimize the ideological foundations of American indigenismo (Díaz-Polanco 1988 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 74). All these concepts in addition to other contributions from all over Latin America have provided the basis for the new autonomic paradigm, to the detriment of the old assimilationist and integrationist paradigm.

In summary, from the 1970s to present, a growing number of previously-named "ethnic groups" protested against having their development being impeded by colonization. They came to consider and affirm themselves as indigenous peoples. Such a position was shared by groups from all continents. Today, more than 200 millions people identify themselves as indigenous, in what the anthropologist Milka Castro Lucic (Castro Lucic 2008 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 75) defined as the "universalization of the indigenous condition", which shows a major trigger in the affirmation of the autonomic paradigm all over the world.

5.1.2 Resistance: Autonomic Paradigm VS Assimilationist/Integrationist Paradigm

The 1970s saw the emergence of a new socio-political actor that would have been the protagonist in the construction of the new paradigm - indigenous organizations. Until then, organizations mobilizing on an ethnic base were missing. Class, and specifically, belonging to peasantry, were the main trigger for collective action. This meant that both indigenous and mestizos participated without distinction as peasants. As Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira noted, before the 1970s the category of indigenous was generally and strongly refused by the indigenous people themselves. It was perceived as a colonial stigma nullifying the single identity (Cardoso de Oliveira 1990 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 76). Gradually, the notion was re-signified and re-appropriated. Several social organizations went to self-identify themselves as indigenous peasants, and eventually, indigenous people exclusively and openly made political use of their identity.

During the 1980s, indigenous movements had to face persecution and violence from authoritarian regimes. In some countries, they appeared as components in wider national liberation movements. However, in those cases, their claims for indigenous rights and autonomy challenged and largely defeated the Marxist orthodoxy of ruling leftist guerrilla movements (Barre 1990 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 77). Successively, autonomic proposals came to question the "popular project", i.e. the view of an ethnically homogenous nation, without room for diversity and plurality. The autonomic forms of government first of all adopted by Nicaragua in 1987 and Colombia in 1991, represent the "defeat" of the popular homogenous state nation and provided further impulse for the autonomic paradigm. At the same time, large-scale indigenous fights exploded and inflamed particularly the first half of the 1990s. The 500 Year Indigenous Resistance Movement in particular, laid the basis for this debate, with the involvement of indigenous organizations, as well as the emerging movement of NGOs, and some sectors of the Catholic church. Since then, most of indigenous claims have been expressed through an autonomic grammar.

In the 1990s, it was already possible to identify a transnational indigenous movement, with a clearly defined profile and structure. *The* indigenous movement definitely abandoned the paradigms of ethnicity and class. It also interrupted any connection with

the peasant movement. And eventually, it started to self-affirm itself as a truly "Indianist" movement. Mobilizations and summits called at the continental level, had a primary role in such a process. The First Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples held in Quito, Ecuador, in 1990, opened the way towards the progressive affirmation of a political strategy moving from indigenismo, to autonomy. Later, the EZLN uprising in 1994, gained world attention and sympathy. Its mediatic impact typical of the information age, decisively led to the affirmation of indigenous peoples, their claims and their proposals, at the global political level. The openly autonomic goals of the EZLN, drove the paradigm of autonomy beyond continental borders, to be embodied by social movements all over the world, and in particular by the then recently-born alter-mundialization groups. In the same way that domination models make use of a plurality of paradigms— argues Burguete Cal y Mayor – so does resistance, and the autonomic paradigm joined forces with the alter-mundialization one, as a part of a wider libertarian model.

At the end of the twentieth century and during the first decade of the twenty-first, autonomy found further expansion among indigenous people and came to invest larger areas of their social life. Autonomic claims acquired new significance and became part of the new strategies of political struggle against "neoliberal" capitalism. In their resistance in front of the capital, indigenous people mobilize cultural control – in the sense of Bonfil Batalla (Bonfil Batalla 1988 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 79). This was in order to define strategic spaces as their own property, and in this way, to repulse the penetration of "others" and of the capital. With the growing affirmation of autonomy, aspirations of ordinary citizens to alternative existences gained legitimation too. In this context, autonomy as a process, materialized in terms of autonomic interstices, spaces of freedom, territory control, cultural control and self-government. And it sought to establish new relationship between indigenous peoples and the state; but also within the same indigenous peoples, between population and the forms of internal government.

Finally, nowadays the autonomic paradigm combines concepts and practices of political action. It informs the ways people (indigenous and non-indigenous) see the world, think the world, act in the world and transform the world. In this way and measure, we can agree with Burguete Cal y Mayor, that the autonomic paradigm gained hegemony in

Latin America. Surely, the majority ignores the theoretical-political process of opposition between paradigms that led to this reality. Nevertheless, the right to a decent life based on alternative cultural existences is widely accepted at this point. This represents the definitive defeat of the assimilationist/integrationist paradigm, at least in peoples' imaginary.

5.1.3 Reconstitution: Autonomic Paradigm VS Multicultural Paradigm

Currently, the most fearsome opponent of the paradigm of autonomy appears to be that of multiculturalism. This is in consideration of the fact that multiculturalism arose in the same field and in the same historical moment of autonomy, and enjoyed the favours of major multilateral entities such as the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank, among others. The very beginning of multiculturalist discourse which is based on the core-concept of "ethnic minorities", dates back to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocides, UN approved on December 9, 1948 (UN 1948a). And it arrives – through several intermediate evolutions – to 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UN 1992). Such a theoretical-legal-political orientation seeks to ensure that persons belonging to minority groups do not suffer any kind of discrimination motivated by their cultural difference. Therefore, states are required to defend their rights. The distance with the right to self-determination is glaring.

As a matter of fact, Article 1 of the 1966 UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, grants all peoples the right of self-determination, by virtue of which, *«they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development»* (UN 1966) and – according to article 2 -: *«all peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.»* (*ibid.*). On the contrary, minorities do not benefit from these rights, but rather only from cultural rights, that are to be protected by the states. As a consequence, to consider and to name indigenous peoples as "minorities" – like scholars and governmental actors often do - is a (more or less involuntary) negation of their right to self-determination.

Tracing an essential genealogy of the multicultural paradigm, the outbreak of such a theoretical-political position in America is primarily due to the work of the political philosopher Charles Taylor, in his classical essay "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition," published in 1992 (Taylor 1992), as well as the political philosopher Will Kymlicka's classical book "Multicultural Citizenship: a Liberal Theory of Minority Rights" published in 1995 (Kymlicka 1995). Yet, the affirmation of multiculturalism has been greatly favored by the loss of legitimacy into which integrationist indigenismo incurred since the 1980s (thanks to the indigenous struggles), after being the ruling state policy throughout 50 years all over Latin America. However, regardless of the indigenous claims for autonomic policies, the states replaced integrationist indigenismo with a new kind of indigenismo – multiculturalism (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010:85).

The rapid rise of multiculturalism across the continent – promoted also by multilateral institutions such as WB and IDB, as mentioned – happened through the so-called constitutional multiculturalism (Sieder 2002 quoted in Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 85). Since the 1980s, most of Latin-American countries implemented constitutional reforms in order to officially recognize the rights of their indigenous groups. This set of legislative measures responded to claims of indigenous self-determination with a kind of "multicultural autonomy" limited to cultural politics and self-government, within a framework of de-centralization. The case of Mexico is paradigmatic in this sense. The reform of article 2 of the Constitution drafted in 2001 (see Chapter 3), states indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and autonomy, but this was restricted to a list of cultural aspects. This means that indigenous peoples are not recognized as entities of public law, but rather as "ethnic minorities" (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 85).

Undoubtedly, some progress was made through those reforms, but generally, their main purpose by means of recognition policies articulated in a multicultural grammar (rather than in an autonomic one) was to neutralize and nullify the transformative potential of self-determination claims. Consequently, the states usually made use of those constitutional reforms as a tool to reshape their hegemony and rule over diversity, establishing a kind of "multicultural governance". This led authors such as Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek (Jameson and Žižek 1998), or Díaz Polanco (Díaz-Polanco 2006), to judge multiculturalism as a cultural politic mainly aiming to favor the expansion and performance of "neoliberal" capitalism.

However, indigenous peoples did not just sit idly. In the face of unkept promises from the constitutional reforms, they modified and further strengthened their strategies of struggle. They focused their efforts on the reconstitution of their groups, strengthening their own life dimension, revitalizing their identities, resisting "neoliberal" capitalism, and practicing autonomy *de facto*, without authorization from the states. Concrete examples of *de facto* autonomies may be identified in the Zapatista MAREZ in Chiapas, or in the Community Police groups from Guerrero, in Mexico (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 86-87). Similar examples were found in Amazonian voluntarily isolated peoples or "hidden" peoples, in Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia (*ibid.*). And more generally, similar examples may be identified in all those experiences of re-actualization of traditional institutions of self-government and justice administration (*ibid.*).

Therefore, we may infer that to be successful, autonomic struggle must harmonically meet and conjugate the following three fundamental dimensions – according to Burguete Cal y Mayor. First, the legal-political recognition of the right to self-determination, by constitution. Second, the permanent existence and resistance of indigenous movements, whose discourse is expressed through an autonomic grammar. Third, at the very base of everything, there should be a deep and unceasing process of people's reconstitution. In so far as these three components are combined in a unanimous and dynamic process, both autonomy as a process and autonomy as a constitutional regime can be successfully pursued. Currently, the biggest challenge is the production of autonomic subjects strong enough to articulate these three dimensions. The consolidation of the autonomic paradigm is indeed facing uncertain times. The 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recognizing the right to self-determination and autonomy, has definitely supported it, as well as the Bolivian and Ecuadorian experiences surpassing the dogma of "one state – one nation". However, on the other hand, threats are numerous and serious. First of all, the militarization of indigenous territories and the repression against indigenous groups and their representatives. Economic precarity and consequent migration flows forcing people to leave their communities and territories is another problem. Although not as prevalent as during the 1990s, another factor is a perceived depletion of political interest, sensibility and will of the state with regards to indigenous claims. In some regions of Latin America, the indigenous movement appears to be somehow weakened and exhausted,

with leaderships in distress, and the heritage of a generalized disillusion for the recognition policies of the 1990s and early 2000s.

However, in many other spaces in the interstices of daily life, indigenous peoples are building metroethnicities and microresistances, defending their spaces of microautonomy, and waiting for more favorable circumstances allowing further and larger articulations, alliances, and actions. In this *micro* level, currently occurs the strongest struggles for the permanent affirmation of the autonomic paradigm.

5.2 Autonomies in Mexico: A Short Genealogy

When exploring autonomies in Mexico like in this research, it is necessary to make reference to indigenous autonomies. The writer Carlos Montemayor (2010) wrote that the question of autonomies in Mexico, dates back to the pre-colonial time. He recognizes that five centuries of colony and independent Mexico have not succeeded in completely erasing the foundations of collective indigenous life. Indigenous peoples saved their autonomy during more than 500 years of resisting opponents named in succession: conqueror, *encomendero*⁵⁰, Spanish crown, viceregal administration, nation, revolutionary governments and democratic transition governments. As a result, an important part of life in the indigenous communities is still ruled by autonomous decision making.

Montemayor explains that these autonomous decisions apply to many fields (*idem*). A classic example is offered by the system of voluntary (unpaid) work, better known as "*fajina*", "*tequio*" or simply community work. Community authorities are another notable case of autonomous political institutions still functioning in many indigenous groups. These positions are not remunerated nor do they give access to economic benefits. They are in charge of different levels of social responsibility in religious feasts, such as the organization of services, food, processions, music, dances and public order. Civil and religious services are occasions to assess the commitment and the skills of each member of the community and based on this, roles and promotions are decided. Community assemblies or councils are responsible for these mechanisms of evaluation

⁵⁰ Spanish colonizer in charge of a colonial grant (*encomienda*)

and for appointing authorities capable to ensure the continuity and security of the community. Daily, indigenous peoples are taking (again) part in more and more decisions in larger civic, penal and administrative areas (*idem*). This is a *de facto* political and social reality. But not *de jure*, still, due to the betrayal of San Andrés Peace Accords by the government (see chapter 3). Accords that nevertheless remain the main reference framework for the right to autonomy of contemporary indigenous people of Mexico. Accords reached thanks to the epoch-making armed uprising of the EZLN in 1994. The EZLN has been the most relevant and world renowned bearer of autonomist claims (indigenous or not) in contemporary Mexico. But it is not unique. We rather have to speak in terms of tradition.

In fact since the 1970s, autonomous discourses and practices began to constitute a tradition among the independent social organizations, in particular in the states with the highest indigenous presence (Chiapas and Oaxaca) (Mattiace 1997). Where for "independent", we refer to groups that have organized outside the state-controlled corporatist channels. And whose components were first of all indigenous, and usually peasant. To be more precise, according to Héctor Díaz-Polanco (interviewed in Mattiace 1997: 44), we may identify two phases in the affirmation of autonomy as a cornerstone of indigenous movements. The first lasted until 1994 and saw autonomist current as a minority within indigenous movements. It was supported by a distinguished group of social actors. But it was still unable to become crucial within the panorama of indigenous movements and to determine the direction to follow. The Zapatista uprising in 1994 reverted this situation and opened a second phase during which autonomy became hegemonic, and informed much of the demands presented to the government at the negotiation process in San Andrés. A process that went far to involve exclusively EZLN on one side, and the government on the other. It saw the more or less direct participation of large sectors of civil society and in particular, of social movements at large, especially indigenous ones. This is a phase that clearly continues today.

The outbreak of autonomist claims among indigenous movements in the 1970s has to be considered as a reaction to the assimilatory purpose promoted by the policy of indigenismo that had characterized independent Mexico particularly, in the post-revolutionary era (Mattiace 1997; Gilly 1999). It was a reaction but also as a consequence of the plan to modernize indigenous territories through an assimilation

policy. To a greater extent than any other Latin American country, the Mexican state has persistently appropriated images of "indian-ness" and of "the indian" to build and consolidate national unity (Mattiace 1997: 40). After the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), political elites used *indigenismo* as a means of legitimation in the post-revolutionary period (*ibid.*) A moment during which the state project of national integration was severely hindered by the agitated social and political scenario at the time. Additionally, *indigenismo* served the purpose of preventing the eruption of another revolution and ensure political stability.

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla has been among the most critical anthropologists in Mexico against the indigenists paradigm deployed by the Mexican state. In his masterpiece "*Mexico profundo*" ("Profound Mexico"), he masterfully described the operation of cultural spoliation at the base of *indigenismo*:

«Indian past had become a common past to which everybody had the right. Moreover, this past, expropriated to indigenous people, turned into a fundamental motivation for the independence of Latin American countries. As later, it had to be used to symbolize the ideals of 1910 Mexican revolution. Nevertheless, on the ideological level, the precolonial past was separated by the present of living indios. Teotihuacan and Chichen Itzá⁵¹ builders became the illustrious ancestors of non-indios. Whereas the indios had to remain, again, in the margins of history. Until the paradox between nationalism and indigenismo, according to which all Mexicans are Cuauhtémoc's⁵² descendants, except the indios. By consequence, the indios must "integrate themselves" (i.e. to stop being indios), in order to be, legitimately, Cuauhtémoc's sons too. » (Bonfil Batalla 1987: 232-233)

[translation is mine]

⁵¹ *Teotihuacan* is considered one of the most important pre-Hispanic cities in Mesoamerica. Its remains - located at some 70 km from the centre of the modern-day Mexico city - are still impressive and include the world-famous pyramids of the Sun and of the Moon. *Chichen Itzá* too is a relevant pre-Hispanic city, in Yucatan state. Among the most famous buildings, it counts the *Kukulkan* pyramid and the astronomic observatory. The two cities are among the most visited archaeological sites in Mexico.

⁵² *Cuauhtémoc* was the last Mexica *tlatoani* (king). He organized and guided a valorous defence against the invasion led by the Spanish *conquistador* Hernan Cortés. For this reason, he is a symbol of indigenous peoples' resistance against Spanish conquerors. See: León Portilla 1959

This signified that indigenist ideology celebrated the past glories of indigenous civilizations, while denying living indigenous people a place in contemporary society and certainly, their self-determination (Gilly 1999; Nash 2005b, 2001; Florescano 2005, 1997; Warman, Bonfil Batalla, and Nolasco Armas 1970). Similarly, the anthropologist Alcida Ramos proposed a telling juxtaposition. She defined indigenismo as the mirror by which the *mestizos* of the Western hemisphere see themselves in relation to the Indian; just like Orientalism does for the Western European observer. It represents a distortion for both ethnic groups, exaggerating an essential core of elements while disregarding other characteristics. She directly linked this with the claims for autonomy and cultural diversity:

«The claims for autonomy and the right to cultural diversity pose the ultimate challenge to nations that conceptualize their populations as homogenous, or at least en route toward expunging difference. The governments of both Mexico and Brazil promoted indigenist ideologies that praised cultural diversity even as they promoted policies that contributed to the extinction of cultural difference» (Ramos 1998: 6 quoted in Nash 2005: 10)

In Mexico, the climax of the indigenist "endeavour" was reached during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, from 1934 to 1940, who set a plan of massive land distribution at the very centre of his political programme. It is estimated that Cárdenas' land reform transferred half of the national arable land to the *ejido* system, based on article 27 of the constitution (Plana 2003). In 1948, the INI - National Indigenist Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*) was founded. This was as a centralized but nation-wide diffused infrastructure that had to systematically fulfil Cardenas' principle of "transforming the *Indio* into Mexican" (Lomnitz 2016)⁵³.

⁵³ As anticipated in the introduction to this study, it has to be acknowledged the role that Mexican anthropology played since after the revolution, in theorize and legitimate first, and promote and concretely implement then (especially within INI), the assimilation of indigenous people and the indigenist paradigm in general. The same Manuel Gamio, considered as the forefather of social anthropology in Mexico, was at the forefront of indigenismo (Plana 2003: 455) and laid the basis of what Claudio Lomnitz, polemically and ironically at once, would have called the "'Mexican revolutionary anthropology" (Lomnitz 2016). An interpretation of the anthropological discipline that a new generation of anthropologist would have taken care of systematically criticise and replace since the end of the 1960s (*idem*). Refusing in this way, to continue cooperating in the tasks of what Arjun Appadurai (quoted in Lomnitz 2016) called the "ethnographic state", i.e. the way into which the state cultural production describes national population by means of census, questionnaires, histories and statistics. A description

The land distributions decided by Cardenas had to represent a truly turning point for many indigenous communities. Especially in Chiapas. The anthropologist Jan Rus wrote that for Chiapas the revolution didn't happen in 1910, but rather between 1936 and 1940 (Rus 1994). As the historian Adolfo Gilly acutely retraced, during Cárdenas' administration, the state of Chiapas experienced a partial land reform, the introduction of trade unions and the abolition of debt bondage (Gilly 1999). Indigenous peoples were finally included even if only partially, into the Mexican revolution. They were still not indigenous, but peasants and *ejidatarios* (shareholders of the *ejido*, i.e. common land). The corporatists state embodied indigenous communities, with all their corporatist traditions in social and political organization, indissolubly weaved with religious beliefs and authorities. In this way, the so-called revolutionary institutionalized communities, directly linked to the state, were created (*idem*). Therefore, the state turned to be the direct interlocutor and recipient of demands, expectations and needs of peasants. Taking the position that was until then occupied by local landowners (*idem*). However, this came with a major unintended consequence.

If the conversion of the peasants into "favourite sons" has since then been the strong point of the state corporatists paternalism, this also proves to be its weak point. Gilly writes that starting from that moment, the state would have had to deal eternally with the persisting and troublesome (for the state) presence of peasants on the public scene. And more generally, another more relevant "side effect" would have appeared. The strategy of the state aimed at assimilating indigenous people, erasing cultural differences but at the same time keeping the existing relationships of domination intact. Thus, at the end of the day, it preserved indigenous cultural specificities by shelving the communities' internal relationships and dynamics. More notably, it also empowered indigenous autonomies in this way.

Such a preservation served the state purposes of domination and "modernization" without social change, recalling the principle expressed by the XIX century writer Tomasi de Lampedusa: «*everything must change so that everything can stay the same*» (Tomasi di Lampedusa 2008 [1958]). As a matter of fact, the domination of the state

which is necessary for the consecutive tasks of "modernizing state", a form of official cultural production aimed to programme the goals of development.

continued to be based on the isolation of indigenous communities, separated from the national community by the language, by a constitutional law ignoring them and by the racism of the state oligarchy (Gilly 1999: 46-47). At the same time, it left the internal systems of beliefs, values, hierarchies and management of indigenous communities unaltered. This remained a world by itself, subordinated but not dissolved, in the political culture of the regime. Mexican and Chiapas ruling elites branded this world "apart" as the cause of indigenous people's "delay", "ignorance" and "inferiority" (*ibid.*). This neglected the real causes of the extremely poor life conditions of the indigenous people were the same as always, namely: the expropriation of their lands and products, feudal servitudes, exploitation of labour and institutional repression (*ibid.*). All these happened at the benefit of the ruling elites.

Anyhow, that world apart invisible to the rulers, would have transformed itself from the site of silent subordination, to the heart of resistance, initially silent too, but progressively more "noisy" and subversive. The first revolts would have not be late to come. At the end of the 1960s, in conjunction with the national political crisis generated by the student movement of 1968 and its bloody repression (see Tlatelolco massacre), a wave of social struggles also began in Chiapas. The first protests were against the caciques, who acted as plenipotentiary mediators between the revolutionary institutionalized communities and the state system (*idem*). Demonstrations would have been particularly vigorous among the *Chamulas*, the Tzeltal people of the San Juan Chamula municipality, in Chiapas highlands. As usual, authorities violently repressed discontent from people, and also expelled them from the community under charges of being "enemies of tradition". Often, this charge was also due to the conversion to religious creeds other than the "hegemonic" one - the traditional syncretistic religion - which still represent a main reference horizon for the concrete distribution of power and authority in the community (Moksnes 2012). In the 1950s, conversions to Protestantism started (*idem*). In the 1960s, the liberationist version of Catholicism preached by the catechists of the catholic diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, gained growing adherents (*idem*). Since then and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of exiles would flee to the outskirts of San Cristobal de las Casas and the virgin lands of the Lancandona rain forest, founding dozens of new colonies that would become among the main ground of the liberation theology promoted by the bishop of San Cristobal, Samuel Ruiz García (Nash 2001). Later on, in 1974, the first National Indigenous Congress

which marked a turning point in the history of indigenous struggles, would take place in San Cristobal (Gilly 1999).

Therefore, the adoption of explicit autonomist claims by indigenous movements has been gradual. The writer Luis Hernández Navarro identified some main factors whose combination contributed to its affirmation (Hernández Navarro 2010):

- the persistence of traditional forms of government;
- the reconstitution of the indigenous people as a people as such, which determined their irruption as political actors claiming rights and not paternalistic assistance;
- the international resonance of indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination in the context of the United Nations;
- the example of the autonomous pluriethnic regions in Nicaragua;
- liberation theology;
- since 1989, the 169 ILO Convention.

As easily predictable, autonomist discourses were embedded in different ways, degrees and moments, among the myriad of socio-political actors involved in indigenous movements. Moreover, it would be more appropriate to use the plural "autonomies", instead of the singular "autonomy". There is not a "standard" or "universal" autonomy, with an orthodox definition and a unique way of using, whereas the plural "autonomies", refers to processes shaped by different historical, cultural, social, political and economic conditions (Gasparello 2010).

For sure, the EZLN "way" is still the most emblematic and the most complex experience of autonomy. It is based (since 2003) on a three-levels system of government that coordinates an integral process of autonomy involving education, health, communication, production and commerce (Gasparello 2010). The three levels of government are community authorities, Autonomous Municipal Councils and *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*, which respectively correspond to the territorial entities of community, MAREZ - Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities and *caracol* (the coordination site for the MAREZs of a same region) (Melenotte 2015; Hernández Navarro 2010). The regions (and therefore the *caracoles*) are five and include overall 29 autonomous municipalities, standing on the same territory of official municipalities (*idem*). This

autonomous project saw the light as early as on December 19, 1994, with the unilateral proclamation by EZLN of 32 municipalities through a military take-over (Mattiace 1997: 45). Despite the unceasing military and paramilitary repression they have been suffering since then and still suffer, Zapatista indigenous peoples were able to resist and make their dream of autonomy flourishing (Gasparello 2010).

But Zapatista autonomies are of course not the only nor the first ones. Important antecedents to autonomy demands of the 1980s and 1990s, may be found in the experiences of peasant organizations that attempted to increase their political and economic autonomy from the government (Mattiace 1997: 47). In 1975, for example, second tier organizations such as *ejido* unions (*uniones de ejidos*) were created to promote two or more local producer groups (*ejidos*, indigenous agrarian communities, cooperatives) to join together: we define them "second tier organizations" because they acted as an "organization of organizations", not an organization of individuals (in which case they would have been of first tier) (*idem*). The creation of the Union of Unions (Unión de Uniones) dates from that period too and it consisted in a third level organization, as it joined together two or more second level organizations: in other terms, it was a union (third level) of unions (second level) of organizations (first level) (*idem*).

When president José Lopez Portillo took office in 1976, the state discourse shifted the focus from land reform (as it had been since Cardenas' administration) to the productive process. Peasant organizations of the different levels sensed this change and reacted by raising claims for peasant autonomy (Gilly 1999). More specifically, their demands were for autonomy in the productive process, a concept implying the smallest possible intervention of the state (a "monolithic" state, corporatist and highly centralized), what had to start by transferring a relevant set of state functions directly to productive organizations. Autonomy claim among peasant organizations continued during all the 1980s, the 1990s and so far, they haven't ceased.

More recently, since 1995 in the mountains of the state of Guerrero a system of community security and justice is operating, with the participation of several communities from the region (see Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero 2010). These experiences count on both community polices and community tribunals, which work

according to the indigenous forms of conflict resolution, integrated with some elements of the positive right. But if the state positive and official penal and penitentiary systems act mainly in terms of punishment and penalty, the communitarian system complies with the principles of re-education and re-integration in the community life (CRAC 2010). Such a system is still alive and functioning, and it is surviving the systematic violence that turned Guerrero into a state among those most directly affected by the ongoing and deadly civil war called the drug war (see chapter 2). Also notable are the autonomous municipalities composed of the Yaqui and the Triqui people in the state of Oaxaca (see Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero 2010). Or by the Purupecha people in the municipality of Chéran, in the state of Michoacán (*ibi.*). And for sure, many more are underway in many parts of Mexico, with different forms, fields of action, dimensions and outcomes. But they still not appear in the scientific literature, as it is the case of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo.

Finally, one last observation before entering into the ethnography of Luz y Fuerza. The rich variety of past and present autonomous experiences, projects or simply claims we just saw, all have an essential element in common. They all sought autonomy and never and under no circumstances, independency. None of them wanted to be independent by Mexican state, in the sense of creating an entity apart and outside of it or building another state. They all aimed and aim to build a new relationship between the state and the collective subjects composing the national society. But always as Mexicans citizens belonging to the Mexican nation.

Some analysts observed that especially among the peasant organizations that first bore autonomist claims, the choice of autonomy instead of independence was rather more strategical than ideological or philosophical. Claiming independence would have entailed a direct confrontation with the state with probably a very bloody reaction from this latter (Hernández Navarro 2010). Moreover, for the same agricultural production and commercialization in Mexico, peasants could not completely cut off the channels with the state and its corporations (*ibid.*). But especially in the present, the orientation towards autonomy instead of independence, is not only strategic, but more likely related to a discourse of identity, which is summarized in exemplary ways by the famous EZLN and CNI lemma «*nunca más un México sin nosotros*»: literally, never again a Mexico without us. Where "us" means the indigenous people, first and foremost, including the

women, the peasant and the poor who are all the excluded from Mexican society. I believe this is far more than the result of the indigenist brainwashing that characterized post-revolutionary Mexico. Rather, it should be considered as the fruit of a long and deep process of critical thought and assumption of Mexican nation, to which indigenous people feel to belong as full citizens.

PART III

ETHNOGRAPHY

Chapter 6. Organización de la Resistencia Civil "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo"

6.1 Introduction and Genesis

The *Organización de la Resistencia Civil "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo"* (Civil Resistance Organization "People's Light and Strength") - or simply named by its activists "*La Resistencia*" or "*Luz y Fuerza*" - is a civil resistance movement based in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. It is represented in nearly 70 of the 122 municipalities of Chiapas, and spans across 14 geographic regions. It has some 9 thousand members formally enrolled within its ranks, but the potential number of militants could be estimated at 30 to 50 thousand people. That is because it is usually only the head of a household who is formally registered in the Movement, as a representative of one electric utility under which entire families (often extended ones) live. We have to speak in terms of electricity users, because Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo is an organization of people refusing to pay for electricity and they directly and autonomously access the grid by eluding paying for fees from the electric utility. They also refuse to pay any kind of tax or duty

to the government as long as the government will not honour the San Andrés Peace Accords signed in 1996 with the EZLN. Finally, the movement includes in its mission human and civil rights advocacy, community self-defence, environment and natural resources protection, access to primary health care and education. We are going start from the beginning and therefore, from electricity.

Electricity is the first and the core reason for this movements to exist. In the beginning of the 1990s, many rural communities of Chiapas started to be unable to afford the growing costs of electricity. That was the result of a never ending economic crisis affecting Mexican society, since the debt crisis of the 1980s opened the Country to liberal reforms (see Chapter 1) and led to the break from redistribution programs for development (Nash 2001). The crisis would have become more marked in the 1990s, beginning with the regimes of Salinas, then Zedillo, and later sealed by NAFTA enforcement (*idem*).

«It was at the end of the 1980s - beginning of the 1990s when many communities could not pay for electricity anymore. They started pleading for a tarifa justa [fair fee] or special fee of 5 pesos, while at that time were reported bills up to 1.000 pesos! The government to some measure met their demands. It launched social benefits programs such as "Tarifa Amiga" ["Friendly Fee"] or "Chiapas Solidario" ["Sympathetic Chiapas"]. But they were only aimed to distract the people, to create a diversion. In such way people forgot the demand for fair fee. And when a new government came, everything returned as before and electricity rates rose again» (Interview, 24.8.2017),

told me Camilo recalling the genesis of the *Resistencia*. Camilo is a nearly 45 year old man from the *Ch'ol* community⁵⁴ in the municipality of Palenque. He was a former *zapatista* militiaman during the 1994 armed uprising and was among the very first

⁵⁴ Here and anywhere else in this ethnography, the word "community" is used with the reference to the mere territorial and (usually) administrative entity where a number of citizens live. It is the literal translation of the Spanish "*comunidad*" with which research interlocutors refers to the place where they live, usually in rural areas, but also in towns. No references to any "imagined community" (see Anderson 1983) is intended. No reference to any other supposedly "common" element among the inhabitants (e.g., "religion", "ethnicity", or other) is meant neither. When, as in this case, the word is accompanied by the adjective for a specific indigenous language spoken (namely, *Ch'ol*) – according to the linguistic criteria observed in Mexican censuses - is because the majority or totality of the inhabitants in the entity do speak it.

members of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. The few figures available on the matter, show that in 1986, electricity cost started climbing (Escobar Delgadillo and Jiménez Rivera 2009). Later, the New Economic plan introduced by president Zedillo soon after his assignment at the end of 1994, called for 20% increase in electricity rates and propane gas. There was a 35% increase in gasoline prices (Nash 2001: 85). Since 1993 and especially from 1995 to 1997, the government provided growing subventions to support the different sectors of electricity users. But as early as in 1998, subventions decreased again (Escobar Delgadillo and Jiménez Rivera 2009). What is completely coherent with Camilo's narration. However:

« The first units that started not to pay electricity in 1991-1992 were called "Frentes de resistencia civil" [Civil resistance fronts]. But as the word itself tells, they only face [hacer frente] the Comisión Federal⁵⁵, they were not organized and they just performed a passive opposition. Luz y Fuerza had nothing to do with them, as they were to be engulfed by political parties soon.» (Field notes, 1.9.2017)⁵⁶,

clarifies Ernesto, the founder of Luz y Fuerza.

Ernesto is *mestizo* man of more than 70 years from southern Chiapas, a father of six and a grandfather of nine. He is universally recognized as the person who "invented", structured and organized the movement. He received academic education (in sociology and law) and has a long history *en la lucha* (in the struggle). Now he is retired from any militancy. He lives with his wife in a small house located on a plot of land on the outskirts of the town of Ocosingo, where they live a bucolic and modest lifestyle. They cultivate the land and rear some animals for their own subsistence. He currently does

⁵⁵ CFE - *Comisión Federal de Electricidad* (Federal Electricity Commission): state-owned electric utility of Mexico, usually referred to by Luz y Fuerza people, simply as "the Federal Commission" (*la Comisión Federal*), or "the Commission" (*la Comisión*).

⁵⁶ Here and in any other case where the mention "Field notes" is provided, the content of the quotation refers to dialogues I transcribed in my notebooks as soon as possible after they took place, often basing on some notes I usually wrote down during the conversation. Therefore – despite my outmost efforts for accuracy - these quotations are clearly not a verbatim transcription of research interlocutors' words. Most of these dialogues were with the founder of Luz y Fuerza, Ernesto. These dialogues were not audio-recorded because most of them resulted from contingent and informal circumstances (like having a walk or sitting in a waiting hall), or because of the situations into which they occurred (often during uncomfortable travels by public mini-bus), or because the high sensitivity of the contents made me feeling unsuitable the recording (in order not to inhibit the interlocutor, but also for the sake of security).

not play any role in the Organization he created. As a man of wisdom, he is only called for advice in very special cases. Otherwise, the Organization is independent from him.

Long before the *levantamiento* of 1994, back in the 1980s, he had been actively involved with the EZLN, although if never being formally enrolled in it. He used to work for the catholic dioceses of San Cristobal de las Casas, under the bishop Samuel Ruiz García. At that time, he provided political training with a special focus on social reality analysis for the majority of the *zapatista* commanders. At the same time, he worked in the communities all over Chiapas, raising awareness and organizing them to eventually support EZLN, or other social organizations of the time.

After the armed uprising, he was involved in several phases and contexts of the peace process that would lead to the San Andrés Accords, as one of the operating arms of *Tatik*⁵⁷ Samuel. Until the beginning of the 2000s, he also intensively operated abroad, as a sort of ambassador for the EZLN and the resistance movements in general. He was giving conferences in Europe and USA, and linking solidarity groups popping up in those countries, with the communities struggling in Chiapas. However, he never stopped to work "from below", with "the base" in the villages across Chiapas. He continued the endeavour of conscientization, as an applied part of the Liberation Theology which characterized don Samuel's era. It is in this framework that he received the "demands" for a new movement:

««[...] Also after 1994, I continued to work in the communities and made more and more people to join EZLN. But then in many communities, around the beginnings of the 2000s, people started to say to me: «Look, we want to resist, we want to struggle, we want to rebel too, but the EZLN is just not for us! It has many aspects that we are not comfortable with, that we don't agree with. Why don't you create something else? Another movement, capable of bringing us together and representing us? » That's how I started to build la Resistencia.»

«And why electricity?» - I asked -

⁵⁷ It is the *tzotzil* word for "father", affectionately attributed to the bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas by his indigenous devotees.

«Because that was the most urgent issue people were experiencing! It was the main need they had.» (field notes, 12-17.10.2016)

Electricity costs kept growing incessantly. According to some estimates produced by *Reporte Índigo* - the first on-line newspaper in Mexico - between 1999 and 2012 the national average price per kilowatt/hour (kWh) had an increase of 260%, while the National Consumer Price Index (INPC) grew 82%⁵⁸. In the same period, the fee for medium enterprises went from 52.28 cents of Mexican Pesos per kWh to 164.66 cents⁵⁹. For families, the fee incremented 1.7 times the inflation rate⁶⁰. Compared to foreign countries, in 2013 electricity in Mexico was 86% more expensive than in the USA and 44% more expensive than the average cost among the OECD countries (while in 2003 it was just 10% higher)⁶¹.

In a rare and short-documentary on the Luz y Fuerza dating from 2011 (Jarrin and Rovira 2011) which is still available on YouTube, some members declared in this regard:

« I received electricity bills of 700 pesos, while I usually paid 20, 30 or 50 pesos. Little by little, it started to grow [the electricity bill] up to 700 pesos, or even 1,000 pesos! I don't know what the ruler thought in this regard. Maybe that we are lawyers, or engineers... But we are just campesinos⁶², growers, without a salary, living on the products of agriculture, on the few that every year we are able to harvest. Not every month but every year, because it is once per year that we harvest a little of corn... »

«I was receiving for my household, this humble house just in front, bills of 2,800 pesos. Then they reached up to 3,000 pesos and 4,000 pesos too. The

⁵⁸ Reporte Índigo. 2015. "Luz en México, la más cara de mundo". El Zocalo (on-line). http://www.zocalo.com.mx/new_site/articulo/luz-en-mexico-la-mas-cara-de-mexico-1407222956 - accessed 16.5.2018

⁵⁹ *Idem*

⁶⁰ *Idem*

⁶¹ *Idem*

⁶² "*Campesino*" is the Spanish word for "peasant".

same happened to all the citizens that are now in resistance, with bills of 2,000, 800, 1,000 pesos...»

«Here, we pay 20 or 30 pesos at most. It is paradoxical and absurd to think that we just pay 20-30 pesos every two months for as much as we have, for example, a computer, a printer, a coffee machine, air-conditioner, a television and 100 watt lightbulbs, which are energy-intensive lightbulbs. By contrast, the neighbours at the corner only have for example, a television and two 60 watt lightbulbs, no fridge and no washing machine, yet they pay 350 pesos every two months!»

High and increasing electricity fees clashing with the poverty of the people. The lack of clear criteria to determine the amounts of the bills. In addition to a poor maintenance on the grid, with negative impacts on the quality and continuity of energy supply. This is the scene described by the interviewees. Which is made even more unacceptable by the fact that in the 1990s, Chiapas was providing - through its huge water resources - 52% of the whole national production of electricity, supplying the northern cities and a part of Central America too (Nash 2001: 102).

In the villages across Chiapas, the number of users who decided to stop paying for electricity quickly grew. They removed the meter from their houses, and directly and autonomously connected their houses to the grid. However, operating alone, unorganized and uncoordinated, they remained exposed to the reaction of the state-owned electricity company (in particular, the cut-off from the grid) and to the legal consequences their "disobedience" could lead to.

Sitting in a cafe on a usually hot afternoon in the town of Palenque, Ernesto explains, as he reminds the experiences and the principles that inspired him while assembling the movement.

«I know quite well the case of South Africa⁶³. In order to avoid here what happened there, I studied and analysed it and kept it in mind during my

⁶³ The case of the progressive electrification of post-apartheid South Africa was notably analysed by anthropologist Antina von Schnitzler (2013). The author highlighted the paradoxical situation generated by, on a side, the post-apartheid government policy of promoting the universal access to electricity

work in la Resistencia,. In South-Africa many started to refuse paying electricity, but they never got structured in any form of organization, they never organized themselves. Then the authorities, or others on their behalf, started killing one by one the people that were more visible, those that took the initiative, the sort of leaders they had even if they were not really leaders. In such way the government bloodily suffocated their form of resistance.» (Field notes, 1.9.2017)

Emiliano - a 25 years old passionate and charismatic militant from San Cristobal de las Casas - provides a concrete example on the need of being organized and not resist alone:

«If I am alone by myself, the Commission can ruin me, but if we are already 4 or 5 persons, then the Commission ponders before doing anything. And then, if 20 persons from the Commission come, then I just bring over 40 compañeros⁶⁴! It's all about that: it's all about mutually defend ourselves.» (Interview, 4.8.2017),

In 2004, as a result of Ernesto's action and coordination, and a capillary networking among individuals and communities in resistance started as early as in 2001, the *Movimiento de Resistencia "La Voz de Nuestro Corazón"* (Resistance Movement "The Voice of Our Heart ") saw the light. The mission of this movement was exactly to coordinate the people and a handful of entire villages that were resisting towards the CFE. But more importantly, the vision was to go beyond a simple opposition (the simple "*pars destruens*") to taking on an active and creative task (the "*pars costruens*"). This meant to work for the conscientization and the empowerment of individuals and communities. To propose alternative forms of economic development, to produce discourses to oppose the hegemony of neoliberal powers, to devise and realize forms of autonomy in every possible field.

especially for the poor living in townships and homelands. And on the other, by the same government neoliberal orientation which prevented a more substantial redistributive agenda. As a result, many poor Africans are now plugged to the grid but they can't afford the relatively expensive costs to use electricity.

⁶⁴ *Compañero*, or abbreviate, *compa*: it means companion, fellow. It is a very common word in Mexican Spanish. It is the common epithet between people belonging to a same organization, movement or association that usually have a political and/or social vocation. More generally, it defines people sharing a same political vision and/or militancy, usually left wing. But it is also used without any political reference in ordinary spoken language.

In 2007, the young organization experienced a split, due to major internal disagreements with the categorical refusal of governmental subventions and agreements with political parties, so far implemented. As a consequence, during an assembly that took place in the city of Comitán de Domínguez, the share of militants and representatives of villages that wanted the movement to stay fully independent of government money and political parties, decided to establish a new organization under the current name of *Organización de la Resistencia Civil "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo"*. At the moment of its founding, the new organization counted members from 13 different communities from the municipalities of Comitán and Las Margaritas. In the following years, those activists who remained in the Voz de Nuestro Corazón were progressively re-absorbed in Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo and the original organization almost disappeared.

Since its establishment, Luz y Fuerza subscribed to the 6th (and last, so far) Declaration of the Selva Lacandona EZLN proclaimed in June 2005 and by which it called for:

«[...] alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements which define themselves, in theory and practice, as being of the left, in accordance with the following conditions:

Not to make agreements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organize outrage. Not to raise movements which are later negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but to always take into account the opinions of those participating. Not to seek gifts, positions, advantages, public positions, from the Power or those who aspire to it, but to go beyond the election calendar. Not to try to resolve from above the problems of our Nation, but to build FROM BELOW AND FOR BELOW an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative on the left for Mexico.» (EZLN 2005) [capital in original]

A subscription that already says much on the orientations and the vision of the recently born movement.

Unlike other social organizations acting on the theme of electricity - in Chiapas and elsewhere in Mexico - who demanded fair or lower fees, Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo made it clear from the very beginning that it was not going to pay any fee at all. It subordinated this refusal to the accomplishment of the San Andrés Accords by the Mexican Government, that were essentially betrayed by the 2001 Indigenous Law - as mentioned in chapter 4. That represents a quite definitive argument of legitimation for their "disobedience". On the one hand, the discrepancies between the Accords and the Indigenous Law are self-evident and hardly arguable. On the other hand, after 17 years since the promulgation of the Indigenous Law, the government has never reconsidered its positions in this regard, and it is very unlikely that it would ever do so.

In the course of time, around 2010 - 2011, the *Resistencia* aimed higher and formally declared that in addition to electricity, its members were stopping to pay any kind of tax or duty to the State at any level (local, state and federal) until the accomplishment of San Andrés Accords. Camilo illustrates the reasons and the process that led to this step "further":

«It was already with the 1994 armed uprising that people said ZERO taxes. Taxes on electricity, property taxes, etc. The Zapatistas started first, but this had an influence on all citizens, as it usually happened with everything Zapatistas had created. It played an influence also on those sectors of society who were not really supporters of the Zapatistas. [...]. At the beginning, we started by not paying for electricity. However, along the path appeared high vehicle taxes, high property taxes; and high sale taxes. People started having trouble with the payments, because the taxes were excessive! As a result, now many of us are not paying taxes, in our organization.» (Interview, 24.8.2017)

Finally, the remaining fields of activity in which the *Resistencia* is committed are the consequence of what was expressed in article 1 of its internal rules:

«We call to struggle in an independent way from the government and from political parties, because our lucha⁶⁵ is not electoral and we are not seeking

⁶⁵ Literally, the word "lucha" is the Spanish for "struggle" or "fight". But it usually implemented with a political connotation and normally refers to social and/or political struggle.

to take power. Our main goal is struggling to solve our problems, being proactive and constructive for a new life project, and the benefit of our poor people in Chiapas and Mexico. We will always pursue the liberation of our people by the oppression under which the federal government, Chiapas government and the whole neoliberal economic model keep them. In this sense, we declare ourselves anti-capitalist.»⁶⁶. (Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo 2014: 1).

More specifically, if the goal is to seek solutions to people's daily problems, electricity is just one of the problems. And in effect, article 3 details:

*«Our struggle is against high electricity fees, as well as for the defence of the earth, for the territory, for the right to water and to all natural resources. And to defend ourselves from the big transnational and national companies and from the Mexican malgobierno⁶⁷. We also struggle to fight alcoholism, drug addiction, criminality and everything affecting our society. Our proposal is to struggle for a NEW POLITICAL, CONSTITUTION, A CONSTITUTIONAL PROGRAM AND A NATIONAL PLAN OF STRUGGLE, TAKING US TO BUILD A NEW MEXICO, where the government leads by obeying.»⁶⁸ [capital in original] (*ibidem*).*

We'll see these aspects more in detail at paragraph 6.3.

6.2 Structure, operating mode and rules

According to the internal rules, the *Resistencia* is articulated in three organizational levels: community, region and state. Every community (or *rancho*, *barrio* or *colonia*⁶⁹) should appoint an executive board consisting of a president, a secretary and a treasurer. Additionally, a substitute for each of them should be named too. The boards are democratically elected by the members of the community enrolled in Luz y Fuerza.

⁶⁶ Translation from Spanish is mine.

⁶⁷ "Malgobierno" means misrule, bad government. It is a typical and very recurring word in social and political organizations' lexicon from Mexico.

⁶⁸ Translation from Spanish is mine

⁶⁹ Respectively: ranch, neighbourhood/quarter and settlement.

They remain in office during one year, after which a new board is appointed. Their duties are to organize and coordinate all the activities and task related to the *Resistencia*. In particular, they are charged together with the community to find solutions on any issue the community may experience about electricity, water, security, earth, territory, and similar. The community assemblies should take place every month or every two months, according to the need. Extraordinary and/or urgent assemblies can have place whenever required.

The community boards participate in the regional assembly, which includes all the boards of a same region. Every year, the regional assembly appoints among its participants an executive board called Regional Committee of Resistance (CRR). Like the community board, it consists of a president, a secretary and a treasurer, plus three substitutes. They have the same duties of the community boards, but at a regional level. This means that they should coordinate the work of all the communities of the region and whenever required, mobilise and manage the entire region to solve specific issues or carry out specific actions.

Adjacent regions may have coordination assemblies between the boards of two, three or more regions, to harmonise their actions and cooperate on common issues they face. In May 2018, the regions were 14 and namely: *Altos, Fronteriza, Tojolabal, Selva Ríos, Marques, Norte, Ámbar, Olvidados, Grijalva, Corazón de la Tierra, Sierra, Volcanes del Tacaná, Zapaluta* and *Yok*. Due to its wide dimensions and the important number of militants, the *Norte* (North) region is split into three sub-regions. These are: *Valle Tulija, Bascan* and *Vista Hermosa*. Regions have been defined with no reference to the socioeconomic regions into which the government has divided Chiapas for administrative purposes. Additionally, the regions do not exactly coincide with the geographic areas their name usually refers to, in order to mix up territorial references for the authorities of the State – activists say -.

The regional boards participate in a state assembly that includes the boards of all regions. The state assembly has a regularity of every two months, but it can be called at any time, in case of need. The State Coordination of Resistance is the board of the state assembly. Again, it counts a president, a secretary and a treasurer plus three substitutes, in office for one year. The role of the state board is not really to coordinate all the

regions, but rather to coordinate the state assembly. However, during my fieldwork I could observe that there is not really a fixed board at the state level anymore. It looked more like the state assembly is each time moderated by the board of the region that hosts the assembly. This latter takes place every time in a different region of the movement. I could therefore believe that the entire state assembly plays an executive role, without a board specifically dedicated to that purpose. The state assembly also acts as a committee of wise men to settle conflicts that eventually arise within the Organization.

Attendance to the assemblies is compulsory at all levels. All members must participate in the assembly of their community. People missing a community assembly are charged a fine of 50 pesos paid at the community board. Community boards missing at a regional assembly pay a fee of 100 pesos. Regional boards not attending a state assembly pay a sanction of 200 pesos. Individuals, communities or regions not complying with the «*works, assignments or obligations*» (Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo 2014: 4) decided at the higher levels, have to pay a sanction of 500 pesos. Individuals not participating in demonstrations, marches or actions of the Organization are charged a fee of 200 pesos.

A bidirectional communication takes place between the community, regional and state level. Representatives are the key-actors of the process, as they are asked to bring to the regional and state level the needs, requests, issues and the will of the people from "the bottom" of the communities and the territories in general. Conversely, they must transmit to the bottom all the information, resolutions and documents coming from the state and regional level. It is worthy to mention that representatives are just spokespersons and facilitators between the different organizational levels. They are not at all leaders and must not act as leaders or unique representatives or managers at any time and under any condition as the internal rules clearly mandate. Nobody can speak on behalf of the Organization or stipulate agreements if not previously and specifically authorized by the state assembly. The authority is collective. It resides in the community of all members and it is expressed through the different levels of assemblies. When we met for the first time, in April 2014, and how he would reaffirm in several occasions even since, Ernesto described this aspect of the organization he founded in these words:

«We don't have leaders and we don't want leaders because we know very well how the government works. They buy leaders of social movements by sending them money, prostitutes, alcohol or drugs, or offering them positions of power. Otherwise, they put them in jail, kidnap them, or simply, they kill them. That's what has always happened with social movements in Mexico, and this is how the government destroyed most of the movements in the past. That's why the Resistencia has no leaders.» (Field notes, 23.4.2014)

And in effect, the reactions of authorities towards social movements is likely to follow, in a variety of places and circumstances, a kind of standard pattern between repression and co-optation (Boni 2012: 41; Auyero 2006).

Self-financing is another key feature of the Organization. The expenses for its operations are paid exclusively and equally by all members. Contributions are required whenever the community, the region or the state coordination have to sustain or have sustained expenses. When the members of the community board have to participate in the regional assemblies, the travel costs are shared and paid by the community. When the regional board has to participate in the state assembly, the travel costs are shared and paid by all the communities of the region. In case of actions such as marches, sit-ins, visits to communities or similarly, the expenses (for example, of gasoline for the trucks to carry the militants to the site of the action) are subdivided in the same way, among the communities. Whenever an intervention on the grid is required (for example, the change of a burned transformer) the expenses are subdivided among the members of the concerned neighbouring community. Communities usually keep a small fund "of resistance" to deal with expenses related to the electric infrastructure. Some regions hold a similar fund too. These funds are mainly monetary, but in several cases they also include electric materials and equipment. Concretely, how much does a member of Luz y Fuerza pay to finance the Organization? All the militants I asked about this, agreed in the amounts of 1-2 pesos per month (equivalent to 0,04 - 0,09 euros) and under special circumstances with peaks of 20 pesos per month at the most. Similarly, at a state assembly I visited in February 2017, the cooperation requested of every single militant for the activities the state coordination carried out during the previous four months,

(meeting with authorities, delivery of declarations to authorities, presentation of claims to tribunals, etc.) was set at 1 peso.

Self-financing is the only way to ensure the complete independence of the Organization from the government and any other actor. The very reasonable economic contribution required to the members, makes the Organization accessible to anyone, even the poorest. Responding to one of my questions on the funding of the *Resistencia*, Ernesto points out that:

«The fact that people pay out of their own pocket gives them the feeling that the Organization belongs to them, that it is something they are responsible for. Apart from the work they put in the Organization, they finance it with their money, which is not much, but it is still something. For this reason, they would hardly accept to get the Organization stolen by a leader, or by the government - because people are the rightful owners of the Organization!» (Field notes, 12.10.2016)

Anyone can be a de facto member of Luz y Fuerza. The Organization is declaredly inclusive and does not discriminate on the basis of religion, gender or other elements. People receiving or willing to receive money from the government under social assistance programs are accepted too. This is done with the hope that the conscientization they will reach in the ranks of the Organization, will progressively led them to refuse the government money and be completely independent. Likewise, people involved in political parties are accepted. However, they must keep their affiliations out of the Organization, vice versa. People experiencing alcohol or drug abuse are welcomed in the Organization which offers support and eventually rehabilitate them. I knew at least two persons aged around 40 and 50 respectively that had a serious problem of alcohol abuse before joining the *Resistencia*. After joining, they totally abandoned alcohol and they eventually turned into two of the most committed and trustworthy representatives. Owners of commercial activities selling alcohol are provisionally accepted in the Organization, but they are required to make their activities alcohol-free in a given period of time (usually 6 months). During my fieldwork, I had information about various storekeepers that successfully converted their shops. Finally, only persons

without problems of alcohol or drug abuse and upright in general, can be appointed as representatives at any level.

People or communities linked to criminal activities of any kind are not accepted at all. For this reason, whenever a person or especially a community (or *rancho*, *barrio* or *colonia*) wishes to join the Organization, a preliminary inquiry is made in order to verify that this condition is satisfied. Nevertheless, a constant surveillance is required, particularly on representatives, in order to detect possible suspicious behaviours among the militants. Persons or communities found to be involved in illicit activities are immediately expelled. The same happens to spies, i.e. persons found to be transmitting information on the Organization to the government, and to those guilty of stealing money from the Organization or committing any act against it.

Emiliano, despite his young age has already served for two years as president of the board of his community and at the same time of his region. He offered a concrete example about the vigilance the boards are asked to continuously perform on potential ill-intentioned persons among the militants, and/or misuses of the membership:

«When I was mesa⁷⁰, I had the case of two compañeros doing not really good things. They get and they change cars overnight.. I started to have a bad feeling in particular about one of them who is now not a compañero anymore. I saw a cabrón⁷¹ hooded and carrying a machine gun and a gun belt as profile picture. [...] That is why I tell you that when you see strange things you have to clean up. This compa, I progressively isolated him. I spoke about him with a few very trust worthy compañeros, because you cannot talk with everybody about these topics: what if he finds it out and he is a narco⁷²? He could come to my house and murder me! I told them: «Look at the picture he has on WhatsApp!». I was sure it was his house in the background of the picture, because I went myself to put the seal there and I remembered it perfectly. «And where does all the money for his cars come

⁷⁰ "Mesa" is the Spanish word for "board" (and also "table"). In this case Emiliano meant "board member".

⁷¹ Very common Mexican colloquial expression, with vulgar sense in some uses. In this case, it refers to a godawful person.

⁷² Colloquial short form for "*narcotraficante*", literally "drug trafficker", which may mean drug trafficker, drug dealer or drug baron, and by extension, criminal in general.

from? » I told the compas. «Let's do something to set him aside.» Moreover, he liked to participate at every assembly, even if had no assignments. And also this aspect started to look strange to me. It was just a simple compa, not representing any community, but he used to come anyway. Then we started telling him: «You do not have any assignments; only representatives can take part at the assemblies. You can get all the information discussed in the assemblies from your representative.». Hence, we did, little by little, until when he could no longer access the assemblies and he finally left the organization, by his own decision.» (Interview, 4.8.2017)

Emiliano mentioned the act of sealing the house of the "bad" fellow, at a point. The rules set that every member should have a seal of the Organization painted at the façade of his house (i.e. the household where the meter has been removed and directly connected to the grid). The seal mentions: «*Organization of the Civil Resistance Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo - Adherent of the 6th Declaration of the Selva Lacandona - Region "x"*» (where "x" is for the name of the region of *Luz y Fuerza* where the household is located). I took the pictures that follow during the operations of sealing in the community of Taniperla (Municipality of Ocosingo), in March 2017:



Photo 1. Taniperla.

Three compañeros in the act of sealing the house of a new activist.



Photo 2. Taniperla.

The just painted seal of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. To note the he electricity meter missing just above the seal.

This practice started in 2012. The original purpose was to legitimate and increase the "bargaining power" of the Organization, during some undergoing negotiations with the CFE at the time. The electric utility company refused to hold to be true to the overall number of members Luz y Fuerza's representatives claimed to represent. In response, the Organization decided to clearly and permanent mark the houses of every single member, in order to visually impact the CFE counterparts and prove to them the actual size of the Organization. The expedient resulted successful at the time of the negotiations, as we will further detail. Later, the mark keeps offering a sort of protection, first of all from the interventions of the CFE workers, always in search of "abusive" users to cut off from the grid. But also and more generally, it is a warning to any authority and to any ill-intention that the family living in that home is organized, it is not alone, it is part of something "bigger and wider". Each region has an own stencil, which is guarded and managed by the regional board. In the event that a *compañero* leave the Organization (for his spontaneous choice or because expelled) the seal is

removed under the responsibility of the community or regional board, to prevent anybody to illegitimately enjoy the benefits it offers.

In like manner, the Organization provides the members an identification document ("*credencial*"), which states:

«The present document identifies the person "X" as a member of this Organization. Under the order of the organized communities of our region, we will not pay electricity and any tax, until the federal government has complied with the San Andrés Accords signed by the EZLN and the federal government. Therefore, workers of the Federal Commission of Electricity, militarys and civilians must not exercise repression or offences against the above-mentioned person: otherwise, it will be our Organization to react at any extent for the person and they will have to take the consequences. »

This picture shows a *credencial* from Olvidados region, for the year 2017:



Photo 3. Venustiano Carranza.
An ID card of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo.

I took it on January 2017, at the assembly of the region, event during which the ID documents for the new year were distributed to the community representatives, that in turn will have them delivered to their represented. The documents have a validity of only one year to facilitate the management and the control on this "civil registry" task, by the board of each region, which is responsible for it. Moreover, while driving a vehicle, the document exempts – *de facto*, by decision of the Organization - the driver from the obligation to hold a driving licence (which in Mexico is a mere administrative act, not requiring any theoretical or practical training and not even an examination) and from the payment of all taxes related to the vehicle (under the condition that the vehicle is in order, in particular not stolen, and not used for illicit purposes). All the members owning a vehicle may request for a sticker of the Organization to place on the sides of it. Stickers bore the name and the logo of the Organization and the region of origin. They have a similar function to the seal in the house. The following is a sticker from the *Altos* region, that I photographed in November 2016, during a march held by the Organization in San Cristobal de las Casas:



Photo 4. San Cristobal de las Casas.
A car sticker of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo.

The stickers warn that the owner and/or the driver of the car belongs to Luz y Fuerza and this should therefore discourage police officers in particular, from demanding bribes as it often occurs, or to commit abuses in general. In some regions, they inform that the car itself belongs to the Organization, as a collective car serving the needs of the Organization and operating under the responsibility and the coordination of the regional board. These cars are usually seized from CFE workers caught transgressing the agreements between the Organization and the CFE. This is usually, those trying to cut electricity from houses in resistance or even entire communities.

6.3 Frameworks and Fields of Action

6.3.1 Electricity

In the previous pages, we have alluded to some negotiations that took place between the Organization and the CFE and some agreements supposedly existing between them. Between 2012 and 2013, massive protests occurred in 16 states across the Mexican federation⁷³. They were coordinated by the National Network of Civil Resistance Against High Electricity Fees (*Red Nacional de Resistencia Civil contra las Altas Tarifas de Energía Eléctrica*, that it eventually changed the name for the shorter National Network of Civil Resistance), the National Assembly of Electricity Users (*Asamblea Nacional de Usuarios de la Energía Eléctrica*) and the Mexican Electricity Workers' Union (*SME - Sindicato Mexicano Electricistas*). Luz y Fuerza was actively involved in the demonstrations, as a member of the National Network of Civil Resistance.

Protests were provoked by the Energy Reform the Peña Nieto administration was introducing exactly in this period. Organizations stood against further application of neoliberal policies to the energy sector that entailed the privatization of energy production at the benefit of foreign companies and the imposition of mega-projects,

⁷³ Muños Ríos, P. 2013. "Hoy, protestas en todo el país contra altas tarifas de luz y megaproyectos". La Jornada. February, 6. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/02/06/politica/017n2pol> - accessed 20.5.2018

Muños, P. and F. Martínez. 2013. "Tarifas justas de luz y fin de la presión, exigen miles en marcha". La Jornada. February 8. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/02/08/politica/020n1pol> - accessed 20.5.2018

Pozol Colectivo. 2013. "Comunicado de la Red Nacional de Resistencia Contra las Altas Tarifas de la Energía Eléctrica". March, 2. - <http://www.pozol.org/?p=7771> - accessed 20.5.2018

offending indigenous peoples' rights and seriously threatening delicate bio-socio-ecosystems (as in Tehuantepec Isthmus).

More specifically, demonstrators demanded:

- an immediate and durable solution to the issue of excessive electricity fees affecting thousands of users all over the country;
- the interruption of criminal trials against users in resistance against electricity fees;
- the interruption of death threats and of the violent repression to the detriment of representatives and members of the organizations involved in the protests;
- a solution for the 44 thousand SME workers remained unemployed overnight with the dissolution on 2009, of the other state-owned electric utility, Luz y Fuerza del Centro, under the initiative of president Calderón (Red Nacional de Resistencia Civil contra las Altas Tarifas de Energía Eléctrica 2012) vigorously opposed by the SME together with large strata of society⁷⁴.

« We had almost paralyzed the Country with the protests... At that point, the government attempted to divide the front of the protest, splitting the negotiating table in two. The government decided to compromise with the southern states such as Campeche, Veracruz, Oaxaca and Chiapas, where organizations had more strength. Personally, I did not agree to accept this offer. Nevertheless, that is how we reached the agreements of 2013, with CFE and the government. The government thought that in this way, the strongest organizations would abandon the protests and thereafter, it could easily repressed the remaining ones. However, once we signed the agreements, we did not leave! On the contrary, we continued struggling

⁷⁴ Luz y Fuerza del Centro was founded in 1903 as a state-owned electric utility in charge of producing and distributing energy in Central Mexico (Mexico City and the states of Mexico, Morelos, Puebla and Hidalgo). At its closure, in 2009, its activities were assumed by the CFE (founded in 1937) which remained the unique electric utility in the country. The dissolution of Luz y Fuerza del Centro still remains, after almost 10 years, much shrouded in mystery. For sure, the operation has to be framed into the second generation of neoliberal reforms realized in Mexico. But it results remarkably hard to find official information and data about the reasons and the procedures that lead to the wind up. As Almazán González (2016) highlighted, most of the key-information on the matter are classified or their existence is simply denied by the government. For an exhaustive reconstruction and a critical analysis of the whole case, also underlining the political dimension of the dissolution (i.e. a way to finish once and for all with resistances and oppositions to neoliberal structural reforms) see Belmont 2012.

together with the other states! Finally the government was obliged to negotiate with them too, even if they finally haven't achieve the same conditions we have.» (Field notes, 17.9.2017)

That's how Ernesto, who was at that time still working for the Resistencia, recalled those events and the process that led to the agreements on which the Organization bases meaningful aspects of its *modus operandi*. The agreements consisted particularly of two resolutions signed at consecutive negotiating tables on June 5, 2012 and on November 12, 2013 respectively where the three main dissident organizations earlier mentioned, the CFE and the government (namely, the *Secretaría de Gobernación*) were present.

With the first resolution, protesters' demands were acknowledged. Authorities recognized the existence and the extent of the social conflict about electricity, The provisional suspension of all power cut-offs was decreed until a satisfactory solution for all parts at the table was found. The second resolution is the one Luz y Fuerza considers as decisive and definitive. It establishes a pact of "reciprocal respect" between CFE workers and representatives on one side, and members of the organizations included in the National Network of Civil Resistance on the other. It is also agreed that dialogue at any level and under any circumstance should rule the relations between the different parts, in order to avoid confrontations and conflicts. For this purpose, the figure of liaison persons (*enlaces*) was established at both sides: in every region, an *enlace* of CFE and an *enlace* of the organizations are still in charge of the communications between the two parts.

However, the content of this second resolution is somewhat ambiguous. Luz y Fuerza people say to respect the agreement inasmuch they do not use any violence in regard of CFE workers. Under their point of view, it is rather CFE breaking the agreements, as it never stopped cutting off the users in resistance and, in many cases, to prosecute them by law. Moreover, CFE continued the substitution of traditional meters with digital remote-controlled ones, powered by a pre-paid card that users have to recharge (just like a cell phone) and when they run-out of credit, electricity automatically goes off. But especially, CFE installed in many areas new generation satellite-controlled devices, capable of cutting off entire communities or areas from the power grid. Furthermore, according to several reports I could get from different regions of Luz y Fuerza, CFE

supposedly overloads the power grid in some points, in order to burn the equipment and devices of communities in resistance.

Therefore, whenever members of Luz y Fuerza surprise CFE workers operating in their communities or within the territories of their communities, they stop them, seize their vehicles and equipment, and they finally expel them. However, they absolutely do not use any form of violence against them. This is because according to the way they interpret the agreements, the CFE is not allowed to enter the territories "controlled" by the Resistance neither to operate cut-offs on the users in resistance. Periodically, the Resistance reiterates this position by means of public statements and missives directly delivered at the CFE, like it happened during the march in San Cristobal de las Casas on November 29, 2016, that I could attend too (see the declaration of the day at Annex n.1).

Probably, CFE gives a different interpretation to the agreements in question. For example, the documents do not mention at any time that CFE was going to accept that people in resistance do not pay electricity. Moreover, it is not known what "reciprocal respect" means to the CFE. It would have been extremely interesting and constructive for this analysis, knowing the point of view of the state company on the matter. However, despite my formal requests, I have never been able to obtain an interview or at least some information from CFE representatives in Chiapas or at the national level.

What already appears clear at this stage is that two opposite visions of electricity are at stake. The organizations represented in the National Network of Civil Resistance (including the local actors on my field) consider electricity as a human right (Red Nacional de Resistencia Civil contra las Altas Tarifas de Energía Eléctrica 2012). As such, it can't be handled as a mere commercial product subjected to the logic of profit. On the other side, CFE is a state-owned company, but open to private capitals participation and a key-tile of the neoliberal energy policies implemented by the Mexican state. Activists demanded and still demand a constitutional reform recognizing electricity as a human right, with all the corollary of legal guarantees and social provisions that would descend from that. However, since 1992, with the beginning of the de-nationalization of electricity production and the reforms of the energy sector that followed, the State went exactly in the opposite direction.

Nevertheless, the agreements with the CFE do not affect at all the position of Luz y Fuerza on not paying electricity until the fulfilment of the San Andrés Accords. But given the irreconcilable opposition with the CFE, how do Luz y Fuerza manage electricity?

First of all, it should be reaffirmed that Luz y Fuerza performs a form of resistance which is civil, as the same name "Organization of the Civil Resistance" unequivocally states. This clearly means that violence is strictly refused as means of struggle. Article 2 of the internal rules recites:

«In seeking solutions to people's problems, our organization prioritizes dialogue. Dialogue with the different levels of government and inside communities too, acting as mediators in case conflicts within the communities or with other organizations. We do dialogue with official authorities, but we do not negotiate with them»⁷⁵ (Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo 2014: 1)

As typical *modus operandi*, the Organization privileges the power of words, seeks to mediate between the different parts, tries to circumvent the obstacles (of any kind) with diplomacy and creative solutions, avoids head-on collisions and prevents conflicts by any means.

Thus, all the tools of civil resistance are deployed to defend and/or obtain access to electricity and for the whole plethora of fields in which the Organization operates (see chapter 5 about theories and practices of civil resistance). Marches, manifestations, sit-ins, road-blocks, distribution of pamphlets, press conferences, public debate forums, etc. But the autonomy that militants almost unanimously recognized to be the fundamental goal of their resistance (as we are going to illustrate) also requires the *pars costruens* we mentioned in earlier pages. When it comes to electricity, autonomy is first of all being built by means of more than 500 trained electricians in the ranks of the Organization.

⁷⁵ Translation from Spanish is mine.

«Today we are here, giving a workshop for electricians of our region. We do train our electricians. As we do not pay electricity, the Commission does not maintain the grid equipment anymore, such as low and medium-voltage overhead wires, transformers, disconnect-switches, etc. [...] In this sense we are seeking autonomy. We want to become independent from the Federal Commission. Instead of following the Commission, it is better to train electricians inside the communities. In this way, whenever an electrical problem arises, the community technician intervenes, independently from the Federal Commission. That is what we do.» (Interview, 24.8.2017),

Camilo illustrates during a training workshop for new electricians of the Resistencia, that I attended in the remote *ejido* of Velasco Suarez, municipality of Salto de Agua, in August 2017.

Camilo is one of the first members of the Organization that had been trained in the middle of the 2000s as an electrician by technicians and engineers of the Mexican Electricity Workers' Union (SME) - historically very supportive towards left-wing/proletarian social causes and movements. Since then, he became one of the most experienced technicians in the Organization as well as the main trainer for all the regions, and beyond. Due to that, he is also invited by the National Network of Civil Resistance to provide trainings in the neighbouring states. The two-day workshop Camilo refers to was the first module of the first training level, for some 15 beginners, from different parts of the northern region. They were introduced to the ABC's of the electrician profession, in both theory (such as the principles of electricity, the components of the power grid, the working principles of the power grid, etc.) and practice (like the fundamental tools in the electrician tool-belts, the preparation of a harness to climb the lamp posts and the mode to use it).

Every community where Luz y Fuerza is represented, selects a person, usually young, to be trained as an electrician. The community pays the expenses for the training, such as travel costs and basic equipment required. The community invests in this young person, that at the end of the consecutive training levels (each one with a theoretical part, a practical part and a final exam to pass), will be a fully trained electrician, capable to carry out from the simplest tasks in a domestic power system, to complex interventions

on transformers or on the medium-voltage overheads wires. He⁷⁶ learns a profession, for free. In exchange, the future electrician will have to serve his community as an electrician for free. In this way, the Organization aims to make every community in resistance equipped with at least one technician. The goal is still not reached, but every region can already count on a significant number of technicians, which makes it easy to supply communities still lacking them.

The following pictures captured two moments of the workshop in Velasco Suarez:



Photo 5. Velasco Suarez.

Theoretical session of new electricians' training.

⁷⁶ Men are usually trained; women never or almost never, as well as their presence in the Organization is extremely limited. We will be back to this aspect at the end of next chapter.



Photo 6. Velasco Suarez.

Practical session of new electricians' training.

Overall, technical capability is clearly one of the pillars of the "electric autonomy" the Organizations seek. Their own technicians, whose skills are periodically updated and upgraded through the support of the SME affiliate ensures the Organization technical autonomy. When it comes to equipment and devices, thanks to the know-how granted by SME, the Organization is undertaking paths of autonomy too, particularly for the self-production of lamp posts and transformers. But this process is still rather embryonic. Therefore, materials are usually acquired at some sympathetic retailers ensuring the Organization special reductions on the market prices. In some cases, they are integrated with those seized from CFE in the circumstances mentioned some pages earlier. Finally, and for the record, it's worth mentioning the existence of a black market of electric equipment (like transformers, cables, posts, etc.), stolen from the CFE, usually by its own workers or subcontractors. But during my fieldwork I couldn't observe or get information, about members of the Organization accessing it.

As second pillar for electric autonomy, we have territory control. As I already reported about the so-called pact of reciprocal respect, Luz y Fuerza doesn't allow CFE to access territories, communities or houses of people belonging to the Organization. Preventing the Commission to exercise its technical, commercial and legal rule on the field enacts the physical dimension of the autonomy Luz y Fuerza pursues. Which is a fundamental dimension not only for electricity, but in general for all the fields of action of the Organization, as we will explain further in chapter 8.

It is self-evident that Luz y Fuerza lacks any control on such a fundamental aspect of electric energy that is production. Yet, the very dimension of network in which electricity concretely exists in our lives, leaves it large *manoeuvre* margins and spaces of autonomous management, on the energy circulating on the grid. Additionally, some key-activists I interviewed also wonder about the production of electricity, at some point. Among the hypothesis, there is the Organization to start producing energy, by means of equipment, facilities and infrastructures that the SME would like to obtain by the government. As a result of the negotiations, the Peña Nieto administration was forced to find a solution to the still unsolved case of Luz y Fuerza del Centro, whose employees remained jobless⁷⁷. It is nothing more than a hypothesis and still highly uncertain. Yet it proves that people are aware of the matter of production and are thinking about it.

Finally, the two different sides of action on electricity (manifestation and intervention) are often very immediately linked. An emblematic example is the march I earlier mentioned and held by the region *Altos* of the Organization, in San Cristobal de las Casas, on November 2016. Some 2 thousand militants marched first to the headquarters of the CFE in town. There, they sit-in for two hours, blocking traffic and access to the headquarters, chanting slogans, distributing pamphlets, writing demands on the walls by spray paints and releasing declarations to the local press. The demonstration culminated in the delivery of a declaration to the offices of CFE, urging the company to respect the 2013 agreements, otherwise the communities in resistance would have detained its workers surprised in their territories (see Annex 1). Afterwards, people marched for approximately 1.5 kilometres to the *colonia "5 de Marzo"* and stopped in front of a little

⁷⁷ Almazán González, J. A. 2016. "La solución al conflicto del SME". La Jornada. January 19. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/01/19/opinion/018a2pol> - accessed 20.5.2018

humble wooden house. Suddenly, 4-5 *compañeros* took out a ladder from the house and placed it against the lamp post just on the other side of the street. A trained technician of the region quickly went up and started to work on the post. In less than 15 minutes, a cable was laid from the lamp post to the wooden house. Finally, a light bulb turned on in the house to the joy of its inhabitants - the house had electricity again. All this happened while the 2 thousand demonstrators blocked one of the two roadways where the action was taking place. But also, under the watch of two motorcycle policemen, deviating the traffic ahead and behind the demonstration. That added a touch of paradox to the whole situation, as a disobedience and "unlawful" act was occurring under the "protection" of police forces.

This action at the address of the settlers of the *colonia "5 de Marzo"* was meant to be a show of force to those not belonging to the Organization who had already cut-off twice the wooden house from the power grid. This had happened because they disagreed with the presence in their neighbourhood of someone not paying electricity, while they all do. As explained to me and to the press by the regional board, in this case as in any other, the Organization wanted to send a message of this kind to the neighbours: «We are much. We are strong. Do not fight against us. Rather join us. Stop pay electricity too. And let's fight together against the system.»

6.3.2 Other Fields of Action

Concerning the remaining fields of action, they are the direct outcome of the what the Organization states at articles 1 and 3 of the internal rules, reported above in this chapter. We are in presence of a self-defined anti-capitalist organization, whose struggle is to solve hardship, problems and threats neoliberal order (under all its forms and with all its actors) inflicts to people. In practice, concrete issues change from region to region and even from community to community. What follows is a short selection of relevant and representative cases I could record during the different phases of my fieldwork.

In the different regions of Chiapas where I have been, one of the most recurrent and furious complaints I heard was about the MOSCAMED programme. All peasants I met

(and I would say that 85% of Luz y Fuerza militants are peasants⁷⁸) refer to it as a truly biblical plague. MOSCAMED is an intergovernmental programme involving Guatemala, Mexico and USA. It was launched at the end of the 1970s and renewed in 2015, with the purpose of fighting the Mediterranean fruit fly, considered one of the worst pests worldwide. It is capable of affecting over 400 fruits and vegetables species across the five continents (Enkerlin and others 2017). The fly reached Guatemala and Mexico in 1976 and 1977, respectively (*idem*). Reasons why the three governments decided to join efforts in order to stop further northward spread of the fly. They aimed to eradicate it from the areas it had invaded in southern Mexico (Chiapas, in particular) and in the longer term, eradicate it from Guatemala and, if possible, from the rest of Central America (*idem*). The main weapon the programme deploys to fight the pest is the sterile insect technique: i.e. sterile male insects of the species are created in the laboratory and released into the wild in overwhelming numbers to inhibit female wild insects from reproducing (*idem*). Searching through the Internet, information on the programme is not abundant. The few scientific articles available share an almost enthusiastic value about the successes and the efficacy the programme has accomplished since the very beginning of the implementation. And there are no traces at all of any possible side effect of the campaign, about possible criticisms or malcontents. However, thousands of Chiapas peasants refer to MOSCAMED as the public enemy number one. Why?

They are mainly corn, beans and coffee growers, according to the different regions of the state. They all agree that troubles started exactly when MOSCAMED came. First of all, they accuse the programme to be responsible for the diffusion of the Mediterranean fruit fly in their lands, rather than for its eradication. But not only. They are sure that since the programme came, a number of invasive species never seen before infested their crops, including even rats and other rodents. All this happened and still happens - according to my research interlocutors - in order to force local peasants to apply chemical herbicide and to plant OGM varieties instead of autochthonous ones, as OGM are the only ones that resist the different pests that appeared. Moreover, coffee growers

⁷⁸ As anticipated in the introduction, the category of "peasant" is used according to the definition provided by Eric Wolf: i.e. agricultural producers «*who retain effective control of the land*» and «*aim at subsistence, not at reinvestment*» (Wolf and Silverman 2001: 196). They therefore differ from "tenants", «*whose control of land is subject to an outside authority*», and from "farmers" whom «*view agriculture as a business enterprise*» (*ibi.*).

in particular from *Sierra Madre de Chiapas* mountains, report of small unidentified airplanes flying for years over their plantations overnight and spraying herbicides literally drying up the plants. Again, the autochthonous varieties of coffee get inexorably burned, while the OGMs resist the herbicides supposedly sprinkled.

As some *compañeros* from the region *Selva Rios* explained to me, the fruits produced by OGM seeds or in general by seeds sold by seed companies, carry sterile seeds (i.e. seeds that if planted will not give birth to a new plant, as it uses to happen with natural varieties). This means that after every harvest or whenever necessary, growers are forced to buy new seeds from seeds companies, becoming dependent on them forever, generation after generation. Therefore, the point of all this situation would still be – according to the *compañeros* - to progressively and definitively eradicate not (or not only) the Mediterranean fly but rather the autochthonous varieties of coffee, beans, corn and a many other varieties of fruits and vegetables, ensuring the infinite enrichment of agrochemical and agricultural biotechnology corporations such as Monsanto. Indeed, Monsanto is the name they mention also as the mastermind of the whole MOSCAMED programme as well as the final and highest hidden beneficiary.

Now, on the Internet we can find notice of peasants' protests against MOSCAMED in Chiapas and Guatemala starting as early as in 2000⁷⁹. And then again in 2004⁸⁰ and 2008⁸¹. The chronicles of those occurrences report that the protests were motivated by the same kind of allegations I heard from people on the field. But as premised, none of them are ever mentioned in scientific literature. As a consequence, no studies were made to verify their reliability, better yet, no studies were published. This doesn't necessarily mean they were not made. Nevertheless, Luz y Fuerza members didn't wait for any scientific legitimation or eminent endorsement to confirm their evidences. They were not seeking that neither. Thousand years of knowledge of the autochthonous crops,

⁷⁹ Bellinghausen, H. 2000. "Exigen chiapanecos retirar una planta productora de moscas". La Jornada. March 21. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2000/03/22/pol1.html> - accessed 20.5.2018

⁸⁰ Bellinghausen, H. 2004. "Temen desastre ecológico y productivo en decenas de comunidades chiapanecas". La Jornada. November 21. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/11/21/020n1pol.php> - accessed 20.5.2018

⁸¹ Bellinghausen, H. 2008. "Exigen campesinos chiapanecos que salga de sus tierras la empresa fumigadora Moscamed". La Jornada. November 5. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/11/05/index.php?section=politica&article=027n1pol> - accessed 20.5.2018

their daily hard work and their empirical observations of the changes affecting their lands day after day and year after year, was enough to take action.

On the occasion of the general mobilization the Organization performed in all its regions on November 29, 2016, a clamorous act against MOSCAMED was realized. Some 3 thousand Luz y Fuerza militants from *Selva Rios* region, marched to MOSCAMED installation located on the federal highway 307. Protesters entered the facility, asked the workers to leave and took possession of it. The facility consists of three buildings that includes offices, workers' accommodations and a laboratory, in addition to a camper. During the following days, the militants made an inventory of everything housed in the installation, which also included two pickup trucks. They changed the locks of all internal and external entrances. They covered the external walls with painted slogans of the Resistance, and they made a big fire with all the chemicals they found in the laboratory and around (hopefully without consequences for their health).

The installation and everything therein were formally declared property of Luz y Fuerza and considered as a form of compensation to the people of the region, for all the damages MOSCAMED inflicted on them during the last 20 years. Besides, the installation laid on a one-hectare plot over an overall land of more than 50 hectares. The Organization therefore considered the option to seize the whole property and assign it to landless youngsters, in order to provide them a chance of making a living, to build families and give birth to a new community on that territory.

In May 2018, the Organization still had the possession of the installation. A state assembly took place there in May 2017, as a symbolic act to legitimize the occupation. And the Region *Selva Rios* was starting to employ some of the goods seized (in particular the two vehicles) to MOSCAMED for collective works at the benefit of the Organization. Options and opportunities about the use and the destiny of the buildings and of the entire land were still under exploration and discussion, in the region and in the state assembly, counting on legal advices too. In the region of *Selva Rios*, MOSCAMED programme has not relocated elsewhere, so far, and its activities considerably decreased.

The MOSCAMED case is a classic example of the way the Resistance may act and react against agents, organizations, initiatives or companies known to seriously harm people. Especially if they are direct emissaries of multinational corporations or suspected to be somehow linked to them. But not only. Anywhere there is a presence of Luz y Fuerza militants, they are constantly vigilant over their territories. They are on alert to detect suspicious presences, activities or movements of goods or people, it doesn't matter by whom, whether corporations, the government, police forces, the army, paramilitary formations or criminals. The following are some short examples in this regard.

At the beginning of 2017, in the community of Frontera Corozal, Municipality of Ocosingo, situated on the banks of the Usumacinta river, Luz y Fuerza people surprised two persons in a powerful and luxury pickup truck, roaming in a territory known to host very relevant Mayan archaeological artefacts. The famous Maya town of Yaxchilán, which is now an important archaeological site, falls in the territory of Frontera Corozal. The whole area is rich in archaeological findings, more or less discovered and accessible to visitors. The two people in the truck were suspected to be thieves of archaeological artefacts, interested to a stele reputed highly valuable. They were stopped by a group of the Organization and when interrogated about their presence and their purposes, they provided confused and contradictory answers. The community in resistance therefore imposed a sanction of 35 thousand pesos on them. Their pickup truck was seized, as they wait for the sanction to be paid. The two people had to leave the community by foot. Six months after, the sanction was still not paid and the vehicle became property of the Organization. When I got aware of the case, in August 2017, the regional assembly was going to take a decision on how and where to use it to ensure the highest benefit to people of the Resistencia (e.g. as a vehicle of public transport, or to transport agricultural products to the markets).

There were two more cases. During the assembly of the region of *Olvidados* which I attended in January 2017, in a mountainous community in the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, representatives of different communities reported that on the top of a hill hosting abandoned archaeological ruins, they saw a Canadian flag waving. Nobody knew much information on the matter. But the assembly supposed that the flag could be related to the presence of a vein of an undefined mineral known to be located

in that area. And according to some rumours, exploitation was going to begin soon. The resolution of the assembly was to charge the communities closer to the hill with a detailed observation of the site and with the collection of any kind of information on the subject. At the next regional assembly, they would report the results of their investigation and based on these, the assembly would discuss if and how to proceed. So far, nothing relevant was noticed. Maybe it was just a false alarm. But communities kept monitoring.

At the same assembly, another representative said that two individuals had arrived at his community, entered the little shop of his *comadre*⁸² and said that they were looking for arms to buy. She replied that she had no arms, she was not aware of any arm or about anyone owning or selling arms neither. Then the two left. Like the woman, everybody in the community found the circumstance bizarre. As soon as the *compañero* finished telling his account, two more representatives from two different communities took the floor and informed that the same had happened in their communities. The assembly gave two possible interpretations: the couple of supposed arms-seekers could be people of the government, going around and trying to get information about the possible existence of armed groups in the area; or they were *narcos* trying to obtain the same information, with the purpose assessing where it could be easier (i.e. less dangerous) to pass by with their trades. In this case, the resolution was that first of all, the whole region had to update the register of the contact person at every community. And then, every community would have taken a copy of it. That was decided because if the two suspects appeared again, people could call the very next community. By this way, they could catch and interrogate them about their unusual behaviour.

In a different region of El Pacayal - Nuevo San Juan Chamula (Municipality of Las Margaritas), the residents noted that almost every night, a hooded man walked through the community. The representatives of the community shared their concerns at the regional assembly, and presented suggested solutions to adopt in order to shed light on the case. At night-time, they were going to close all access to the community with chains. They will institute guard duties at each access, with groups connected by radio. The possible explanation issued by the assembly was that it was likely to be someone belonging to criminal groups, whose passage through the community had to do either

⁸² Literally "godmother" and, by extension, also "close friend".

with the drug smuggling or with human trafficking, as the community is just next to the border with Guatemala. The assembly approved the solution advanced by the community.

Chains at every access was the same solution the *compañeros* implemented in the town of Siltepec, on the *Sierra Madre*. There, the presence of *narcos* appears more evident and intrusive for a while. With the chains, illicit traffics by car were stopped. But then, the criminals eluded the blocks, going around the community by motorbikes. At the end of 2017, the militants of Siltepec were working to find new solutions to also limit the traffic by motorbike.

These actions aimed to limit the smuggling and consumption of illicit drugs because of the social costs their abuse entails. It also aimed to curb the violence and the threats to civilians that the flourishing of criminal organizations systematically bring. In particular, considering the context of the "war on drugs" the government is officially fighting against drug cartels or some of them (see chapter 2). Where suitable conditions exist, or in other terms, where the Organization is strong enough (i.e. where it has a relevant number of militants and a solid presence in the territory), campaigns to limit the sale and the consumption of alcohol are realized too. This is because of the social plague alcohol has represented and still represents among indigenous communities, since the Spanish conquest. And also because the Organization considers it as the state tool of social control. In Siltepec, 30 dives were obliged to close by the people of the Organization; 13 were shut in the city of Comitán de Domínguez.

Finally, the Organization also promotes a project of autonomous scholarly education. 13 schools are already teaching their own alternative programmes with teachers from the same community where they are located. These teachers are trained at the Guadalupe Mission in Comitán, where a new indigenous education system is being developed. Similarly, community health programmes are encouraged too. During the period of my fieldwork, a group of Luz y Fuerza militants from Siltepec were working to equip the very first autonomous clinic linked to the Organization, that would operate in cooperation with the local catholic church and doctors from the UAM - Autonomous University of Mexico and SADEC - *Salud y Desarrollo Comunitario* (Community Health and Development) of Palenque.

The short collection of fields and modes of action I just listed, concludes the introduction to Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. I intentionally devised it as purely descriptive, with as little analytic directions or subjective interpretations as possible. In the attempt to offer a vision similar to the one an external observer - not necessarily an ethnographer, but with enough time and curiosity – may get if meeting this social movement. For sure, this overview didn't pretend to look "objective" at all. But at least it should give the reader the time of some pages, to make an own personal idea on the social movement I narrated, before being overwhelmed by my visions on the matter.

What follows is the analysis I have been able to produce after more than four years I dedicated – both on the field and at distance, on the study of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. I'm going to open the section with three cases or histories I gathered on the field, opening a glimpse through which we will delve into some moments of the daily existence of local actors. These cases should first of all help in showing how some of the key-figures reported at Part I (poverty, inequity, violence, lack of rule of law, among others) may be concretely embodied in people's lives and result in real places, circumstances and facts.

6.4 Three Exemplary Cases

6.4.1. 24 Militant Families Cut-Off From Electricity.

In the middle of October 2016, I went with the board of the Altos Region of Luz y Fuerza (among whom Emiliano), to the town of San Juan Cancuc, located in Chiapas highlands about 60 km from San Cristobal de las Casas. The purpose of the trip was to visit 24 local families, cut off from electricity since the previous six months. 11 of them were support bases ("*bases de apoyo*") of EZLN and 13 were subscribers to the 6th Declaration of the Lacandona Forest. According to the accounts they provided when we met in a little wooden shack hidden in the middle of a coffee plantation and operated as a Zapatista autonomous school ("*escuelita*"), they had been intentionally cut out from the grid exactly because of their militancy. Six months earlier, renovations of the electric power infrastructure had taken place in town. In that circumstance, the company in charge of the works interrupted the supply of energy to the neighbourhood where the

24 families resided. This had happened under request of a group of citizens affiliated to PRI, supposedly backed up by the mayor, who belonged to PRI too.

Municipal authorities rejected the allegations the families made against them, when they found out they were deprived of electricity. Similarly, they refused to take any action to fix the matter. CFE said that no such order was sent by their offices, and labeled the incident as the result of an internal dispute within the community. It refused to intervene to reconnect electricity in the neighbourhood again. The Zapatista families eventually exposed their problem to their *Junta de Buen Gobierno*, - the body of autonomous civil administration introduced by EZLN since 2003, in the different regions of Chiapas (Martínez Espinoza 2006). The response they received was that for the moment, the conditions were not favourable for any action to be undertaken. They would have had to wait and resist without electricity, because "they had no electricity when they were born"⁸³ anyway. After six months of "resistance" with no potential solution on the horizon, the families finally decided to call for the help of Luz y Fuerza, which, as far as they had heard, was an organization of *compañeros* "solving electrical problems".

The three representatives of Luz y Fuerza, carefully listened to revelations of the facts, while sitting in front of the earthen classroom floor, this time attended by the fathers of the usual pupils. They introduced the Organization, its principles and its working methods. And finally, declared without hesitation the availability of the Organization in helping the 24 families to have electricity back in their houses even if they were not members. Moreover, they were going to do it for completely free. This is because Zapatista people and subscribers to the 6th Declaration «are *compañeros* too» and their struggle is the same as Luz y Fuerza's (literally, «*la misma lucha*»).

The board of Luz y Fuerza recommended to the audience a roadmap to figure out the situation:

1. The Zapatistas families had to ask the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* the authorization for receiving the help of Luz y Fuerza. In case of a favourable response,

⁸³ Literally: «¡*No naciste con luz!*». Which is a mode to say, in the Zapatista rhetoric, that electricity is not strictly essential to survive.

2. Luz y Fuerza would compile a list with the names of the people allegedly culpable for the electricity cut-off and officially deliver it (pretending a formal registration) to the mayor of San Juan Cancuc. Through the same document, the Organization would inform the mayor that if the municipality does not reinstate electricity to the 24 families, its militants were going to do it. And that if any violence occurs during the operations, people would hold the mayor and all the community authorities responsible for that. In case of a negative response from the mayor,

3. A technical reconnaissance of the grid would be carried out by Luz y Fuerza technicians with the support of the locals, in order to assess the materials required for the intervention. The families would have to acquire what is necessary. In case of their inability to afford the whole costs (as mentioned at chapter 1, San Juan Cancuc is one of the poorest municipalities in all Mexico), Luz y Fuerza would ask the solidarity of all its regions in supporting the affected *compas*, in particular with materials from the "resistance funds" kept in every region.

4. Finally, a date for the action would be set. Luz y Fuerza would provide the technicians and a good group of activists. The families would be required to ensure room and board and especially, security for the day or the days of the operations. It did not exclude the possibility of a violent reaction by the same group of people that disconnected the families from the grid. Therefore, the families would have to gather a relevant number of companions (Zapatista or not) for the date, in order to discourage possible reactions and if necessary, to respond.

Here is how the situation unfolded. The *Junta de Buen Gobierno* gave the green light to the intervention of Luz y Fuerza. The intervention proceeded as planned with the municipal authorities. Despite the attempted mediation of the Federal Government Delegate of San Cristobal de las Casas, the municipality refused to reconnect electricity. But eventually accepted the intervention of Luz y Fuerza and got committed not to obstruct it. At the end of June 2017, the action was successfully realized by a group of Luz y Fuerza's technicians led by Camilo. Under the technical point of view, the task turned out to be more complicated than expected and it demanded two days of work, instead of the one day originally planned. However, there was no reaction or resistance from the rest of the community. At nightfall on the second day, the mission was

accomplished: after almost one year, the 24 families had electricity again. The children couldn't contain their joy, running from one house to the other, to see if each of them was illuminated again after a long time.

In May 2018, according to the last update I had on the matter, the families continue to have electricity, without technical issues or further threats from the community. On the contrary, apparently the same mayor, impressed by the intervention of Luz y Fuerza, expressed an interest to make all the town to join the Movement: time will tell.

6.4.2 A *Compañero* Under the Attack of Usurpers.

Francisco Javier is 35-40 years old *Tzeltal* peasant from a village in the Municipality of Las Rosas, in the Luz y Fuerza's region of *Olvidados*. He is not taller than 1.50 m, very skinny and humbly dressed. He had an uncertain moustache on a childlike face, marked by the daily hard work on the field. He looks timid and barely whispered when invited to explain his case at the regional assembly that took place in a remote village in the mountains of the Municipality of Venustiano Carranza, at the end of January 2017.

When his father had passed away, some years earlier, as only child, Francisco Javier, legitimately inherited the family's plot of land, as certified by the official papers in his possession (and verified by the community board of Luz y Fuerza, too). He cultivates this land, which is also his only livelihood. But "unfortunately" for him, it seems that this plot has a high commercial value. The overall 7 hectares of land just border with an important arterial road. Additionally, several springs are located on the plot too, which makes the ground extremely fertile. According to the estimation later referred to me by Alejandro, the president of the board of Francisco's community, that land may easily amount to a total value of 3-4 million pesos (around 140-180 thousand euros). Which would represent a fortune, particularly in an area where most of the people hardly earn the minimum daily wage of 88 pesos⁸⁴ (4 euros). Such a valuable property in the hands of such a meek person as Francisco Javier looks like, in addition to the weak rule of law endemic in Mexico (see chapter 3), soon awakened the avidity of unscrupulous people and what is more, among his same relatives (one uncle of him and his family, namely).

⁸⁴ According to the table of Mexican minimum wages for 2018, available at: <https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/285013/TablaSalariosMinimos-01ene2018.pdf> - accessed 1.6.2018

The attacks on Francisco Javier started with the accusations of illegitimately occupying the land, without any title, while his uncle's family was the rightful owner. Accusations were accompanied by the peremptory order to immediately abandon the land. Otherwise, he would have to pay the consequences in front of the law and especially, in front of his relatives. But Francisco Javier didn't capitulate and didn't leave his land. This was the reason why threats were followed in fact with several assaults to his detriment, that didn't change his mind anyhow.

Later, his opponents changed their claims limiting them to only hectares of land bordering with the arterial road, of which they were declared to be the rightful owners. By consequence, if Francisco Javier have not paid them the amount of 1 million pesos, they would have taken possession of the plot. He didn't surrender in this case neither. He didn't leave his property, and finally, he came to the decision to report the circumstances to the state authorities. After a preliminary exams of the allegations, the public prosecutor issued arrest warrants for six persons accountable for the act. But three months later, none of the arrests had been executed. This is because as Alejandro explained to me - local police frequently refuses to proceed, fearing possible reprisals against them or their respective families, by the people they arrest.

Unsurprisingly, intimidations didn't stop. On the contrary, the strategy of attack improved. And saw the intervention - according to the *compañeros'* accounts - of a historical social movement from Chiapas, in defence of the supposed rights of Francisco Javier's rivals: they talked about the "OCEZ - *Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata*" (Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization) and namely, of its Region Carranza branch. The offences were since then committed by people belonging to this organization and particularly, managed by a *soi-disant* lawyer, identified by local people as a notorious land usurper. They tried on several occasions and ways to make Francisco Javier leave his community. For example, they told him that his presence was needed in a tribunal, to testify on a crime that happened in his community. Otherwise, he would have finished in jail himself. In another case, while he was serving as catechist in the catholic church of his community, an attractive young woman he never saw before came to him (who is unmarried) asking to accompany her by foot to a near village, because she wasn't sure of the path. The goal of these attempts was most likely

to attract him in isolate locations and obliged him to sign documents at gunpoint, or even worst, to kidnap or kill him.

But Francisco Javier resisted and never fell into their traps. Instead, he asked for the help of his Luz y Fuerza *compañeros*. They promptly shielded him and directly warned the perpetrators of the threats that if anything was going to happen to Francisco Javier, Luz y Fuerza would respond likewise. Considering the sensitivity of the whole situation, they presented it at the regional assembly. The assembly deliberated what follows:

1. Francisco Javier had to acquire a cellular phone, even the most basic, allowing him to communicate with his companions, especially in case of emergency.
2. Francisco Javier had to avoid any potentially risky situation and in particular, to try never stay alone out of his house or his community. The *compañeros* from his community were in turn required to keep looking after him and accompanying him in his movements.
3. All the companions of the community were asked to obtain precise information on the identities of the people currently threatening Francisco Javier and in particular of the self-declared lawyer, in order to report them to the authorities too.
4. The very next day after the assembly, a delegation of the region travelled to the public prosecutor's office in the city of Comitán de Domínguez, where, assisted by a legal adviser of the Organization, they urged the execution of the pending arrest warrants and report the new series of threats.

Two weeks after the regional assembly, I was informed that the public prosecutor gave Luz y Fuerza the "mandate" or the authorization, to locate the six persons to arrest and hold them. Once captured, the public prosecutor would send some police patrols from Comitán, giving the refusal to act by local police. The board of Francisco Javier's community issued a public announcement, through which they informed Las Rosas municipal authorities and the civil society about the occurrences and the Organization they blame for (the OCEZ Carranza).

At the end of February, a state assembly of the Organization was held in San Cristobal de las Casas and I was there too. As usual, the assembly lasted two days. In the morning of the second days, the representatives of the *Olvidados* Region claimed to have received a phone call from Alejandro, at dawn, telling them that 16 bullets were shot at his house overnight. A flier of those distributed by Luz y Fuerza to denounce the attacks against Francisco Javier was left at the front door, as an "explanation" of the act. The update produced strong reactions among the attendants at the assembly, and it created a vibrant debate on how the Organization should behave in such a kind of alarming act.

To make matters worse, in the following week Francisco Javier's house was shot three times, on three different nights. The reaction of the Organization was still non-violent though very determined. Luz y Fuerza filed complaints on the events with the Chiapas State government, the attorney general's office, the state human rights commission and human rights NGOs (such as the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, in San Cristobal), urging immediate actions in defence of its activists under attack and to detain the culprits. Press conferences on the matter were released in several regions of the Organization (see Annex 2) and the news was covered by several local newspaper and radios. In addition, the militants from the *Olvidados* region made two blitzes in the two main radios of the region and took control of them for the time necessary to read the press release.

In July 2017, the situation had greatly calmed down. The six arrest warrants were still pending. But the attacks against Francisco Javier and his *compañeros* had ceased. What is more, OCEZ Carranza - the rival organization - had supposedly been seeking an agreement or at least a dialogue with Luz y Fuerza. But Luz y Fuerza refused, «because we don't talk with armed groups or paramilitaries», to use the words of Pedro, president of the *Olvidados* regional board (Field notes, 25.7.2017). The last update I received on this subject dates to May 2018. The arrest warrants had not been executed. But the situation had continued to be calm and Francisco Javier was never intimidated or threatened again.

6.4.3 The Young Son of a *Compañero* Kidnapped

On May 2016, five months before the beginning of my first fieldwork, an episode that remained fixed in the mind and which was also reported by national newspapers⁸⁵ involved many militants I met. Maximiliano, the 18 years old son of a long-time member of the Organization from a village in the Municipality of Socoltenango had disappeared. The boy was last seen at a National Institute of Immigration (INM) movable checkpoint of Chablé, in the federal highway 186, at the border between the states of Chiapas and Tabasco. He was travelling by bus together with a man of his village to the well-known touristic destination of Playa del Carmen, to seek a job. This man was who informed the family of the event. He told them that immigration officers detained the guy under the pretext that he looked like a Guatemalan immigrant, despite that he had proven his identity with his valid Mexican ID card.

The next day, the boy's father arrived as soon as he could to the place where the son had disappeared (namely, a toll booth) and eventually at the INM local offices. In both places he was rejected and some of the officers even made fun of him and of the persons that accompanied him. He filed a missing person's report at the attorney general's office of the state of Tabasco and his son's information was recorded in the national register of missing persons (*Registro Nacional de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas*). Even so, the hopes on any concrete support by State authorities were minimum, considering that one of them (INM) was suspected to be responsible for the kidnapping. Moreso, given the dramatic rate and the patterns of disappearances happening in the Country (as illustrated at chapter 3). In fact, the INM categorically denied to have ever detained Maximiliano. It refused to provide the security video records as well as the list of officers on duty on that day. As a result, the official investigation was obstructed and misdirected since at the very beginning.

Contemporarily, the father asked the help of Luz y Fuerza and of *Pueblo Creyente* (a catholic social organization rather popular in various regions of Chiapas), being himself

⁸⁵ Mandujano, I. 2016. "Tras 52 días de desaparecido, joven indígena aparece con vida en Chiapas". Proceso. September 3. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/453477/tras-52-dias-desaparecido-joven-indigena-aparece-vida-en-chiapas> - accessed 1.7.2018

Díaz, G.L. 2016. "Acusan a agentes del INM por desaparición forzada de joven chiapaneco" Proceso. August 22. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/451882/acusan-a-agentes-del-inm-desaparicion-forzada-joven-chiapaneco> - accessed 1.7.2018

an active member of both of them. They accompanied and support him in mobilizing first of all the human rights centre Fray Bartolomé de las Casas as well as some others in the state of Tabasco, and through them, the National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH), the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (CIDH) and even the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, which formally requested Mexican government to provide further information on the case⁸⁶. While these entities put pressure on the government and its branches "from the top", a similar action was to be undertaken "from the bottom" of civil society. Luz y Fuerza decided to organize a demonstration exactly where Maximiliano disappeared, indeed. Even if the location was out of Chiapas, therefore out of the essential territorial background of the Organization. And despite the conditions had to be considered rather delicate: the involvement of criminal organizations in Maximiliano's and in several other cases of disappearances in the same place and similar circumstances, was considered very plausible⁸⁷. Here follows the account of events Emiliano told me:

« The same people from his region refused to support the boy's father in that effort. Instead, it was we, that belonged to another region, who went there with a committee. I personally had to convince the compas, because the place we were going to, was not really safe: «Compas, we are going to go. We may come back or we may never come back.» When we went to the place where he had been detained, the immigration said that they knew nothing about the boy. However, it was ironic that they sent armed federal policemen when we were making our demonstration. I have pictures of them watching us. At a certain moment, out of nowhere, those immigration officers took out a camera of these dimensions [he shows with his hands a rectangle of some 10 cm long and 5 large] whose lens was capable of extending up to this [he shows some 40 cm]: I had never seen anything like it before! They took pictures of each of us. They took pictures of everything we did. Every single person among us was photographed. [...] Shortly after protesting, we realized a couple of days later, someone called the boy's

⁸⁶ Mandujano, I. 2016. "Tras 52 días de desaparecido, joven indígena aparece con vida en Chiapas". Proceso. September 3. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/453477/tras-52-dias-desaparecido-joven-indigena-aparece-vida-en-chiapas> - accessed 1.7.2018

⁸⁷ *Idem*

father: «I have got your son here. If you want to take him back, you should come here. But you must come alone.»

The father had to go to Playa [del Carmen]. His sister and the priest went with him. But only them went in a car. They went with the fear that something bad could happen - it was a really delicate situation. When they arrive at the address they were given, the boy was not there. Then, they called them again and told them «He is not there. You have to go ahead. He is here». When they arrive at that place, the guy was actually there. [...] A cartel kept him in a house, where he was detained and was working. They said that in the house where they found him there were many young boys, really a lot of young boys.

And the boy, after the therapies he received once he was freed, the boy said that he saw many firearms, many drugs and he didn't forget that it was the same police who supply firearms and drugs. He says he had been working, that he was appointed to always carry out different activities. One day he was to take care of some plants, the next day to help in construction work, and another day to bring water from the river... He never had just one specific task. His uncle tells me - now we are very good friends with the uncle and with all the family, they even invited me to the mass [to celebrate the liberation of Maximiliano] - that the boy didn't want to come back with his relatives: «I'm fine here! Why you should take me away? Who are you?». He didn't recognize his own family! Can you imagine what kind of drugs they could have given the boy, to make him forget his family? And that's all real!

Me, I'm in this [in Luz y Fuerza] because I'm sick of all that. It is the same damned government [the culprits]. Those bastard immigration officers had detained the boy and delivered him to the narco! Are we really talking about Immigration? No, it's the narco! They arrest him and they deliver him to the narco! [...] As I told you, for me it has been God who allowed that he could come back. But yes: the boy was found after the demonstration we did. And on that occasion, we clearly realized how authorities operate.» (Interview, 4.8.2017).

Chapter 7. Why joining Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo?

An Analysis of Motivations.

Although somehow "old-fashioned" in the study of social movements since the affirmation of the Resource Mobilization Theory at the beginning of the 1970s, the very first interrogative I found necessary to pose to the social organization I'm studying has been "why": why do these people militate in Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo? What are the motivations leading them to join the movement?

This sort of "etiological" approach has the advantage to clear the ground from preconceived hypothesis and a priori theories that, especially in a field like Chiapas intensively frequented by social scientists during last 25 years, may easily mislead a "young" ethnographer. For example, Chiapas has been widely known as the theatre of the EZLN armed uprising 25 years ago. It still hosts several valuable projects of autonomy and alternative society originated from the Zapatista experience. At foresight, it would be very suggestive and certainly comfortable, to attribute all forms of political militancy, social activism and autonomic projects in Chiapas, to the neo-Zapatista "paradigm", in both historical and ideological terms. During the last four years, I found this is the first and main idea most of the people had when I spoke about this research, not only in Europe but in Mexico itself. Of course, the EZLN has undeniably something to do also with Luz y Fuerza. But, as I will explain along these pages, it would be both naïf and false, to over-estimate its role.

7.1 Poverty and Human Security

I approached the question of why people join Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo in different forms (directly and indirectly, individually or in group). The recurring answer I usually got from the activists has been: «*No nos queda de otra*», meaning "we have no choice", or "there's nothing left to do but this". This should first of all be interpreted in socioeconomic terms, in the sense that the first and main reason people join Luz y Fuerza is the state of socioeconomic need in which most of the members live their existence. In other words, it simply because of poverty; poverty and often extreme poverty, suffered by the majority of the Chiapas population, and in particular, by indigenous peoples, as we saw in chapter 1. People join the movement because they are not able to afford the costs of electricity and, more generally, the continuously growing costs of living, as Emiliano argued:

«[...]It is the same necessity that is making people seek refuge or help. Because everything is already privatized, there is no employment, electricity is very expensive, gasoline is very expensive, and food is very expensive likewise. If I manage to have a job that barely pays me 600 pesos per week [about 27 euros], where would I get the money for everything? No nos queda de otra!» » (Interview, 4.8.2017)

The movement offers the immediate "benefit" of having free electricity (or having it back, like in the case of the 24 families). As well as the "exemption" from paying taxes of any kind. At the same time, it protects members from the potential "side effects" or reprisals, such acts of disobedience they are usually exposed to (e.g. repression from the State, being cut-off from the grid, lack of maintenance of the grid, etc.). Though there is much more at stake. And it is about solidarity. It is about protection, either physical, social or legal. It is about giving and receiving advice. It is about problem solving. And not just in terms of electricity, but rather in any area of human life. Because in a context of structural violence (Farmer 2004) when one lives in a state lacking the rule of law and dominated by systematic impunity or when one is indigenous, peasant, and poor with very low levels of formal education and a modest social capital, he is unprotected without any rights and is often at the mercy of adversities and threats of any kind. These are exactly the conditions for a large part of Chiapas society.

As a result, when people join Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo or a social movement in general, is in search of security, or more precisely, human security. The concept of human security was originally stated in the 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP 1994) and reaffirmed at the 2005 World Summit (UNGA 2012). Which set seven areas of security that should be ensured universally to human beings and in particular to those especially exposed to global threats:

- economic security, which requires an assured basic income;
- food security, requiring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food;
- health security, i.e. the minimum protection from diseases, prevention of unhealthy lifestyles and access to health care;
- environmental security, i.e. the protection from short- and long-term ravages of nature, human threats to nature and deterioration of natural environment (what includes land-grabbing too);
- personal security, i.e. the protection from threats of several forms, such as: threats from the state (like torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings), threats from other states, threats from other groups of people or society, threats from criminal individuals or groups, gender-based threats, threats to children and threats to self (e.g. suicide, substance abuse);
- community security, i.e. the protection from the loss of traditional cultures and ways of life, especially in the case of indigenous peoples;
- political security, i.e. the right to live in a society that honours basic human rights (UNDP 1994: 24-25)⁸⁸.

The refusal to pay electricity and any other duty clearly has a direct and relevant impact on the economic and food security of militants. At the same level, in several regions the Organization also fostered initiatives of community work among militants, that included the collective production and trade of crops (mainly corn) and the management of

⁸⁸ Human security is a universally recognized theoretical and policy framework to ensure the survival, livelihood and dignity of people, in particular of those especially exposed to global threats. In anthropology the paradigm of human security has been especially explored by Thomas Hylland Eriksen (see Eriksen, Bal, and Salemink 2010). However, the analytical tracks on the topic so far developed in the anthropological discipline are not really fitting with the subject of this study.

public transport routes. The improvement of basic economic conditions clearly entails progresses in the prevention of diseases, coming therefore to health security. In addition to this, the Organization holds workshops in every region on healthy lifestyles, focused particularly on healthy diet (especially to prevent diabetes, whose epidemic in the country has been declared as a national emergency by the Mexican government) (Guthrie and Fleck 2017) and in alcoholism prevention. The initiatives on community health programs and autonomous clinics we mentioned in the previous chapter goes in the same direction too. In case of special conditions requiring medications too expensive or hardly procurable in Chiapas, the Organization counts on some official contacts with the Cuban health service, that may supply what is needed and at a more affordable price.

The continuous surveillance to prevent indiscriminate exploitations of natural resources, megaprojects and threats in general to the environment (we offered some examples in the previous paragraph, like the action against the MOSCAMED programme) evidently represents an action performed to improve environmental security. In already three cases, the Organization had to hold government functionaries to ransom, as a last resort to stop initiatives communities were not previously consulted about (as expected by law) and considered as forms of biopiracy⁸⁹ and control/repression (installation of remote cameras in the forest). The same goal is pursued with initiatives to raise awareness on the dangers of chemicals and GMOs' used in agriculture, or on how to avoid deforestation for example, by a systematic tree-planting where people use to cut wood.

The three cases that opened this section, demonstrate the improvement of personal security the Organization could grant its members. The 24 families were victims of an arbitrary and criminal act by another group of the same community. Francisco Javier was as well under attack by a group of people from his community together with an organization supposedly devoted – according to Luz y Fuerza - to criminal activities such as land invasion by means of firearms aggressions. The young Maximiliano was enforcedly kidnapped by state officers and delivered (maybe sold) to a drug cartel, in

⁸⁹ For an exhaustive definition of "biopiracy" I recommend Shiva 1997. For a wider insight on bio-piracy and related forms of resistance all over the world, see Martinez-Alier 2002.

the framework of the deeply-rooted association between political authorities, police forces and criminal groups dramatically ruling many areas of Mexico.

This kind of circumstances explains the need for the Organization to issue ID cards, car stickers and seals in the houses of its militants in order to prevent abuse from authorities, to avoid *a priori* situations like Maximiliano's, that are much more common and frequent than people in Europe may imagine. These measures do not guarantee complete and universal immunity. Moreover, they are hardly "recognized" outside of Chiapas (Maximiliano was kidnapped in Tabasco, indeed, and he didn't carry a Luz y Fuerza ID card, because only the father was formally enrolled). However, the ID helps in a number of daily situations from which threats of different kind and gravity may come up: e.g. bribes demanded by police or other state officers, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, civil or human rights violations of any kind, criminal acts, etc. This "badges" should prevent threats and more often than not, are effective. But when they are not enough, the Organization comes directly into play in different manners and measures according to the case, like in the case of Francisco Javier,.

The interdiction of alcohol and drug abuse for the representatives of the Organization and of selling alcohol (and of course drugs) for all the militants. Measures to protect people from the so-called threats to self - in human security lexicon – include the campaigns to close alcohol sellers in the villages and the vigilance to impede drug smugglers' access to villages. As well as the support offered to alcoholics, by allowing them to join the Organization and eventually offering them treatment, often in cooperation with the catholic church. However, they are also meant to protect the most vulnerable persons such as children and women, from the potential risks engendered by the presence of alcoholics or drug abusers in the family or within the same village.

When it comes to "community security", concretely at stake is to ensure indigenous people the right to exist, and to live a free and decent existence. 85% of Luz y Fuerza's members are indigenous and in particular Tojolabal, Ch'ol, Mam, Tzotzil, Q'anjob'al and Chuj (these latter arrived from Guatemala as refugees, during the civil war that tormented their Country for more than 30 years and permanently settled in Chiapas). Therefore, we may infer that everything done by the Organization serves this purpose. And not only by improving the chances of indigenous peoples in mere biological terms,

through the ways we enumerated so far, but also by observing and advocating respect for their worldview ("*cosmovisión*"), their customs and traditions ("*usos y costumbres*"). This is done by defending the rights Mexican constitution and international declarations specifically recognize to indigenous people. Also, by promoting the conservation, the development and the diffusion of indigenous cultures and knowledge, in what concerns education, language, literature, art, handicraft, history, medicine, ecology, politics and society. All that is done by all the legal tools available and when these are not enough, by civil resistance. Also the 13 autonomous schools launched by the Organization (mentioned at the previous paragraph) represent a clear example in regard. Together with the promotion of community health programmes combining traditional medicines and allopathy, that will find a major expression in the autonomous clinic the organization is contributing to build.

Finally, concerning political security, at chapter 2 we showed how troubled and alarming is the situation of human rights in Mexico. There is clearly very much to do to ensure political security of Mexican people, in particular the poorest. And we may conclude that essentially the whole range of Luz y Fuerza actions aim to enhance the enjoyment of human rights for the people it represents⁹⁰.

Recapitulating, poverty and the consequent plea for security are the primary and decisive motivation for the majority of the people to join Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. For this reason and in consideration of the variety of areas the Movement is engaged, it would be definitely reductive and inexact to consider it as a mere "social movement for electricity". However, some further factors influence people's convergence towards Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo.

7.2 The habitus of Organized Social Activism

Tom Salman and Willem Assies wrote that any anthropological analysis of the emergence and development social organizations and movements must consider that the actors involved are not infinitely flexible, inasmuch they have life histories, capabilities

⁹⁰ Luz y Fuerza engagement with human rights should be also framed within the wider tendency undergoing since the early 2000s, that saw Latin American indigenous groups (in particular from the "Maya region") regularly deploying the discourse of human rights to legitimate their positions and pursuing their goals: see Pitarch, Speed, and Levya Solano, Eds. 2008

and inabilities, views and judgments, as well as knowledge and networks (Salman and Assies 2017). As a consequence,

«they have in a specific manner been 'prepared', both on the level of conscious memories and conceptions and concrete faculties, and on the level of less conscious routines, self-images, and notions of societal differences and inequalities, to react to organizational opportunities and propositions— to react maybe affirmative, maybe declining, but neither one of these possibilities ad random.» (Salman and Assies 2017: 65)

Which push me to reason in terms of "habitus". In effect, if we may devise a "hierarchy" of the motivations driving actors towards Luz y Fuerza, I would definitely indicate just after poverty and the plea for security, what I may define an "habitus of social activism."

When I speak in terms of "habitus", I first of all refer to the roots of the concept laying in the notion of *exis*, that Aristotle elaborated in his virtue ethics outlined in the *Etica Nichomacea* (350 BC). With that definition, the Greek philosopher meant a moral character, acquired but embedded, orienting our sensations, our wishes and by consequence, our behaviours (see Wacquant 2016). Therefore, I refer to the re-emergence of the notion in phenomenology and in particular in Edmund Husserl's work, where habitus defines the mental link between past experiences and forthcoming actions (Husserl 2007 [1939]). An orientation shortly after recalled by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his analysis of the "lived body", where he defined as "habitude" the silent but intelligent source of meaning and social behaviour (Merleau-Ponty 1965 [1945]). And finally, of course I invoke the probably most "famous" elaboration of the concept, which is the one made by Pierre Bourdieu. In the French sociologist's formulation, habitus is *«the place through which we learn who or what we are in society»* (Bourdieu 2015 [1972]: 163) - a mediational construct allowing one to go beyond the old dualism between individual and social dimensions. This shows how socio-symbolic structures of society sediment into persons, in the form of persistent dispositions. Which finally correspond with learned skills and codified propensities in thinking, feeling and acting. That, in turn, drive persons in their creative responses to constrictions and stimulations coming from their social environment (Wacquant 2016; Bourdieu 2015 [1972]). Used in

an anthropological study like this, the concept of habitus can promote the notion of holistic inquiry, grounding the ethnography in space and anchoring it in structural conditions (Nash 2001).

In our case, the notion of habitus allows a better understanding of the inclination of people to join a social movement, more specifically, a social movement like Luz y Fuerza, which is characterised for being independent from the state and from political parties, self-financed and declaredly anti-capitalist. Even people approaching Luz y Fuerza primarily due to their state of need (which could be represented by a specific need like electricity, or by a more general one, like the plea for security), could seek help for their needs elsewhere especially in the structures of political clientelism very well-established in Chiapas. Rather, they turn to a social movement. Maybe some of them tried those other ways to no avail, and finally joined the movement. But generally, an important part of the explanation is to find in the fact that they are used to social movements. They are familiar with them. They have embedded a habitus of social activism, and in particular, of organized social activism. A habitus whose relevancy is even more determinant for people primarily joining the movement for consciousness, more than for need (as we'll further detail later).

But first of all, a brief historical focus is essential to facilitate the comprehension of this aspect.

7.2.1 The Tradition of Social Movements

Since the 1970s, a considerable wave of independent movements saw light in Chiapas. We refer to peasant movements whose bases were mainly but not exclusively indigenous, geared towards escaping the corporatists and monolithic system of control of PRI (Le Bot 2013; Mattiace 1997). In the state of Oaxaca, the Mixtec people started to get organized since the beginning of the 1970s thanks to the prompts and the alliances many of those who emigrated to the USA could develop (Nash 2001). In Chiapas, where emigration abroad was still very uncommon among indigenous groups, mobilizations started under the prompt of the first National Indigenous Congress held in 1974 in San Cristobal de las Casas promoted by the Bishop Samuel Ruiz García. That represented a truly turning point in the recent history of Mexican indigenous people (*idem*; Gilly 1999). Since then, Chiapas witnessed a flourishing of independent movements and organizations, with different nature, goals, political orientations and

eventually parabolas. Several important and organizations still active were born at that time. First and foremost, we cite EZLN, whose foundation occurred in 1983. But also others have played relevant roles in representing, organizing and mobilizing peasants and workers, indigenous and non-indigenous. This is for instance the case in CIOAC (Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Campesinos), formed in 1975 from the split of the Campesino Independent Centre (CCI). Of OCEZ from the Venustiano Carranza region, founded in 1982. Of the Chiapas section of ARIC, founded in 1988. All them played a prominent role before and after the 1994 uprising (Mattiace 1997).

Many underwent divisions and deep changes over time, which often led them to acquire institutional positions on the side of the state government (Mora 2010: 301). ARIC saw a serious split in 1995, when a faction decided to support PRI and the army in the invasion of the rainforest and the progressive para-militarization of Chiapas (Nash 2001: 190). According to some Luz y Fuerza militants from the municipality of Palenque, that had previously participated in it, Xi'Nich, disappeared around 2010. Both rival organizations that resulted from the split of the original CIOAC, i.e. CIOAC "Historical" and CIOAC "Independent" are reported to be now completely subjugated to political parties: the first to PRD and the second to PVEM (Ecologist Green Party of Mexico, the ruling party in Chiapas between 2012 and 2018). Historical CIOAC in particular, has been repeatedly accused of being a paramilitary group and charged by EZLN with (among other aggressions) the killing of the Zapatista school teacher "Galeano" in 2014 (EZLN 2014a). An episode that caused deep emotions and high tensions in Chiapas (EZLN 2014b). These are the same accusations Luz y Fuerza levies on OCEZ Carranza, responsible - according to my research interlocutors - of paramilitary acts backed by the State government, such as the aggressions we reported in the case of Francisco Javier and several others against Luz y Fuerza communities, occurred in the Municipality of Amatenango del Valle between 2016 and 2017.

However, despite the inauspicious destiny into which some of them had fallen, they left a mark in the history and society of Chiapas. First of all, they played a primary role in those two politically-intense decades between the National Indigenous Congress and the EZLN armed uprising. And EZLN especially continues to play it. Secondly, in sociological terms, they contributed - as said - to build the habitus of organized social

activism, where for "organized" participation in organizations, movements, collectives, unions, etc.

Now, the habitus is not an entity written in stone. It rather has a malleable nature, especially due to its permanent revision in the practice. Not only this, but on one hand, based on the early researches Bourdieu dedicated to the connections between the educational dynamics and social classes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970); and on the other hand, on the further developments by Loïc Wacquant about the categories, the skills and the desires of the boxers from a black ghetto of Chicago (Wacquant 2004), we are allowed to make a key distinction between a primary and a secondary habitus. Primary habitus is acquired in the early childhood, by osmosis, in the microcosm of the family and of its extensions. Whether secondary habitus is rather acquired via the specialized action of school and other educational institutions such as religious sects, political parties, boxing gymnasiums (like in Wacquant's renowned study) and similar. What results is a dynamic arrangement between generic and specific dispositions across the life cycle into an operational range of schemata.

All this, keeping clear that the habitus is never the mere reproduction of a single social structure. It rather is *«a multi-layered and dynamic set of schemata that records, stores, and prolongs the influence of the diverse environments successively traversed during one's existence»* (Wacquant 2016: 68). Last but not least, it should be stressed that the habitus alone is not a sufficient mechanism for the production of action. It requires a trigger from the external world to be activated. Reason why it can never be considered apart or in isolation, from the specific social world within which it operates. And in fact, the same habitus may prioritize different lines of conduct in front of different contexts and different strategic opportunities (Wacquant 2016).

Starting from the end, in the habitus I attribute to the actors of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, the trigger is for sure represented by the conditions of structural violence present in the society in which they live. If they were not living in poverty in a state clearly lacking the rule of law, or exposed to threats of any kind and in a context of systematic human rights violations, the habitus of organized social activism would probably not be activated. But they are poor and in great need of human-security. Therefore, they used the habitus of organized social activism they have embedded living in a region with a

relevant history of social movements, as the one illustrated above. A habitus whose primary and secondary components are clearly trackable too.

7.2.2 Primary Habitus: Family

The majority of Luz y Fuerza militants aged less than 50 that I met, declared to have been educated to *la lucha* from their parents or older relatives (brothers, cousins, uncles), who personally participated in the 1994 uprising, or in the EZLN in general, or in other movements.

Luis, a driver, aged around 30, a Tzeltal speaker from the community of San Martin Chamizal, in the Municipality of Palenque, is just one of the many militants that expressed how decisive has been the example set by someone in the family (the father, in his case), in making him willing to join social activism:

«The year was 1986 when my father started to participate in an organization called Xi'Nich. This organization eventually split up, because some leaders sold themselves to the government for money. [...] I was interested in it too, but I was too young. When I finally grew up I wanted to join it but it was at the time that the organization was splitting up. Then I didn't access it, I didn't participate in it until when the organization Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo emerged, to which I belong since the last four years. Even though my deceased father, in the last years couldn't participate anymore because he was ill, he always encouraged me to struggle, because it is the only solution we have to live well, and to prevent the government from continuously attacking us. [...] I'm a person who loves la lucha. I understand la lucha. I'm conscious of what is going on. [...] My conscience comes from what I saw from my father. Because when I was a child, every battle they fought against the malgobierno, they succeeded! [...] I will never forget that the government incarcerated my father three times. On all the three occasions, the sentence was to 30 years of jail. But when the organization rose up and all the people gathered to protest, they were released after 6-7 days. [...] From this experience, I learned that when we go alone, we cannot do anything in front of the government, but when we belong to an organization, to a group of persons, it is easier. From then, I made my

decision to enter the organization, to struggle. This is because it's always better to stay united.» (Interview, 23.8.2017)

Very similar to Luis' experience, Pablo is around 40. He is a Ch'ol speaker. He stayed twice in the United States as an undocumented worker for over 5 years. He had been in Chicago, Illinois, where he worked as a construction worker until he was deported. Thence, he resettled in his hometown, where he started a family and built two little houses with the savings from his stay on the other side of the border. In his hometown, he eventually became one of the most active militants of Luz y Fuerza, together with several uncles and cousins of his. He told me the following:

«Since I was a kid, I had the idea of fighting. I started when I was still a kid. Because I saw that my parents liked the lucha. They liked to defend their rights, and that's the resolution I developed too. I have to fight because now I have my own sons. My father fought for his sons too. He has been fighting for a long time. And then when one becomes old, one starts to be tired. And who takes over? The sons!» (Interview, 23.8.2017)

We are clearly in presence of a father-to-son and generally, the inter-generational transmission of militant memories, visions and practices - education to *la lucha*, since the childhood and from within the same household. A habitus coming from past forms of activism that continues to be activated and generates the contemporary forms of activism because the conditions stimulating the former and the latter activism, endure.

7.2.3 Between Primary and the Secondary Habitus: the Epic of Mexican Revolution(s)

Furthermore, this happens within a cultural framework deeply informed by the "epic" of the Mexican revolution (1910-1920), with the deeds of the legendary heroes Pancho Villa and especially, Emiliano Zapata. At every single demonstration I could assist in Mexico, it doesn't matter if by Luz y Fuerza or by other formations, in Chiapas or in other States, continuous chants to Emiliano Zapata never missed, and in particular: «¡Zapata vive, la lucha sigue!» ("Zapata lives, the struggle continues"), «¡Si Zapata viviera con nosotros estuviera!» ("If Zapata was alive, he would be with us") and «¡Viva Zapata!» (Long live Zapata!). These references of course belong to the revolutionary institutional "liturgy" to which Mexicans are initiated already since the

very beginning of primary school, with punctual celebrations, representations, songs and plays. And given the continuous twisting of the revolutionary content of 1917 Mexican constitution (see constitutional reforms we highlighted at chapter 1), we should consider the institutional initiatives to commemorate Zapata and co. as merely rhetorical. But among the peasant, worker and indigenous sectors of Mexican society, those facts, those heroes and those principles are definitely more deeply and genuinely "felt", than in the rest of society.

In Chiapas, the EZLN, with its philosophy and political ideology, the armed uprising in 1994 and the autonomous realities it was able to build, conserve and further develop through the years, represents a closer and more lively revolutionary epic to refer to. With its own heroes too, such as the sub-commander Marcos (now Galeano), the sub-commander Moises, commander Ramona and commander Tacho, among others. After all, EZLN is declaredly a Zapatista organization; therefore recalling, renewing and reaffirming Emiliano Zapata's ideals and struggles. At least in Chiapas and particularly in the areas directly invested in the 1994 uprising, the echoes of EZLN revolution - because revolution is the word - are still very lively, profound and fruitful in the popular culture and in the collective imaginary. With a transmission taking place already in the families, both nuclear and extended. In the autonomous schools established in many villages, not only the Zapatista autonomous municipalities, as well as in the wider social relationships and events, often informed by EZLN-related cultural productions.

But why are such heroes so important for this movement? As the historians Federico Navarrette and Guilhem Oliver argued that heroes must embody liminality:

«Their fame and legendary status makes them transcend the times in which they lived and make them "fit" the role of example in later times. It is this very characteristic which accounts for the mixture of history and myth in the stories about their lives and deaths. Finally, they must embody something "ordinary", being a typical example of their groups' lives in their times, and something out-of-the-ordinary, related to their rebellious character, visionary ideas or exceptional courage. Of course, to have appeal or charisma, the hero should preferably belong to the same group that is being

mobilized.» (Navarette and Oliver 2000 quoted in Salman and Assies 2017: 80)

Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa perfectly embody these properties. They were Mexican, they were both *campesino*, from humble families and they took arms at the benefit of the poor, against the rich, the oppressors, the bad government, and the dictatorship. They accomplished great feats for a great cause and eventually died – at different moments and under different circumstances – for it. And Zapata in particular, has been a notable socialist theorist, whose political thought passed into the annals of history as "Zapatism".

It is interesting to note how EZLN neo-Zapatist heroes like Marcos, are contemporary, not dead, and still active on the socio-political field. For sure, the main element for their elevation to the Olympus of revolutionary heroes resides in the 1994 armed uprising, which occurred almost 25 years ago, which is already a close past. More so, the revolutionary events of 1994 specifically happened in Chiapas, not elsewhere in Mexico. Furthermore, EZLN has always had a clear indigenist ideology and political agenda. And many of its heroes are not only *campesinos* and poor, but also indigenous. Apparently that wasn't the case with Zapata and Villa. All these are elements of great relevance, that makes Marcos (a non-indigenous, non *campesino*, from the city, but accepted among the indigenous as "one of them"), Moises, Tacho, Ramona among others, like living heroes for *campesino*, poor, indigenous people like the Luz y Fuerza activists. And what finally also states about the emotion, sympathy and admiration for 1994 uprising being still alive, shared and strong, at least in the place where the events took place.

7.2.4 Liberation Theology and Catholic Activism

A specific focus should be reserved to the role of Liberation Theology in building the habitus of social activism and because of its ability to simultaneously pervade the primary and the secondary dimensions of habitus. Although it comes from a religious institution, it is eventually adopted by the families, which in turn transmit the information horizontally (to relatives of the same generation) and vertically (to different generations). In this way, it generates meaningful integrations and intersections with other components coming from different sources composing the habitus. However, it

also deserves particular attention for the game-changing role it is capable of playing by itself, not just in instilling the habitus of social activism. But rather in offering a new universe of meaning and a related set of innovative practices, convincing people to immediately struggle even before the complete adoption/construction of a habitus of social activism. And eventually building the habitus *in* itself *and for* action (Wacquant 2016: 66). The disruptive premises featuring this new theology in relation to the "old" catholic theology in force in European and American countries before the 1970s, mainly are:

1. a different starting point: the world is iniquitous;
 2. a different interlocutor: the poor and marginalised;
 3. different tools: social sciences;
 4. a different analysis: a conflictual society;
 5. a different way to get engaged: a dialectical alternation between reflection and praxis;
 6. a different theological core: God's preferential love for the oppressed.
- (De Vos 1997; Gutiérrez 1971)

To explain how, we have to step back to the tradition of independent social movements established in Chiapas since 1975. As we saw earlier, the first National Indigenous Council, in 1974, represented a turning point in the recent history of indigenous people in Mexico, and even beyond. And as mentioned, it was called by the diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, presided by the bishop Samuel Ruiz García. Anthropologist June Nash - who carried out fieldworks in Chiapas since the 1950s and who thoroughly analysed the historical process leading to the 1994 uprising and what came after - compared Don Samuel to Bartolomé de las Casas, 500 years earlier (Nash 2001: 163). They both put at the core of their pastoral mission and life, the defence of indigenous people. One from the colonial extermination, the other from the nation-state neoliberal extermination.

Don Samuel pursued this goal by redirecting the San Cristobal diocese towards Liberation Theology, which became crucial as theological doctrine for advancing social welfare programs at the benefit of the poorest, inside the church and beyond. In the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65, Pope John XXIII opened a new course,

conceptualizing the pastoral task as one engaged in social movements of redistribution, instead of mere dispensation of grace. This orientation was first acknowledged at the Latin American Bishops' Conference held in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 and later in 1979, at the Latin American Ecclesiastical Conference, in Puebla, Mexico (Nash 2001: 164). This finally marked an epoch-making change. «*These orientations [...] encouraged priests to move the faithful away from fatalism and the acceptance of poverty and marginalization of life in earth to and towards becoming collaborators with God in the fulfilment of their destiny*» wrote Nash (*ibid.*), and continued: «*The clergy was urged to address the social suffering and inequity generated by the free market economics and to encourage people to be agents of their own history in the kingdom on earth.*» (*ibid.*).

To make these words a reality, Don Samuel mobilized a small "army" of catechists and deacons selected from the Christian Base Communities located in the Lacandón Jungle and in the poor suburbs of San Cristobal de las Casas. They covered Chiapas far and wide, visiting indigenous and poorest communities in general, working for people's coscientization, in the sense of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Freire 1970; 1974). This involved raising awareness about the conditions of impoverishment, oppression and suffering of the people, informing them about the contemporary reality and analysing the causes and the responsibilities. At the same time, they aimed to empower people, making them aware of their fundamental and legitimate rights, and to actively support their demands. The Human Rights Centre "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas" founded in 1989 through the initiative of Don Samuel, became a crucial arm in such a strategy. The Centre offered and still offers free legal assistance to victims of human rights abuses, as well as practical and material aid. It runs independent investigations on the cases of abuses. It issues official public reports and transmits them to major international human rights organizations and bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights or Amnesty International. This is a means to bypass censorship, manipulations and obstructionism more often than not seen from local authorities. In addition, it helps to raise international attention and pressure about committed abuses and their responsible.

Such a widespread, unceasing and industrious action of coscientization of the bases, had clearly to produce a primary impact on people's attitude towards getting committed in

first person and organize themselves in groups, collectives and organizations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ernesto, the founder of Luz y Fuerza, was exactly one of the "soldiers" of Don Samuel's little "coscientization army". And as he explained, his work of coscientization for the diocese, for a long time was to act almost as a "natural" bridge for people to join EZLN.

I had the opportunity to witness this mechanism during my fieldwork and with the Ernesto. In the autumn of 2016, some communities that he used to visit at the time of Don Samuel and with whom he maintained a strong friendship, invited him. They wished to have a workshop of "analysis of the reality", about the constitutional reforms Peña Nieto administration was carrying out, despite the protests that exploded in many states. Even retired, Ernesto remains constantly up-to-date on the current social, political and economic developments in Mexico and around the world. He accepted the invitations due to existing friendship and offered me to accompany him in this little "tour".

These meetings usually lasted 3-4 hours. The first part of them was usually dedicated to an exhaustive information on the latest social, political and economic events, with a specific attention to Mexico and Chiapas. Later, constitutional reforms were presented and explained in relation to the liberal adjustment programs implemented in Mexico since 1982 (see Chapter 1). A special attention was dedicated to reforms of the educational system, of the energetic sector, and of Article 27 of constitution, as they were those more directly concerning the people listening. Finally, an accurate analysis of the impacts the reforms could have on local communities, followed. At that point, once the audience realized the potentially destructive effects the provisions may bring in their daily lives, the questions that usually rose were: «What should we do? How could we cope with all this?».

Ernesto, informed them that, since the only option left is to get organized and fight, many communities have already organized themselves and were resisting the constitutional reforms and the *malgobierno* in general. And if they were interested to know more about this option, he could put them in contact with some *compañeros* from an organization called Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo (none of the communities was part of the Organization) which was acting on this matter. Some members of the communities,

after the meetings actually asked to receive a committee from Luz y Fuerza in order to know more about the Organization.

I therefore assume that the one I observed during these visits was a typical dynamic that characterized Ernesto's work for the diocese of San Cristobal. As mentioned earlier, during the 1980s and 1990s the "option" Ernesto suggested was likely to have been the EZLN, where later in the 2000s, it would be Luz y Fuerza. Therefore, these visits at the request of the communities Ernesto used to visit, also gave me the opportunity to observe at first hand, the mechanism through which Luz y Fuerza was founded. This dynamic still endures today, with younger militants (usually the community and regional boards) instead of Ernesto travelling all over Chiapas. The same name "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo" is proof of the tight bond between the Organization and Liberation Theology. Contrary to what one may suppose, the name doesn't represent a tribute to the dissolved electric utility Luz y Fuerza del Centro (see note 69), indeed. "Luz" rather refers to God's light, that should illuminate, point and guide people to the way. And "Fuerza" is the power of people organized and ready to struggle, guided by God's light, toward the construction of a new society and eventually, the creation of a new humanity. That's the exegesis of the name, as Ernesto referred to me.

However, even before the foundation of Luz y Fuerza, EZLN was not the only "outlet" for conscientization efforts. For instance, in 1991 parishioners from a number of communities belonging to the dioceses of San Cristobal gave light to a social movement called "*Pueblo creyente*" (Faithful people). It was a catholic movement pursuing in practice, the fundamental goals set by the diocese with regards to the poorest and the most suffering people. Also *Pueblo creyente* represented a "concrete effect" of the endeavour of conscientization organized by the diocese. And the movement still exists. It has been constantly on the front-line during the peace process that followed the armed uprising. It subscribed the 6th Declaration of the Lacandona Forest (alike Luz y Fuerza). And not only many of Luz y Fuerza's militants, especially in the highlands, have previously militated in *Pueblo creyente*. But many still belong to it, too. An aspect this latter, that introduces the next and last point of this section.

7.3 An Habitus, Many Social Movements, Multiple Militancies

In the last paragraphs we argued that it is the existence of objective conditions that drive individuals to join an organization instead of being alone. Primarily poverty in addition to the inherent need for security, articulated in the different dimensions included in the paradigm of human security. Therefore, the habitus of organized social activism many individuals absorb in their family, some at school and many through the thought, practices and the organizational structures provided by Liberation Theology. However, the "market" of social organizations and movements into which finding answers to one's needs and/or put into practice the habitus of *lucha*, in Chiapas is still very rich. Why choose Luz y Fuerza among many other available options? Some premises are required.

First of all, as anticipated in the conclusion of the previous chapter, many people of Luz y Fuerza have militated or still militate in *Pueblo creyente*. Emiliano recalls he entered *Pueblo creyente* when he was only 9-10 years old, following his mother's example, and «he loved it». Later, once he came to age, he decided to join Luz y Fuerza because he was looking for «*more action*» and «*more work*» (Interview, 4.8.2017). In Luz y Fuerza, he encountered many people that were also part of *Pueblo creyente*. People that like him, continued to belong and participate in both organizations. In fact, this is absolutely common for Luz y Fuerza, as the Organization doesn't impose an exclusive militancy on the members. On the contrary, multiple contemporary militant memberships are rather common and diffused.

A glaring example in this sense is the case of Osvaldo, a 40 years old Tojolabal school teacher I have known since 2014, who concurrently participates in Luz y Fuerza, the CNI- National Indigenous Congress as representative of Tojolabal people, Pueblo Creyente, the indigenous section of the SNTE - National Educational Workers Union, the initiative of the *Nueva Constituyente Ciudadana e Popular* (New Popular and Civic Constitutional Assembly) and from outside, the initiatives of EZLN (not as support-base, because as he receives a salary from the government by working as a teacher, he can't join EZLN). Hence in response to the question, more often, people don't choose Luz y Fuerza *instead of* other organizations, but rather *together with* other options available on the movement market.

Secondly, we should discern between people joining the Resistencia mainly for need and those doing it for consciousness. The first group is represented by people that come to the Organization for practical reasons. The most classical of the cases is someone experiencing trouble with electricity: i.e., from receiving exorbitant bills (see paragraph 6.1) to having remained isolated from the grid, as it was the case of the 24 families in Cancuc. The specialty of the Organization is electricity. People ask for help to solve the problem and then they join because alone they would still be exposed to the same or similar threats. In other circumstances, people experiencing agrarian issues (like in the case of Francisco Javier) join the Organization because in their region it has a strong presence, and they know they may receive not only legal support but also a sort of physical protection from it. This is because committing abuse against an individual that belongs to a movement, is much trickier than perpetrating it against a lone individual.

On the other side, there are people that choose the Resistencia for consciousness. People aware of the structural violence in which they live, in Paul Farmer's sense (Farmer 2003) that realise the injustice beyond their suffering, their poverty and their exclusion. And they decide to react and struggle. First of all, for survival, and then, for a better future as in Pablo's words:

«I hear my heart calling me to this - to fight; to give my life for a struggle, because I need that my sons after finishing their studies one day will have a fair employment; they will have a fair salary; that their rights will be respected; that there will be justice and peace. That one day, we will be able to live serenely. That we will live as we should live. Like the politicians that deceived people's lives. Because they make money exploiting the people. We want to live better too, but by means of our struggle, by means of our movement. We want to have a better life prospect. I always keep in mind that this is what I have to fight for.» (Interview, 23.8.2017)

Of course, many in the Resistencia - particularly those that have had or still have roles of responsibility, are fully aware of the different types of militants. It is quite easy to discern who is there just for interest and who really believes in the *lucha*. Because to militate in the Organization one has to be complying with the rules, to put passion in it, dedicate time and very long working hours, be available at any time for anyone, and

always be present even in the most delicate or dangerous circumstances. Moreover, without any personal monetary compensation, just for the cause.

Nevertheless, the Organization welcomes everyone. People that just don't want to pay electricity, people affiliated with political parties, people benefiting from government social programs, alcoholic or even drug addicts. Everyone is welcomed in accordance with the evangelical principle that «sick people are who require the doctor, not the healthy ones». Because once in the Organization, they will receive conscientization with the hope, they will become more and more aware, and they will be helped to abandon alcohol and drugs. Gradually, they will understand that «social programs are a form of dependency culture to keep the poor poor and under control». That «political parties remember the poor just at election times and then they forget him again». That «electricity is just a small part of a bigger fundamental struggle». In sum, as Ernesto repeated to me on several occasions: «*They come for need and they stay for conscience*».

Thus, trying to respond to the original question, people mainly motivated by their state of need turn to Luz y Fuerza especially for the specific "services and benefits" it offers. While people not primarily moved by specific needs opt for the Organization because of the "way it works". According to several activists I interviewed, on one hand, this means absolute independence from the government, from political parties, from religious institutions, from international organizations and from external funding in general. On the other hand, it means inclusiveness, openness, not excessively strict rules, lack of leaders, democratic management and bottom-up decision making. All this set of aspects convince people to choose the Resistencia, instead of or concurrently with other movements. And often after having militated in others, often EZLN.

7.3.1 EZLN and Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo

The "flow" of militants between EZLN and Luz y Fuerza deserves special focus due to the dimensions of the phenomenon and for the somewhat hegemonic role EZLN played during last 25 years of social movements in Chiapas, in both political and cultural terms. Also, for the global attention Zapatistas acts and ideas achieved for more than a decade, after the 1994 uprising. We will begin from the personal experience some key-research interlocutors of mine shared.

Camilo lived in person and from within, as a militiaman in the 1994 armed uprising. He substantiates the "passage" from one organization to the other, drawing from his personal experience:

«I entered EZLN in 1993 and left in 1998. When I left, I was not looking for a political alignment or any kind of shelter. I waited for a while until when I decided to organize myself again with the civil society and to seek for a fair and positive lucha.» [...] There are several former Zapatista compañeros that now are involved in the Resistencia. However, they didn't leave Zapatism due to specific problem, they just didn't like it anymore and now they are with us. [...]»

And he further explains:

«Here [in Luz y Fuerza] it is the same lucha of the Zapatism. The difference is that the Zapatista lucha is about orders. Sometimes, that's the tricky aspect when you are a militiaman or have a support base. Because there [in the EZLN], you have to obey orders, the orders of the command. While here you do not have to [in Luz y Fuerza]. Here you have to do what people say, from the base. Here the lucha is more pacific, wider, open and very participatory, than among the Zapatista compañeros. On the other hand, the Zapatista compañeros do not ask for your input on whether yes or no. You rather receive the order and you must go. And you go!» (Interview 24.8.2017)

Pablo, who since 1997 until the moment he emigrated to the USA, served as a radio communication technician being a support base of the EZLN, shared an analogous vision:

« They [EZLN] also seek justice, peace. [...] But here [Luz y Fuerza], we do not discriminate anybody. If one belongs to another religion or belongs to another organization, here is welcome: the doors are open. We aim to unite people, not to disorganize them. I really like this. Because the Zapatism was stricter. They have a different and more severe law. With several kinds of punishments. [...] Which is fine. But sometimes, if you are too strict, it is like

you are closing the doors. Many people wish to struggle. But if you close the doors nobody will enter. Here instead, the doors are open to any kind of people animated by a sincere desire of struggling.» (Interview 21.8.2017)

Declarations that make one wonder about the fact that probably EZLN has not really or completely succeeded with a fundamental challenge as some analysts pointed out soon after the uprising. Namely, that the long-term success of EZLN depended on how it dealt with the tension between the hierarchical command structure necessary for fighting a war, but extremely limited in building a social or political movement (Mattiace 1997: 61) - an unresolved tension that probably made many militants leave and eventually join other movements, such as Luz y Fuerza.

However, a necessary premise to make is that Luz y Fuerza and EZLN are not rival organizations. On the contrary, they are formally allied, as Luz y Fuerza subscribed to the 6th Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle issued by the EZLN, and they cooperate in the same struggle, not only in words, but also in deeds, as shown in the case of the 24 families from Cancuc. But still, they remain two different and independent organizations. This said, my understanding is that over the years, Luz y Fuerza, has likely become a major recipient of former Zapatistas support bases and to a smaller extent, militiamen.

I think this happened in particular in the north of Chiapas, across the wide territories covered by the municipalities of Palenque, Salto de Agua and Tumbalà. In the territories of the municipalities of Las Margaritas and Altamirano. And in the highlands of Chiapas. What basically corresponds to the territories where EZLN historically held the bulk of supporters. I would not assert that people usually leave EZLN to directly join Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. They rather arrive at Luz y Fuerza after a variable period and variable trajectories of life, like Camilo and Pablo. And not to forget, in some regions many companions of Luz y Fuerza contemporaries remain support bases for the EZLN. Such a dynamic has to be framed within the recession EZLN suffered since the beginnings of the 2000s, whose causes lie on multiple levels.

Yvon Le Bot followed very closely EZLN facts since the 1994 uprising. In a recent publication (Le Bot 2013) he reviewed the processes which since the 1990s, led several

Latin American indigenous movements to gain legitimation as full political subjects. And he eventually examined their trajectories. In the case of EZLN, he recognizes that since 2001 EZLN incurred a retrogression. It couldn't maintain the role of protagonist on the international arena it deserved having been since the fall of communism, the bearer of the first global protest against neoliberal capitalism (Le Bot 2013: 60). And on the national level, it was not able to establish itself as a central social or political actor (*ibid.*).

The reasons for a such a decline should be found in wider external factors, such as the obstructionism the Mexican political "caste" unanimously opposed to EZLN pro-indigenous claims, particularly after the historical Zapatista "march for dignity" to Mexico City in 2001 (*ibid.*): the betrayal of San Andrés Peace Accords consumed with the 2001 Indigenous Law (see chapter 3) is the most striking evidence in regard. And on the global stage, since 2001 the global sphere started to be monopolized by the logics and the politics of terrorism, counter-terrorism and war (Afghanistan and Iraq, as first) (Le Bot 2013: 62). That absorbed the attention and efforts of oppositions and anti-globalist movements around the world, relegating EZLN somehow to the background.

Of course, EZLN had some responsibilities too. In 2002, the attempt to regain international presence by proposing sub-commander Marcos as moderator between the Spanish government and the Basque Eta was a complete failure. It was coldly rejected by both sides (Le Bot 2013: 63). On the internal front, in 2006 came the *Otra Campaña* ("Other Campaign"), an initiative created in opposition to the political campaigns for the 2006 presidential and legislative elections. But the EZLN, still through its main spokesperson, sub-commander Marcos, was dragged into a never-ending confrontation with the leftist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, finally playing that same political game it pretended to denounce (*ibid.*).

If we look from below at the reasons of the down-scaling apparently suffered by EZLN, people in the field mention to me that a major factor was, the prohibition EZLN imposed on its militants from accepting any money coming from the government. This means that they can't receive financial aid by social programs, neither non-monetary support such as housing projects, nor could they even earn a salary from the government (like being school teacher) (Van Der Haar 2004). Immediately after the 1994 uprising,

the government started to dole large sums to the populations living in the areas where EZLN was stronger, in order to steal supporters and weaken the organization. EZLN allowed its people to receive government money, in order to use that same money to finance the fight against the government. But after some years of growing "donations", Zapatistas realised that the government was finally succeeding in "buying" their supporters and weakening the base. At that stage the prohibition came against any money from the government. But at that same stage, many people had already gotten used to receiving it. Instead of renouncing the money, they renounced to EZLN and left (see also Van Der Haar 2004: 104). When I shared this information with Ernesto, he confirmed it. And he explained the different position of Luz y Fuerza on the matter:

«In the Resistencia, the Organization as such refuses government money and we have nothing to do with it. But we can't oblige our members to not accept money from the government programs. Because there are persons and communities extremely poor, really. And they really need it to eat, to survive. Of course, we explain them that it is a form of social control, etc. But still, they need to eat.» (Interview 27.2.2017)

What evidently represents a more moderate approach, making the Organization more accessible than EZLN.

But I could also record some specific circumstances that would have - according to reliable sources of mine - contributed to a growing disaffection towards the EZLN, in areas where its presence was strong and consolidated. One of the most relevant cases was referred in Palenque. Around the end of the 1990s, a new military commander was appointed in that region. A while after he entered office, people discovered some incidence of malversation committed by the new military commander. He allegedly kept for himself and for his own benefit, some monetary and material donations destined for the EZLN. People reported their suspicions to the civilian commander of the region, which took them seriously and decided to make an investigation. The accusations were reliable and the civilian commander found evidences of misconduct. He therefore reported the military commander to the highest level of EZLN hierarchy, i.e. the General Command. But eventually, for some reason, the General Command decided not to remove the commander from his position. He remained in office, with the same grade

and in the same region. The civilian commander remained bitterly disappointed by this sort of impunity and in response, decided to leave the EZLN. This civilian commander was an old and wise man. He was very well-liked and respected all over the region. He was very trusted by his Zapatistas *compañeros*. Therefore, when he left EZLN, a great part of the support base of his region followed his decision and left the EZLN too. What deprived the EZLN of an important commander and a large group of supporters. It also created a precedent that has since then undermined people and communities' inclinations towards the Zapatista army in the region.

It is not my intention to overestimate or generalize information that I had no way to empirically verify, although if reported by research interlocutors that demonstrated to be trustworthy. I do not aspire to perform an "ethnography of rumours" neither. Nevertheless, I found it necessary to report and not to hide such a kind of information, because they may complete the reconstruction of the factors that influenced EZLN historical developments. The wider political, geopolitical and cultural factors highlighted by LeBot – indeed - are combined with practical and economic circumstances as those related to government money, and with single incidental episodes from the daily life of individuals and communities on the territories like the one from the Palenque area. Such an articulated focus was required due to the relevant flow of militants from EZLN to Luz y Fuerza I could observe, especially in the regions I previously mentioned. What makes Luz y Fuerza an important recipient of former Zapatistas militants or the other way round, EZLN an important catchment area for Luz y Fuerza new memberships. But also, because it is not unrealistic at all to retain that Luz y Fuerza surpassed EZLN for overall number of militants. My estimations for Luz y Fuerza range between 30 to 50 thousand supporters. While for EZLN, official estimates are missing. But according to those I could grasp on the field, currently it could hardly pass 20 thousand people. Anyway, circumstances like those of the 24 Cancuc families prove that in some of the historical regions of EZLN, Luz y Fuerza is stronger.

Finally, there is one last relevant aspect to highlight. All the persons that disclosed to me the "mistakes" of EZLN or the reasons that made them leave it, all maintained the highest respect toward EZLN and the highest consideration about its achievements. Those that were Zapatistas and eventually left, simply explained this as a personal decision: they were not comfortable anymore in the organization and they preferred to

leave. And more generally, the attitude I found can be summarized in what Ernesto told me, during a travel by car in 2014: *«It's true that the EZLN made many mistakes. It's undeniable. However, this doesn't allow to discredit all the movement and all what they did. Which remains something great!»* (Field notes, 24.4.2015)

Chapter 8. The Political Agenda

8.1 Autonomy is the goal

After having extensively explored the factors that make people join Luz y Fuerza, I consider it indispensable to analyse the political level in which the Organization should be framed. From the picture we delineated in the previous paragraph, it should be quite clear that the Organization provides solutions to peoples' compelling needs - from electricity to human security in general. It is also chosen by people willing to put into practice the conscientization they received, or to execute the political and/or civil activism they previously started in other organizations (like EZLN). Which means that the Organization is also a space where transformative actions on the socioeconomic and political determinants are incubated and performed.

Therefore, for sure it represents a "problem-solving network". Even if not in the sense used by the sociologist Javier Auyero to explain the political clientelism governing the urban slum of Buenos Aires, in Argentina (Auyero 2000). In Luz y Fuerza, the relation between problem-holder and the problem-solver is horizontal, not vertical and hierarchical. As far as the problem-solver is not a politician or someone related to politic system. The exchange is not of the kind "favours or services in return for votes" - a mechanism, by the way, very common in Chiapas and in Mexico too, not only in the suburbs of Buenos Aires. In the case of the Organization, we should probably talk in terms of mutual, collective and solidarity problem-solving network where the positions

of problem-holder and problem-solver are often interchangeable. The motivation at the base of solving action is belonging to "something" common.

However, it should be underlined that this problem-solving capability is not the ultimate goal the Organizations pursues. It is a means, serving a wider and deeper political project. At the same time, it originates from a wider and deeper political vision. First of all, we will discuss some preliminary information from the field.

The founding rules of the Organization formally mention three main political goals:

- the find/build solutions to own problems, as a part of a wider goal, i.e. a new life project where the people will not be oppressed anymore by the government and the neoliberal order;
- to build a new Mexico, based on a new constitution, where the government will lead by obeying the people;
- the full accomplishment of the San Andrés Peace Accords (Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo 2014).

Additionally, the rules mention that an anti-capitalistic vision will be used and self-determination of the people will be observed and promoted. These are already key-elements to take into account. When I asked Luz y Fuerza militants what fundamental political goal the Organization pursues, the responses varied depending on the person I spoke to, his level of general awareness and his seniority in the Organization and in the *lucha*.

Ernesto, for example, manifested the most visionary and ambitious position, probably favoured by his privileged external viewpoint. In rather prophetic terms, he proclaimed that the goal of the Organization should be to make a big "masterstroke" in the state of Chiapas:

« Right now the Organization still cannot take the risk of making it. Now it is present in some 60 municipalities [of Chiapas.], but one has to be certain to succeed. Then it should wait to have at least 85 of the 124 municipalities. »

«Take the risk of what? Taking power?» I asked.

«No! We will not even need it! It will be more about making a masterstroke, a big masterstroke, in the state of Chiapas. That will allow us to impose the will of the people, without participating in the elections and the need to take control of the institutions. At that point, it will not matter who will be mayor or governor... etc. they could all keep their positions. Because they will all be obliged to comply with the people's will - the will of an organized people, holding complete territorial control and therefore boxing politicians in the obligation of respecting popular will.»

«And in how long do you think the Organization will be able to achieve such a purpose?», I asked again, and he replied laughing:

«I just hope the Organization will have enough time to do it! Before the government will try to destroy it.» (Field notes, 11.11.2016)

Such an ambitious mission to perform on the local level of Chiapas has to be considered as a part of a wider strategy on the national level of Mexico, as depicted by Pablo:

«The plan is to make the country changing completely. Because they changed the laws we used to have. They destroyed the constitution we used to have. They removed the right to peace and the right to justice. Because there's no peace anymore and there is no justice anymore, what are people looking for? To change the system of government in the country because it is wrong. Because now politics are not "normal" politics as before. Now we are in the presence of "narco-politics". [...] What does this mean? That is, we are going to experience more deaths, more discriminations, and if possible, they will even reduce us, the indigenous to slavery again. We do not want that our politicians are now managed by narco-trafficking. [...] Rather, we want a total change in the whole country. The Organization promotes this purpose of change. Because just making change here in the state is not going to be enough - it is feasible. What is missing is just

awareness. We need to make people conscious. As a former Zapatista commander from the General Command used to say, «if people were not involved in political parties and wanted a change for real, we could change the country's political system in just three days». We count on people's strength. However, there are still too many who sell out to the government for money. That is why we still have not really won our fair struggle.»
(Interview 23.8.2017)

This account also clears the air from any potential independentism or separatist goal possibly pursued by the Organization. As a matter of fact, people struggle as Mexicans, in the very local dimension of Mexico and for a better Mexico. No independent entities or independent states beyond Mexico are foreseen or even desired. Camilo (from chapter 6) was quoted while declaring that the Organization is pursuing autonomy in the field of electricity - cared about specifying that Luz y Fuerza struggle is not for political power:

«At the state assembly we never said we want to govern. Because even if the Resistencia could ever hold a government, the problem we face would be with capitalism. The government is a mere lid. Those who really rule are the chiefs of capitalism. Whether the initiative came from a church, from a community, or an organization, in case it succeeds in building a government, or aligns itself with them [the chiefs of capitalism] or they make it disappear. That is what we don't want to happen. What we want is to work from the base. To unite the base and nourish the base. Then, I do not know if one day we will talk about autonomous villages, or autonomous people. However, right now they are not part of our "dream» (Interview, 24.8.2017)

However the plan is not to build autonomous entities like the MAREZ (Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities) of EZLN (see Hernández Navarro 2010), autonomy is the key-word that strongly emerges from Luz y Fuerza interviewees. Some other militants entered more into detail and further explained the plans of the Organization. Here is Luis' view in this regard:

«The goal is to become independent from the government. The Organization is independent. Its mission is to improve the conditions of the community, but without the help of the government. We are not interested anymore in anything related with the government. Many of us do not accept governmental subsidies yet. As well as many refuse political party benefits. Because we do not trust anymore in all that. The Organization pursues a better future, in which everything will be up to us, the indigenous peoples. Any problem will be solved by ourselves and the government will no more oblige us to do something we do not want to do.» (Interview 23.8.2017)

Emiliano shifted to a rather economical level of consideration and with his usual expressiveness argued:

«From what does the government make its living? From nothing! Where does its money come from? From our own pockets! So, what does this Organization try to do? To not pay any tax, because all taxes are used to support those cabrones that bother us. With what money riot policemen that beat us up are paid? With our own money! We pay those who come down to beat us up, to kill us, to make us disappear, to imprison us. [...] Then it is better we keep that money for us, instead of donating it to the government. We keep the money and we assess what is better to do with our own money. It could be used for collective purposes, for collective productions such as farming or livestock... No matter what, but we must keep it for us.» (Interview 4.8.2017)

And some concrete initiatives of economic autonomy already started up or are on the way, like in Pablo's community:

«We are now developing the proposal of building an economic autonomy. In which who has products to sell, can sell them to our own compañeros here in the community. Those who need to buy something, can buy it here, in the community, from someone of the community too. That is a very good plan, because we are going to move away from the products sold by the government. Therefore, all profits are going to remain here. We will buy

here what we produce here, and we are going to begin with livestock.»

(Interview 23.8.2017)

Overall, what is clear so far, is that taking power, making a revolution (at least on a large scale) or a *coup d'état* is absolutely not contemplated by Luz y Fuerza. Autonomy is the path the Organization is following. First of all, in the field of electricity. Thence, devising and realising projects of autonomous production and distributions of goods. In addition to the initiatives on autonomous education and health care (see paragraph 6.1). Generally, as a problem-solving network, aiming to exclude the government from the management of people's needs and overall, from the governance of their lives. Nevertheless, autonomy is seen as an instrument for a fundamental political change in the Mexican nation. A change within the Mexican nation and for all Mexican people, in particular for the poor and indigenous. A change that should come from civil society and outside of the institutional system of democratic representation.

8.1.1 Civil Society and Luz y Fuerza: the "Jelly" and the "Frame"

To analyse the autonomous visions and practices used by Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, we first need to clarify some of the words and definitions so far used (or avoided). In the historical context of autonomies in Mexico (see paragraph 5.2), we extensively referred to indigenous peoples, indigenous communities and indigenous movements, and to a lesser extent, to peasant movements. As the reader might have noticed, so far I haven't applied any specific category to describe Luz y Fuerza. I just reported the definition the movement attributes to itself: "civil resistance movement". I specified that its members are for the great majority indigenous and peasants. But it is not an indigenous movement neither a peasant movement. None of the traditional categories into which most of past movements and organizations mentioned, apply to Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. Furthermore, as June Nash argued, both class formation (that traditionally characterised Marxists and other structuralist positions) and identity formation (particularly cherished by the advocates of new social movements theory) are too narrowly focused and do not adequately take into account the multiple, coexisting and often confounding identities that enter into a political consciousness (Nash 2001: 233).

This holds true in particular when very general and all-embracing definitions like "*the* peasant movement", "*the* women's movement" or "*the* ethnic movement" are used.

Whereas within "*the*" given movement, plural identities coexist (and often reject the naturalizing classificatory tendencies observers pretend to apply to them) and fluid and multiple agendas are embraced. As the anthropologist John Gledhill confirms that collective subjects engaged in acts that they describe as "resistance" are seldom internally homogeneous (Gledhill 2014). What is more, he adds that the very same "resisting" that our research subjects say they are doing when they struggle, may refer to an array of actions from defending their lands, culture, or religion, to achieving new rights and social dignity in situations of inequality and discrimination (Gledhill 2012: 1). Thence, as the anthropologist Sherry Ortner highlighted, the fact that subaltern groups have their own politics, plays a role in the long-term results of their struggles, even if those struggles originally began from a provisional position of unity (Ortner 1995). The same view is shared by James C. Scott with his formulations about the infrapolitics of subordinated groups, according to which it is quite difficult if not impossible, to refer to *a* process of mobilization or *a* resistance (Scott 1990; Scott 2012). It is rather necessary to speak in terms of a refraction of resistances, that finally correspond to differentials of power segmenting social action (Lazzarino 2012: 206).

Therefore, Luz y Fuerza is not a movement based in ethnicity (e.g., a specific indigenous group, indigenous people of a region/state or all indigenous people of Mexico). It is not a movement based on social class (e.g. proletarian, bourgeois, etc.). It is not a movement based on professional corporations (e.g. peasant, *peones*, labourer, breeders, teachers, etc.). It is not even a religious movement. As the self-definition implies, Luz y Fuerza is a movement of civil resistance, and civil resistance is performed by civil society. Consequently, Luz y Fuerza is a civil society movement open to everybody. A first step in this direction had already come with EZLN, whose ranks before the 1994 uprising were opened to both indigenous and non-indigenous people. At the time, this represented quite an "innovation". But as mentioned, EZLN keeps some mandatory strict conditions to be "on board", whereas Luz y Fuerza chose a more inclusive and open attitude.

Ernesto resorted to a very telling metaphor to illustrate the nature of the Organization in relation to civil society:

«Civil society is like jelly. What happens if you take a jelly in your palm? It slips everywhere. Therefore, what you should do is to give the jelly a frame

[literally: "un marco"] *to contain it. The frame, that is exactly the function the Resistencia fulfils! The Resistencia holds its own structures, which are driving structures and not control structure; they orientate people, not control them. The frame shapes the jelly, but if it squeezes it, the jelly overflows all over. In fact, in the Resistencia there is everything under the sun. There are people affiliated with PRI, PAN, Verde [PVEM], etc. There are many Zapatista compañeros, people of the church, any kind of people! But at the base, there is a wide and common frame [literally: "un grande marco común"] represented by the three fundamental goals of the Resistencia: environmental protection, control of the territory and of the government. Our prospect is the fight against the system. Inasmuch we win a local battle of ours, we are winning a battle against the system»* (Field notes 1.9.2017)

This analogy of "the jelly and the frame" offers a series of crucial elements to analyse. Beginning with "the jelly", a very similarly to what the anthropologist Robert Albro observed in Bolivia with the "*Coordinadora*" (a coalition of civil society organizations at the forefront of the so-called Water War started in the country at the end of the 1990s) (Albro 2005), Luz y Fuerza performs in civil society a role of canal for popular discontent. It gathers people whose discontent is due to a range of specific causes but generally ascribable to "the system". Discontent people of any ethnic group, political affiliation, or religious belief. Discontent people from remote rural villages but also from towns and cities like Palenque, Comitán, San Cristobal and even the state capital, Tuxtla Gutierrez. All united in the same struggle against the system, seeking local solutions to "structural" problems (as mentioned also in the rules of Luz y Fuerza). Therefore, Luz y Fuerza is yet another case confirming the transformation that both theories and practices of social movements have undergone, since 1968. A notable and much discussed turn that happened from an earlier engagement with social politics and the discourse of class, in favour of a politics of democratization expressed in terms of civil society, as the anthropologist Molly Doane observed (Doane 2005: 188). Where for civil society, in simplified Gramscian terms - a field lying outside of the formal mechanisms of the state (*idem*: 189.). And as such, capable to generate counter-hegemonic claims that may transform the state and its ideology, by establishing and practicing democracy at the local level (*ibid.*).

When it comes to the "frame", the metaphor used by Ernesto evokes the "framing theory" that began to circulate in the study of social movements in the second half of the 1980s. As far as I could assess with Ernesto, it was a fortunate conceptual coincidence, maybe influenced by his early studies in sociology, more than an explicit reference to the theory. Yet, some interesting considerations may be deducted. In the first section of chapter 5, dedicated to social movement theories, I described the main features of the framing theory. Here I would just recall that frames are schemas of interpretation making reality meaningful for individuals and finally orienting their action. Every social movement is required to produce a framing effort, capable of unifying a multitude of frames (i.e. visions and positions elaborated by each of the actual or potential activists) and to satisfy expectations and demands from society. In particular, it should achieve consensus by providing a diagnosis *of* and a prognosis *to*, aspects or events perceived as problematic and/or unfair. And it should motivate people to act for a transformative change.

Now, in the case of Luz y Fuerza, the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational tasks are probably not especially original. Among the indigenous and peasant population of Chiapas, which is the sector of society most extensively and deeply affected by poverty and structural violence, it is quite self-evident that "something is wrong" (diagnosis), either in general, either about specific aspects (e.g. electricity, whose costs people are often unable to afford). About what has to change and how (diagnosis), Luz y Fuerza proposes an anti-capitalistic and anti-neoliberal struggle aimed at self-determination and the re-establishment of people sovereignty as a part of a new and alternative Mexico. These arguments and goals are not exclusive to Luz y Fuerza. They are rather shared by other social and political organizations, such as EZLN, by many subscribers of the 6th Declaration of the Selva Lacandona, and even – on paper - by some of those historical social organizations that are now suspected (by Luz y Fuerza) of being coopted and controlled by the government. Finally, the call to arms of motivational framing may correspond to a certain extent, with the specific benefits the membership to Luz y Fuerza ensures (access to electricity, protection, etc.). But most notably, it comes from "*no nos queda de otra*", the no-options-left but to struggle notion we cited in paragraph 7.2, combined with the habitus of social activism depicted at the following 7.3.

Therefore, the most insightful spark from the framing theory probably comes from the concept of "master frame" sociologists David Snow and Robert Benford originally enounced in 1992, with the purpose to account for the empirical observation of the cycles of protests (Snow and Benford 1992):

«A master frame refers to a generic type of collective action frame that is wider in scope and influence than run-of-the-mill social movement frames. Whereas most collective action frames are context specific (e.g., drunk driver frame, cold war frame, exploited worker frame, environmental justice frame, etc.), a master frame's articulations and attributions are sufficiently elastic, flexible, and inclusive enough so that any number of other social movements can successfully adopt and deploy it in their campaigns.»
(Benford 2013: 1)

Since its original conceptualization, master frame has been applied to aspects and phenomena other than cycles of protests. For instance, to analyse cross-movement networking and unity among several social movements. Or, most notably for our case, to show that inclusive and elaborated master frames are essential for broad-based mobilization campaigns, especially when the targeted audiences are diverse (Noonan 1995; Gerhards and Rucht 1992 cited in Benford 2013: 2).

Consequently, the "*grande marco común*" Ernesto alluded to is nothing but a master frame, aligning the multiple and heterogenous frames present in civil society and involved in the Organization. He stated that the master framework corresponds to the three goals of environmental protection, control of the territory and control of the government. Which we may agree with, inasmuch as the Organization includes diverse people from 14 different regions of Chiapas different or very different between them (for geography, micro-climate, economy, threats, etc.), and it is realistic to consider – for instance – that some of them are more concerned and/or skilled with environmental protection, while others with territory control (for security purposes, for example), and others with contrasting the government.

However, enlarging the perspective a little, I think it is more appropriate to look at them not as an end *per se*, but rather as a means. Means, to reach the truly supreme and

definitive goal of Luz y Fuerza: autonomy. Autonomy is therefore the actual master-frame. Environmental protection, territory control and government control are its "elastic, flexible and inclusive" articulations, tightly interconnected and interdependent. In the analysis that follow, we should have the opportunity to see how autonomy constantly emerges as a leitmotiv through them.

8.1.2 Control of The Government

Starting from the latter, "control" of the government means in this case, an action of surveillance, containment and constraint over the state. Surveillance of state activities, to detect potential acts of misrule and/or harmful for people's lives and/or contrary to people's will. Containment of the state, to obstruct initiatives people don't agree with, to limit state prerogatives over people and territories, to challenge and delegitimise state authority. Constraining the state to respect and comply with people's will. «*El pueblo manda y el gobierno obedece*», "people order and the government obey" is the motto made worldly famous by EZLN and pronounced almost as a mantra by Luz y Fuerza militants too, to describe the state-citizens relationship they are pursuing. What finally corresponds to the idea Ernesto expressed when declaring that the Organization doesn't need to take the power, because it will oblige the government to comply with the will of the peoples.

As a matter of fact, the Luz y Fuerza struggle doesn't seek to overthrow the state, nor an "head-on collision" with it. It doesn't struggle to take power, but rather to influence the distribution of power, reaffirming the importance of popular will over institutional will (Holloway 2002): "change the world without taking power", declaimed the sociologist John Holloway in the title of a well-known book of his, about contemporary revolutions (*idem*). It is more about a "war of position" where the goal is to democratize the state progressively and, especially, "from below" (Álvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998). Drawing upon Arjun Appadurai's well known analysis on federation of organizations addressing poverty in Mumbai's slums, we may argue that Luz y Fuerza sets a "political horizon" to be achieved in the middle/long run, through a logic of patience, of cumulative victories and long-term asset-building - a "politics of patience", still in Appadurai's terms (Appadurai 2001: 28-30). Despite the relevant differences with the

"Alliance" that Appadurai observed in Mumbai⁹¹, Luz y Fuerza performs a "deep democracy" too. On the one hand, "deep democracy" «*suggests roots, anchors, intimacy, proximity and locality*» (*idem*: 42) - all aspects featuring the militancy in Luz y Fuerza. And on the other, this latter systematically implements and promotes "*traditional democratic desiderata*" such as inclusion, participation, transparency and accountability (*ibid.*). Also what Molly Doane wrote about the social movements against the Megaprojects planned in Teuhantepec isthmus, and particularly those based in the state of Oaxaca (Doane 2005), applies to Luz y Fuerza. The Organization doesn't challenge the structure. It rather aims to produce transformation on the local politics and economy first, by creating alternative spaces from below or in other terms, spaces of autonomy. This local action is functional and instrumental for the higher change of national and, possibly, global politics and economy. This corresponds to seeking "local solutions" to "structural problems" (*idem*: 189). That is one of the fundamental goals declared in the Luz y Fuerza rules. It also explains Ernesto's vision about every success in the local level as a success against the system.

As David Graeber observed, in doing so, social movements (like Luz y Fuerza, in our case) are proposing a systemic alternative, although they do not explicitly recognize or claim it: the substitution of an unfair, indifferent and unpopular electoral democracy, with a direct participatory democracy, supportive and attentive to people's needs (Graeber 2008). However, this kind of movements do not aspire to substitute the institutions, nor to be the popular expression of them, or their completion. They are more likely to be the expression of a logic of egalitarian and shared governance of power, claiming autonomy in decisions directly regarding them (Boni 2012: 45). What implies between them and the institutions, a constant dialectic which under some circumstances may also reach high levels of intensity. A dialectic animated by two fundamental tools of civil society's "toolbox": civil resistance and direct action (see paragraph 5.1.1).

Among the numerous forms of civil resistance performed by Luz y Fuerza, we may recall the occupation of MOSCAMED installations reported at paragraph 6.3.3, as well

⁹¹ The main differences are: Appadurai's case study is about the urban poor from an over 20 million people-metropolis, whereas Luz y Fuerza is mainly rural; Luz y Fuerza refuses any funding or material support from NGOs, multilateral agencies, governments, local or international donors, or similar; Luz y Fuerza is currently not seeking to establish alliances or partnerships with other social realities abroad.

as the protests held at the migration checkpoint where the young Maximiliano was detained and disappeared, at paragraph 6.4.3. There are all those other cases in which the activists put pressure on authorities to make them complying with the law and execute their duties, as in Francisco Javier story at paragraph 6.4.2. Whereas direct action finally corresponds to the construction of autonomies, as we are going to argue. Yet, keeping clear that civil resistance and direct action are interconnected and interdependent, inasmuch as autonomies can't exist without the base, a robust and effective resistance to the state mechanism of control and repression (Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero 2010a: 160).

Now, as we pointed out in the theoretical section, autonomy can be interpreted either as an end, either as a process. In the case of Luz y Fuerza the definition that applies is undoubtedly that of a process. It represents a mode of struggle and of an organization instrumental in achieving a superior goal: the transformation of social relationships and the construction of an alternative model to the "neoliberal" system (Quintana Guerrero 2010: 159). This is what article 1 of the Organization states, the same actors on the field openly confirm (like Camilo in the extract of the interview at page 220) and put into practice daily. To avoid any misunderstanding, the Organization does not foresee building autonomous communities or municipalities, which could have been interpreted as a concrete goal or arrival point. As Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero (2010b: 262) correctly argued, autonomies are built from everyday life, based on concrete needs and problems, whose resolution by collectively organized people is the very heart of autonomous institutions and - I add - of autonomous discourses. Luz y Fuerza is a problem-solving network, as said. Solving specific and local problem autonomously is a form of struggle against the state and the system. This allows it to overlap the presence of the State or completely substitute it. It divests the State from its institutional functions and prerogatives. It limits the same authority of the State and in some circumstances, even replace it with the people's authority, expressed through the Organization.

Among the many examples possible, one emblematic is provided by the imposition on state authorities of norms decreed by the Organization, in replacement of state norms. In February 2017 for instance, the Organization communicated to state authorities that new limits for merchandise transportation must be observed for Luz y Fuerza members, in

particular in their way back from the Guatemalan commercial hub of La Mesilla (see Annex 3). This is because the limits set by the state were considered excessively low and made it difficult to amortize cross-border transportation expenses. Similarly, the request the Organization received from the same public prosecutor to locate and detain guilty parties of the aggressions on Francisco Javier, clearly represents a substitution of the state in the accomplishment of its (supposedly) exclusive privileges (in this case, the monopoly of physical force), motivated by the lack of rule of law.

But as the writer Raúl Zibechi (among others) has pointed out, «*without an own territory, self-controlled, not even the smallest possibility of autonomic constructions could ever exist*» (quoted in Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero 2010b: 275). An analysis that drives us to approach the second pillar of the Luz y Fuerza master-frame - control of the territory. And we are going to examine it together with the third pillar, environment protection, for the reasons that follow.

8.1.3 Control of the Territory and Environment Protection



Photo 7. Venustiano Carranza.

A road signpost informing that the territory is under control of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo.

Conceptually, territory control and protection of the environment are clearly not the same. There are forms of territory control not related to environment protection. As mentioned at paragraph 6.2, territory control is a very key-condition for the autonomous management of electricity the Organization seeks, for instance. As well as it is essential for security purposes, such as protecting communities from drug trafficking and criminal activities in general, as mentioned earlier too. On the other hand, environmental protection is not exclusively operated through territory control neither. Surely, territory control is also essential to prevent unwanted extractive initiatives targeting local resources at large. And we gave an example in that regard, with the surveillance over the hypothetical opening of a new mine (under the Canadian flag) reported at paragraph 6.2 too. But the Organization also operates to protect the environment by raising awareness about potential threats to the environment in common and daily practices and habits, such as waste disposal and water treatment. It also works in promoting sustainable use of forests and reforestation campaigns. Nevertheless, territory control and environment protection are part of the same discourse.

More generally, the current living conditions of Chiapas peasants among whom majority are Luz y Fuerza activists, is emblematically described by Jorge Santiago, an activist engaged in building solidarity economies and autonomies with Chiapas indigenous communities (Santiago Santiago 2010) for more than 30 years. According to him, Chiapas peasants are experiencing the progressive substitution of traditional crops (corn, beans and coffee) for plantations required by multinational corporations. It is particularly the case of palm oil, parlour palm, eucalyptus, vanilla, cardamom, sorghum, melon and watermelon. More recently, energy crops for the production of biofuels have been strongly promoted too. This trend has been happening particularly in the regions of North, *Selva*, Central Valleys (which are also the regions of Luz y Fuerza higher presence, I add) and Cost. Farmers in these regions found themselves obliged to associate with companies such as Monsanto and Nestlé. In this "business venture" – Santiago reveals - companies put the capital and pay farmers of the land for their low-cost labour, thereby turning them into agricultural day labourers in their own land. The growing use of agrochemicals, deforestation of large areas and the aggressive exploitation of natural resources are causing rapid soil erosion. This problem in conjunction with torrential rains, exposes people to potentially catastrophic events such as inundations and landslides. The overuse of natural resources became more and more

evident. However, land productions decreased and agricultural products are subjected to uncontrolled price variations. This causes food insecurity, due to which undernourishment, diseases and premature deaths raise. A loss of own technologies and a growing dependency from government welfare programs were registered too. In addition, the lack of infrastructures entails settlers' isolation, increases costs of services and determines unfavourable commercial exchanges. At the same time - continues Santiago's analysis - PROCEDE - *Programa de Certificación de Derechos Ejidales* (Certification Programme of *Ejido* Rights), a governmental programme promoting the privatization of community or *ejidos* lands, incessantly spread. Transnational megaprojects such as the Mesoamerica Project continue regardless of people' opinion and will. The Chiapas territory continues to be militarized and several paramilitary groups still operate undisturbed. Last paramilitary attacks known date of December 2017 in the Highlands, in a territory situated between the municipalities of Chenalhó and Chalchihuitán, causing more than 6 thousand displaced persons, in the same area where the Acteal massacre took place in 1997⁹².

That's how things are in Chiapas, but not only there. Threats over tropical forest, biodiversity, water, seeds, energy technologies, food, rivers, and seas, in addition to contamination generated by extractive industries like oil and mining and transboundary pollution, together with climate change and global warming, are phenomena happening at a global level. Their visibility and direct consequences are locally variable, but in many parts of the world they became the object of intense struggles (see Haenn, Wilk, and Harnish, eds., 2016) since decades ago. More than ten years ago, Arturo Escobar highlighted that all these struggles usually share two fundamental features (Escobar 2006: 7) First, they often oppose rich against poor within regions, countries and across borders. Moreover, often in the frontline of the poor formations we encounter women (often as leading figures), and indigenous or ethnic "minority" communities (*ibid.*). Second, most of the times they entail the questioning of capitalistic economic models, on one side, together with mobilizations around, or in defense of, local cultures on the

⁹² Bellinghausen, H. 2018. "Asociaciones civiles exigen desarmar y castigar a paramilitares de Chenalhó". La Jornada. January 2. <http://www.jornada.com.mx/2018/01/02/politica/009n1pol> - accessed 1.7.2018

Bellinghausen, H. 2017. "Sigue desplazamiento forzado y violento en Chenalhó y Chalchihuitán, alertan médicos". La Jornada. December 22. <http://www.jornada.com.mx/2017/12/22/politica/010n1pol> - accessed 1.7.2018

other (*ibid.*). That's why environmental conflicts (of any kind) always involve the three interrelated dimensions of economy, culture and ecology (*ibid.*). With difference (and its negations) playing a key-role in the dynamic between them.

Globalization – continues Escobar – finally hasn't razed differences to the ground, as once feared (*idem*: 7). Yet, the more diversity is affirmed, especially by subaltern groups (economically poor and culturally oppressed), which constitute the world's majority, the greater the powerful and ruling (rich) groups tend to exclude and dominate them, by further limiting their access to resources and opportunities for survival and development (*idem*: 7-10). Conversely, the greater ruling groups are open to a measure of economic equality at the benefit of subaltern group, the more they intensify the efforts to deny differences through assimilation processes. This discloses two levels of conflict involving already and contemporary the economic and cultural dimension: economic distribution conflicts and cultural distribution conflicts (*ibid.*). What's very interesting is that a growing number of critical analysts indicated a fundamental ecological dimension at the base of contemporary cultural and economic crises, namely: the conflicts over access and control of natural resources, in other terms, ecological distribution conflicts (Martinez-Alier 2002 quoted in Escobar 2006: 8).

However the relationship between these three conflictual at stake here, is a circular and complex one that is not univocal. The production under unequal distribution of wealth, entails the negation of ecological integrity, since the time and requirements of capitalistic production are far different from those of natural processes (Escobar 2006: 9). Similarly, the production under unequal distribution of wealth negates the cultural meanings and processes (including ontological ones, as we'll see later on this paragraph) locally investing the natural world and determining how people think, live and use nature (*ibid.*). The fact that ecological distribution conflicts have most of the times appeared when poor communities mobilized to defend their environment as a source of livelihood, led some ecologists to describe these circumstances as "environmentalism of the poor" (Martinez-Alier 2002; Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997). A definition that become quite popular since its first enunciation, and surely applies to Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo too.

All these levels of distribution conflicts unfold over territories, that nowadays – affirms the economist Ana Ceceña - are the arena of two fundamental competitions (Ceceña 2010: 196-198). The first competition is inside the same global financial capitalism - territory grabbing is essential for international competitors. The key-components of reproduction process and the main sources of power today are elements permanently situated in territory. Not in all territories, just in some. They can't be moved elsewhere to be exploited, thus requiring the possession of the territory itself. We are talking in particular of water, oil, gas, germ plasm and strategic metals. These are the pieces defining contemporary hierarchies and geographies of power laying the bases for future ones. Territories are often inhabited by populations and not infrequently by populations that settled there for thousands of years. Therefore, local populations become the first and direct victims of the war between capitalists, being subjugated, delegitimized and dismantled by water privatizations, expulsions, relocations and by being deprived of the bases of their economies, as well as of their historic and symbolic landmarks (*ibid.*). By consequence, the second level of competition for territories necessarily opposes institutions and actors of "neoliberal" capitalistic power on one side, and people on the other (*ibid.*). People struggle to survive and to assert their right to live in a territory and generally in a world with a diminishing subsistence base (Nash 2001: 20). At the same time, they struggle to affirm a vision of the world, of a social life, of nature, of the relationship between society and environment, completely different than the one endorsed by capitalism (Ceceña 2010: 196-198). Therefore, we may identify a material level of confrontation based on and inseparable from a fundamental level which is ontological.

As, Arturo Escobar, once again, remarkably explained, however it entails economic, technologic, cultural, ecologic aspects and often, even the armed force, the state and the capital carry out and promote an ontological occupation of territories (Escobar 2016: 15; Escobar 2014). They are bearers of the ontology associated with what John Law defined as the "one-world world" (Law 2015). It is a world structured around the absolute (and absolutistic) affirmation of "euromodernity" - a capitalistic, rationalistic, liberal, secular, patriarchal, white and of course, eurocentric modernity (Escobar 2016: 15). A world that assumed the right to be "the" World, subjugating all the other worlds and even worst, condemning them to absence and not-existence (Santos 2014: 179) - a world in which there is room for one world only. This one-world ontology, made of individuals

and markets, typically aims to convert wild environments into "nature" and successively nature into "resource" (Escobar 2016: 19). Ignoring the material nature on which life is based and converting organic and non-human sites into objects to own, destroy and pillage. And linking transformed environments with global markets, for profit (*ibid.*).

On the other side of this ontological confrontation there are people like Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo's, in good company with many indigenous, Afro-descendent, peasant, urban poor communities, especially from Latin America. Whom instead bears an opposite ontology: a relational ontology or in other terms, an ontology of relational worlds (Escobar 2016: 14-16). Worlds into which nothing pre-exists the relationships constituting them. Which means that things and beings exist only in relation with others and they do not have a life of their own (*ibid.*). Worlds that the anthropologist Tim Ingold defined as "without objects"(Ingold 2011: 131), in which all kind of living beings depend on others for their subsistence, and are weaved together in an enormous fabric in continuous evolution (*idem.*: 10). Worlds that are not occupied by living beings, but rather inhabited from them (*idem.*: 71). And the bind of inhabitants' paths contributes to the continuous evolution of the big fabric (*ibid.*). In relational words common lands do exist, which is not the case in worlds considered just as lifeless places to occupy and transform in commodity under the tyranny of private property and profit (Escobar 2016: 18). Contrary to the one-world ontology, relation ontology contemplates the existence and the co-existence of a plurality of different worlds: a "pluri-verse" (plurality of universes) instead of a "uni-verse" (unique universe) (Santos 2014; Escobar 2016; Escobar 2014b). What is perfectly resumed in one of the most famous neo-Zapatista maxims: «*un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*» (a world where many worlds fit) and which has been enunciated and analysed to the core by the sociologist Boaventura da Sousa Santos' theoretical framework of "epistemologies of the south" (Santos 2014). Accordingly, the production and the affirmation of the notion of pluri-verse has been allowed by the persistence of non-dualistic philosophies, in particular among indigenous peoples from different regions of the world (*idem.*). Philosophies better known as world views (*cosmovisiones*, in Spanish) and founded on a deeply relational understanding of life (Escobar 2016: 23). *Ubuntu* in some regions of Africa and The *Pachamama* from the Andean peoples are among the most known examples (*ibid.*). In the case of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, local *cosmovisión* play a considerable

role too⁹³. During my fieldwork and in particular among indigenous communities, activists repeatedly made reference to *nuestra cosmovisión* (our worldview), *cosmovisión de los pueblos* (indigenous peoples' worldview) or to *nuestra madre tierra* (our Mother Earth). Either in responding to some questions of mine, about the Organization or just spontaneously sharing with me aspects of their lives or culture, they referred to the Mayan *cosmovisión*, as they all belong to Maya peoples. Here is an extract of a telling exchange I had on the matter, with Ernesto:

«To understand our Resistance, there is one fundamental aspect you should consider. Our people are mainly indigenous, they are all sons of the ancient Mayas. The Mayan cosmovisiones play a crucial role in motivating indigenous people to join an organization like ours, and even in the way they live the militancy into it. In their cosmovisión, there are four cardinal points, each of them corresponding to one of the four elements: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air. In the very centre of this four points, there is the individual. But he is not the owner of the world, neither its ruler! He is just a part of the world, he belongs to it, as any other component. From that position in the centre, what he has to do is to stay in harmony with everything around him: with the environment, with the sky, with the wind, with God, with every side of Nuestra Madre Tierra... He has to keep the harmony with this "whole". [...] For sure, Mexican government together with the big chiefs of the capitalist power, stand against such a vision, due to the political meanings and consequences this latter entails. But for the indigenous people it does not exist "una lucha buena y una lucha mala" [a right social struggle or a bad one]. Even those who stands against us, are complementary to us! Facing them, with know we are right. Without them, we couldn't know we were right. Us and them: we are both part of the same whole.» (Field notes 26.12.2016)

⁹³ We preferred not to bind this study to a major theoretical diapositive such as that of ethno-development (*etnodesarrollo*), due to the exclusive role this latter confers to the "ethnic group" as «the political and administrative entity with the authority over its territory and the capacity to rule over its project of development, within a process of growing autonomy and self-management» (UNESCO 1981). As we carefully made clear, Luz y Fuerza is not a social movement structured around any "ethnic base". Nevertheless, valuable contributions produced within the discourse of *etnodesarrollo*, such as Bonfil Batalla's ones on cultural control, were acknowledged (Bonfil Batalla 1995: 464-480).

Very briefly, the Mayan worldview identifies with four corners of the universe, each of which is oriented to one of the four cardinal points. The structure of the universe is vertically organized at three intercommunicating levels: the *supramundo* (upper-world) kingdom of divinities, the *mundo* (world) where human beings live and the *inframundo* (infra-world) inhabited divinities related to death and destination for the dead. The universe is conceived as a living, acting and moving whole, unique and indivisible, into which every single component (including human beings) is in balance with all the others. Balance and the harmony between all the components of the universe must be always actively conserved. Humans are all sons and daughters of the same Mother Earth. They are made of the fundamentals elements water, air, sun and earth. Then they supremely respect them as they are part of the same whole. Humans are just passing through the world, and everything existing in the world is sacred. Therefore, everything in the world must be respected and not destroyed⁹⁴. This clearly marks an immense distance from the one-world cosmology and the question of territory.

Raúl Zibechi asserted that contemporary social movements from Latin America are building new territorialities characterized for being different from the territories of the capital and of the state (Zibechi 2008: 200). This means that land-space stops to be considered as a means of production, to become a political-cultural creation where different social relationships unfold (*ibid.*). This is due to the fundamental shift occurred over last 60 years, from struggling for land, to struggling for territory (*idem*: 76). This has coincided with two further fundamental shifts: from struggling for rights, to struggling for autonomy and self-government; from resistance to domination(s), to affirmation of difference(s) (*idem*: 201). An example of this socio-political and cultural change could be found in the evolution of peasants' claims in Chiapas we briefly visited at the previous chapter: after recovering relevant quantities of land through president Cardenas' land reform, their struggle progressively turned to autonomy. Due to the fact that land distribution was never really completely and properly accomplished. And because they realized that the only solution for the deep injustice characterizing the society in which they live (including land-distribution issues), was self-government.

⁹⁴ For a more accurate and exhaustive knowledge on the *cosmovisiones* of indigenous groups from Chiapas, I recommend: Medina 2000; Albores Zárate and Broda 1997; López Austin 1996; Lenkersdorf 1996.

8.1.4 *Place Politics* and the Autonomic Gigsaw-Puzzle

Luz y Fuerza responds to the material and ontological offensive of the state and the capital over the territory-environment, implementing what Arturo Escobar defined as "place politics" (Escobar 2010: 86). These are an emerging form of politics bearing on a new political imaginary affirming a logic of the difference (instead of a standard/universal one) and the potentiality of a plurality of actors and actions, on the everyday life. According to this vision, before being nodes of a global and totalizing system, places are sites of living cultures, economies and environment. In the formulation of the duo of economic geographers Gibson-Graham (quoted in Escobar 2010: 86), politics of place - frequently joined by an heterogeneous range of actors, from feminists, to environmentalist, to people committed to alternative forms of life in general - represent lucid responses to "empire politics" (quite diffused in the leftist thought too) according to which empire can be only faced as such, in its totality, underestimating and discrediting localized actions. But places are never totally capitalist and in this resides their potential to become something else (*ibid.*). To use the terms of the modernity-colonialist "project", an externality to the imperial globality do exist and it is not reducible to the terms of capitalist modernity (*ibid.*). In this framework, the more local alternatives to capitalist modernity expand their spaces of re/existence, the more they debilitate the "one-world project of empire" (Escobar 2016: 22). That again, gives reason to Ernesto's declaration about every local battle won as a success against the system. But it also completely gives reason to the anti-capitalistic position Luz y Fuerza declares within its founding principles (see article 1 of the internal rules quoted at chapter 6).

As a matter of fact, Luz y Fuerza faces the government and the capital in selected "places" we may think as "battlefields", grounded in local, micro, specific territories, where it alternates without interruption, civil resistance and the construction of autonomies, as different but interdependent moments of the same fight. Among them, we surely count electricity, which is probably the main battlefield as it has been the very first one, common to all regions of the Organization and a kind of distinguishing feature of it (see the case of the 24 families deprived of electricity). This is in addition to human rights protection (see the cases of Francisco Javier and Maximiliano) and the prevention of "extractivist" initiatives, megaprojects, land grabbing and threats to environment in general (see the case of MOSCAMED).

This sum of "micro-battles" in the different battlefields, pictures a medium-level offensive, the state level of Chiapas: micro-battles are already fought on the territories of nearly 70 municipalities on the overall 124 of the state, in 14 different regions. Of course, forces on the field and the degree of autonomy they are reaching are not the same in all territories, communities and regions. But what is clear is that the autonomous project Luz y Fuerza is building goes beyond communities. It is in fact, certainly different from Zapatista MAREZ, where an integral form of autonomy is pursued and autonomous communities try to be completely independent in all fields (see Hernández Navarro 2010). Luz y Fuerza autonomic project might be rather defined as an autonomic jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces are:

1. The contingent solutions Luz y Fuerza autonomously build to respond people's selected major needs (the above defined battlefields).
2. The forms of autonomy *ejidos* and indigenous communities benefit from, by law; together with pre-existing realities and experiences of autonomy, undertaken by communities, production cooperatives, social organizations, etc.;
3. The forms of autonomy reached under the initiative of the Organization (mainly the autonomous management of electricity).
4. The coordination and the reciprocal reinforcement of the three previous elements, with a common and unique strategic direction articulated over the three levels of community, regions and state.

These "pieces" occupies interstitial spaces, whose empties are opened by:

1. the systematic lack of rule of law (see Chapter 2, paragraph 2.6);
2. the isolation and the difficult accessibility of large territories, together with the relatively low density of population in Chiapas;
3. the peripheral position of Chiapas in relation to the centre of the power (Mexico city).

And on the other side, limited by:

1. the state, with its formal infrastructure of governance and control, and its rather informal but very actual apparatus of clientelism and paternalism;
2. social and political organizations co-opted by the state;
3. multinational companies;
4. the still high militarization;
5. paramilitaries groups;
6. drug cartels, whose presence and interests are becoming more and more evident also in Chiapas.

The Organization finally seeks to make state institutions "surrounded" by the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle. That explains what Ernesto meant when he said that taking power was not going to be required, because state institutions will be obliged to comply with popular will. That should also and finally hinder or prevent unwanted capitalistic operations on the field, because state institutions, complying with popular will, would deny them authorizations and conditions to proceed.

Although Luz y Fuerza doesn't look for a "head-on" confrontation with the Mexican state, this autonomic jigsaw puzzle does represent a relevant challenge to the authority of the state. First of all and historically, the Mexican state responded to autonomous claims (mainly from indigenous groups) by granting communal autonomies, but never regional autonomies, because the latter may become strong enough to challenge the state and national government policies (Mattiace 1997: 46). We saw how Luz y Fuerza goes far beyond the community dimension. But especially, the biggest challenge is again on the ontological level. The Spanish for jigsaw puzzle is "*rompecabezas*", which literally means brain-teaser. That's the image best portrays what Luz y Fuerza should look like to state institutions. Because it seeks a form of autonomy which is communal, regional and state-wide, but at the same time, it is not. An interstitial autonomic puzzle that is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. In addition, it has no leaders nor physical "headquarters" or "offices". It operates in the most remote villages as well as in the main state cities. Socially, it is fully inclusive, but politically elusive, as it has no fixed or permanent alliances. It participates in the 6th Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, but it is independent from the EZLN. At the same time, it cooperates with

catholic church and religious social movements (not only catholic) whenever suitable. In what specifically concerns the relations with the state, Luz y Fuerza is not interested in negotiating or receiving benefits from the government. It just demands respect from the government, not recognition. Because it has already received recognition by civil society and this is the only kind of recognition it conceives. And its autonomic process is a de facto autonomy, not at all de jure. The only possible legal recognition would have to come from the application of San Andrés Peace Accords by the government. An eventuality still very unlikely to happen (Santiago Santiago 2010) and by consequence, permanently legitimating Luz y Fuerza's struggle.

From a strict political point of view, the autonomy Luz y Fuerza performs is an "indigenous relational autonomy" - a definition coined by anthropologist Astrid Ulloa who observed concrete cases of indigenous autonomies in Colombia (Ulloa 2010). It represents an "evolution" of the original concept of "relational autonomy" earlier expressed by political scientists such as Roberto Russel and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian (Russel and Tokatlian 2002). According to Ulloa, in the Colombian and similar contexts, indigenous peoples cannot exercise full autonomy (Ulloa 2010: 173). This entails on one hand, partial and instrumental processes of recognition for indigenous autonomies (*ibid.*), and the other, a partial and limited governmentality (*ibid.*). As a result, in such cases the degree of self-determination and self-government indigenous communities are able to reach in their territories, necessarily depends on the required relations, negotiations and the participations they are able to set with the state and other relevant local actors (*ibid.*). In this sense their autonomies are necessarily "relational". The autonomy exercised by Luz y Fuerza is conspicuously partial and fragmentary, and does not fit the whole "jigsaw puzzle". It is an autonomy based on a dense weave of relations with the state and with other social actors mentioned above. In addition, the activists exercising this autonomy are mainly indigenous. In sum, it is an indigenous relational autonomy. This cannot be truly considered the exact translation in politics, of relational ontologies. Yet, it appears to me that there is a sort of affinity between these two levels.

8.2 Electricity in the Spotlight

Whenever associating electricity with a discourse of building "alternative worlds" or "alternative forms of life" to oppose to "capitalist modernity" – as we have done here - it is unavoidable to evocate the famous and striking slogan Vladimir Ilyich Lenin pronounced on November 21, 1920, at the Conference of the Province of Moscow of the Bolshevik Communist Party of Russia: «*Communism is Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country*» (Lenin 1966: 419). The philosopher Toni Negri recently proposed a reading of Lenin's words befitting the case of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. At least, Negri disagrees partially with the traditional interpretations according to which soviets and their productive efforts had to be subordinated and conducive to the "*urgent needs of socialist accumulation*" (Negri 2017) - i.e. of the systematic industrialization of the country. Lenin's slogan cannot be reduced to the imperative of increasing «*the fixed, energy-related component of the organic composition of capital as a necessary foundation for any industrial expansion*» (*ibid.*). Negri, argues further «*it reveals a fundamental Marxist theme: a social revolution cannot succeed without the support of an adequate material foundation.*» (*ibid.*).

Consequently, if we attribute "adequate material foundation" with the wider understanding of material living conditions - instead of mere mode of production – the connections with the case of Luz y Fuerza become evident. As we explained earlier, poor living conditions experienced by activists of Luz y Fuerza represents a determinant motivation driving their activism. The improvement of these conditions is clearly part of the "social revolution" the Organization pursues. In this sense, having or not having electricity clearly makes a significant difference in terms of material living conditions. Nevertheless, as already declared, considering Luz y Fuerza as a mere movement for electricity would be both reductive and incorrect. This explains my choice for conducting the analysis primarily through some key-social, political and ontological rubric , and eventually approaching the theme of electricity. To appreciate the kind and the extension of this potential input, a brief overview on the relationships between anthropology and energy is due.

In the last years, two of the world major anthropological reviews, dedicated a special focus on the anthropology of energy. In 2014, the Anthropological Quarterly (AA. VV.

2014) published a special collection on "energopower", that is in short, *«how energetic forces and infrastructures interrelate with institutions and ideations of political power»*, whose contemporary main modalities are fuel and electricity (Boyer 2014: 309). In 2015, Cultural Anthropology (Allison and Piot, eds., 2015) published a special issue on the anthropology of electricity. More recently, in December 2017, the website of Cultural Anthropology hosted a series entitled "Our lives with electric things" to which several anthropologist from all over the world often granted passionate contributions (Cross et al. 2017). What represents - at least at my view - a clear sign of a growing attention of the discipline towards the themes of energy. Yet, it is not like anthropologists have "discovered" energy as an object of investigation only in the 2010s. If we embrace the reconstruction of the affair between anthropology and energy proposed by the anthropologist Dominic Boyer (Boyer 2014), those scholars animating the current trend would be yet the third generation of anthropologists interested in energy.

The first generation was mainly defined by the work of the anthropologist Leslie White, according to whom energy was a conceptual key to understanding everything about human life, history and also the entire universe (White 1959; 1949). Everything in the universe may be described in terms of energy and organization of energy, according to White. Energy therefore played a crucial role his efforts to resurrect evolutionary theory in anthropology: *«cultural development varies directly as the amount of energy per capita per year harnessed and put to work»* (White 1943: 338 quoted in Boyer 2014: 310) states his key equation. However, he has the merit to sow the seeds of a view that had high but still mostly unexplored and critical potential: the idea that modern capitalist society is firstly and foremost a fuel society and that all its achievements have been based on fuel consumption, such that unrestrained fuel consumption became an archetypal throughout its culture (Boyer 2014: 311).

The second generation of anthropologist of energy emerged between the 1970s and 1980s, without a true continuity of the previous one. The influence of White stayed, particularly through the networks of Michigan anthropology. However, scholars of the new generation were clearly not much interested in advancing energetic and thermodynamic cultural theory. They rather preferred to highlight the cultural and social impacts of energy development for indigenous peoples, particularly in relation to

nuclear power, uranium mining and oil extraction. They therefore included energy in wider debates that would have remained central until today, for both anthropology of energy specifically and anthropology in general: we especially refer to debates over the right of indigenous peoples, resource exploitation and environmental impacts (Sawyer and Gomez (eds.) 2012; Schoepfle et al. 1984a, 1984b). But still, the topic of energy didn't succeed in establishing itself as a mainstream interest of the anthropological discipline (Boyer 2014).

Now, Boyer affirms that from these two generations and in particular, from the timing of their appearances, a first lesson can be drawn. They both have accompanied critical, vulnerable or transitional moments in dominant regimes of energopower. White's work accompanied the nuclear energy revolution, with its corollary of hopes and fears, about its creative and destructive power respectively. While for the second generation the context was what the anthropologist Laura Nader, one of its main representatives, named the "energy decade" of the 1970s (Nader 2010: 523). In this case the disruptive event was represented by the oil shocks of 1973 that together with the creation of OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), occasioned the end of the geopolitics of neo-imperial control over the Middle East and its subsoil resources (see Mitchell 2011). The energetic crisis of the 1970s encouraged a fleeting political interest towards the exploration of alternative energy sources. That captured the interest of anthropologists. But since the 1980s political powers across the industrialized world eventually opted again for carbon and nuclear energy (Boyer 2014). Then anthropology of energy entered again in a kind of hibernation (but still with some valuable works published). That lasted until the second half of the 2000s, when signs of renaissance were finally displayed and the third generation of anthropologist of energy appeared. Thus, what energetic epoch making change is this latter accompanying? In a word: Anthropocene.

Made popular by chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer, Anthropocene defines an age in which human industry has come to equal and probably even surpass the processes of geology, and in which humans pursuing the fundamental goal of conquering nature have become a major force in its destruction (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Haraway and others 2015; Latour 2014a). The Anthropocene therefore acts as a scientific label given by earth scientists to the current epoch of unprecedented

anthropogenic planetary change. But also, as a political label defined to call attention to this change entailing notions of agency and responsibility in contemporary life (Moore 2016; Latour 2014b). Despite a well-financed and high-level backed industry of climate change scepticism (see Boykoff 2011), the "facticity" of Anthropocene is more and more recognized in everyday knowledge, especially due to the recurrent extreme weather and pollution events (Boyer 2014: 317).

Anthropology and human sciences in general - in the acknowledgement *of* and as a reaction *to* such a structural critical conjuncture involving culture, biology, climate, energy, economy and politics - during last decade intensified (again) researches and debates on the multiple sides and consequences of the use of energy. Among the many relevant contributions investing a wide variety of topics, following Boyer we may mention: ethical considerations of climate change (Chakrabarty 2009; Jamieson 2011), the formation of climatological expertise (Edwards 2010; Parker 2010), connections between carbon fuels and political power (Mitchell 2011; Klieman 2008), critical investigations of "petroculture" (Szeman 2007), limits and potentialities of the ecological theory (Morton 2010; Taylor 2009), sustainable and low carbon urban design (Davis 2010; Wheeler and Beatley 2004); the presence of fuel in literature and the arts (Pinkus 2008; PMLA 2011); and - I add – the complex processes of appropriation of commons (e.g. wind) for the production of "clean" energy (Jaramillo 2013).

This third wave of interest on energy in anthropology is still in full swing. Energy is a sub-field of the discipline undergoing a relevant expansion and a flourishing production. Also in consideration is how energy politics have become an acute "matter of concern" (Latour 2004) over the past years. Of all examples, the entry into office of Trump's administration in the USA with a declaredly negative position about climate change (O'Gorman 2018). This caused a significant blow to the (few) hopes generated by the Paris Agreement reached on 2015 (UN 2015).

Fossil fuels and the role of these in global politics have so far catalysed the interest of anthropologist engaged with energy and society (Winther and Wilhite 2015). But also the second "branch" of energopower, electricity, is gaining attention and from different point views. The special issue of Cultural Anthropology I cited at the beginning, grants a good insight on current topics and approaches within what we may call the

anthropology of electricity. Among them, we recall: ontological and material reflections on electric energy and on its physical presence (and absence) in our lives (Anusas and Ingold 2015); the relationships between electrical infrastructure (the grid), "electropolitics" and state governance (Boyer 2015); the markets of electricity based on the Locational Marginal Prices and the potential horizontal and participatory developments of the forthcoming "smart-grid" (Özden-Schilling 2015); the social, cultural, economic and political implications of the arrival of electricity in places beforehand not reached (Winther and Wilhite 2015); the exploration of social and political arrangements around electricity in complex realities from the Global south (Gupta 2015a).

As the anthropologist Akhil Gupta wrote, electricity is absolutely taken for granted in contemporary world and the questions about if and why it is desirable are not even up for discussion (Gupta 2015a: 158). Even radical environmental perspectives on climate change and Anthropocene, hardly question the necessity and the suitability of the access to electricity (*idem*). In the pioneering and surely promising field of the anthropology of electricity, I find that significant attention was paid to the infrastructural side of electricity and its tight entanglements with state power. This path of investigation can surely rely on the already solid background of the anthropology of infrastructure. As Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand and Akhil Gupta (2015) noted, infrastructure has long been a central conceptual tool for critical theory and the analysis of social life more broadly. Just think about, for instance, Marxian references to infrastructure in theorizing capitalism (see Althusser 1971). Yet, eventually infrastructure ceased to be considered only as a metaphor. And roads, water pipes, electric grids, bridges and fiber-optic became the objects of theory-making and ethnographic practice (Appel, Anand and Gupta 2015). As early as in 1999, Susan Leigh Star (1999) openly called for an ethnography of infrastructure, indeed. For sure, the recent and promising horizon of the anthropology of infrastructures also rests on a disciplinary past (Anand, Gupta and Appel 2018: 7). Since the beginning of the discipline, anthropologists have looked to the relationship between infrastructure, environment and modernity. We may mention cultural materialists such as the already quoted Leslie White (1943), or Marvin Harris (1966), Julian Steward (1955), and even Marcel Mauss (2008). All these predecessors were critical of modernization discourse of "lag and lack" (Ananda, Gupta, Happel, Eds., 2018: 7). And they attentively investigated the ways into which energy, irrigation,

and other technical systems, mediated relations between local environments, labor, and cultural practices (*ibid.*). Later, Clifford Geertz (1972) drew attention on how these relations may produce different kinds of persons and political authorities. And more recently, Stephen Lansing (1991) – engaged with Geertz's work – analyzed the "engineered landscapes" of irrigation in Bali and demonstrated how these infrastructure regimes humanize nature, producing durable political institutions.

The anew ethnographic attention to infrastructure, is due to the property of material and political lives of infrastructure to reveal fragile relations between people, things, and the institutions (both public and private) that seek to govern them (Anand, Gupta and Happel 2018: 3). Being "more-than-human relations" – as the geographer Bruce Braun argued (Braun 2005) - infrastructure emerges as a fruitful location to examine the constitution, maintenance, and reproduction of political, economic, and social life (Anand, Gupta, Appel, Eds., 2018: 4). Ethnographic regards to infrastructure reveal that politics are not exclusively shaped by juridico-political practices, but rather, they are also made of pipes, energy grids, and toilets (*ibid.*). According to von Schnitzler (2015), such an attention is truly and classically anthropological insofar it offers a frame to critically rethink the political. All this explains why infrastructure has been recognized as an insightful and helpful field to theorize key anthropological questions investing affect, aspiration, and imagination; about modernity, development and temporality; and about the production of states and markets, as well as of the public and private (Appel, Anand and Gupta 2015). To use Appadurai's (2013) terms, infrastructure tells much about people's aspirations, anticipations, and imaginations of the future: what they wish their society should be like, and how the government may decide to deal with that vision (Gupta 2015b). Finally, the current ethnographic interest towards infrastructure is also due to this latter's performance as a technology of liberal rule (Anand, Gupta and Appel 2018: 4). As the historian Patrick Joyce demonstrated, the construction and management of infrastructure acted as a key-technology of government that resulted essential to the performance of liberalism. (Mitchell 2003).

Focusing again on electricity, the computer scientist Paul Dourish and the anthropologist Genevieve Bell affirmed that infrastructures «*drive and maintain standardization, reflect and embody historical concentrations of power and control, and are instruments through which access is manipulated*» (Dourish and Bell 2007: 416-

417). The anthropologist Brian Larkin also explained the "peculiar ontology" of infrastructures as being "things and also the relation between things" (Larkin 2013: 329). Thus, the contemporary power of electricity, which is channelled through grids, power lines and substations, is infrastructure par excellence (Boyer 2014: 532). Additionally, as the anthropologists Tanja Winther and Harold Wilhite have argued, electricity is also associated with the provider, usually the state, and the arrival of electricity may crucially affect the state-citizen relationship. Drawing from their own fieldworks, the two scholars maintain that in Zanzibar, the coming of the grid to rural areas during the 1980s and 1990s, offered the government a new efficient tool for strengthening its political control over the population (Winther and Wilhite 2015: 571). And following the same analytical path, they recognize in electricity a symbol of power: *«because electricity's infrastructures are physically heavy, costly, and enduring their configuration continues to remind observers of who holds power» (idem: 572).*

It seems that the dimensions so far privileged and especially explored have been of electricity as a means of control; a majestic symbol of the state power and presence, as a biopolitical tool, or better, as what Dominic Boyer proposed, of electricity as a modality of "energopower" (Boyer 2014). In Boyer's view, energopower is not an alternative to Foucault's biopower. It is rather a concept that bridges materiality, discourse and history, and it implements a multiattentional method (Boyer 2010). Thanks to this futures, it should help in undermine impasses among the analytics of modernity and power of Marxian and Foucauldian inspiration (Boyer 2014). Therefore, it looks like anthropologists have attentively acknowledged what also Mathma Gandhi worried about electrical power, namely the centralized control over the lives of people (especially in remote villages) this latter would have brought, together with preventing communities to reach self-sufficiency for their energy needs (Kale 2014: 28).

In turn, the potential social and political enabling power electricity may offer - as energy and even as infrastructure - is still not much explored, as well as the agency of the users in what concerns the access to electricity, but also in the management of the power and of the same infrastructure. As Boyer recognizes, the grid is not just a state instrument, namely a tool invented to accomplish a government agenda (Boyer 2015), on the contrary, the grid also helps *«to groove political efficacy, subjectivity, and affiliation» (idem: 533)* and *«must be understood as the organization of enabling power*

that allows any invention of statecraft to occur in the first place» (ibid.). "Any invention of statecraft" means not only from the state, but also for instance, autonomous statecraft from below - from the bosom of civil society. And if - as Boyer sustains - electropolitics infuse governance, this latter has not necessarily to be central state's governance: it could be popular governance too. Thence, what I would like to highlight, and I wish it will be further investigate, is that the users or consumers, may not be mere passive objects of politics conveyed through the electric infrastructure. On the contrary, they may resist. And they may even challenge the supposedly one-directional flow of power running along the grid, from the declared centre to its (almost) infinite and progressively more peripheral nodes. The case of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo has much to teach in regard.

Electricity has acted and still acts as a trigger for the social protest conducted by Luz y Fuerza. It is the glue for the heterogeneous membership of the Organization. It is at the same time the ends and means of the struggle, insofar it is a concrete problem to solve for many, as well as a part of a more fundamental struggle. In fact, electricity is the main "battlefield" over which Luz y Fuerza challenges both the state and capital simultaneously (because CFE, the Mexican electric utility is still state-owned but, open to private local and foreign capitals participation and subject to neoliberal market policies, since 1992) (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2016: 28) through the construction of an autonomic alternative. An autonomy investing not only the "flow" (i.e. energy) passing through the grid, its use and management, but also the same infrastructure a presented earlier, is usually considered a quintessential tool of state governance, control and dominion. Luz y Fuerza, whenever it is strong enough, takes control of the infrastructure and in this way "disarms" the government of such a tool. Secondly, it inverts the normally top-down, centre-periphery, state-citizen direction of the political power running along the grid to send at the opposite extreme the expression of deep-rooted discontent and, above all, challenge to state authority. The structure of the grid, the network or better, a series of interconnected networks, allow for an important alteration or even subversion of the traditional power relations more than in many other battlefields.

As the anthropologists Anusas and Ingold wrote, electrical wiring give us a world which is more comparable to a woven textile (Anusas and Ingold 2015: 550; Ingold

2010). In a woven textile, it is not possible to exclude, eliminate, isolate one or more binds without altering the aspect of the textile and possibly compromising its whole structure and functionality - in other words, without causing holes. The same occurs with the electric grid. With physical access to the territory denied by Luz y Fuerza, the provider can hardly cut off from distance, some selected houses in a neighbourhood, without at the same time cutting off the very next households that do pay electricity. Neither can it cut off an entire community in resistance, without disconnecting the next community in the way of the electric wires. That is, without causing holes in the electric woven textile which is the grid. According to Winther and Whilite, given the features of the electric infrastructure being physically heavy, costly and enduring (Winther and Wilhite 2015: 572), it is materially problematic and economically unsustainable to double or overlap existing infrastructure, in order to isolate and bypass households, villages, towns, and regions belonging to Luz y Fuerza.

In order to have autonomous access and management over the grid – as it happens in several areas of Chiapas - Luz y Fuerza needs to keep territory control. Therefore, in this case too, the grid "infuses governance", because it demands, prompts, and promotes, territory control. As a matter of fact, the first and most compelling motivation to control territory is to prevent CFE from cutting electricity of users and communities in resistance. But once they control the territory in order to prevent access to CFE, they also preventing (or at least struggling against) any unwanted presence, activity and exploitation by the government and by capitalism. In this case, the grid brings a governance which, is not only popular and not governmental, but even opposed to the government. That is because as seen earlier, territory control is one of the pillars of Luz y Fuerza politics of the place, through which the Organization fights against capitalist modernity.

The semiotic value of the electric infrastructure as symbol of power is turned in favour of Luz y Fuerza and against the state. In Mexico, such a "show of power" (to freely quote Marc Abélès) (see Abélès 2007) is made possible and magniloquent by the fact that the infrastructure is still completely open-air and visible, even in Mexico City. Whereas in most of European countries and in North-American metropolis electricity disappeared from the view and in general, from all senses (Anusas and Ingold 2015), hidden under grey pavement and behind white walls. The praxis meter removals by Luz

y Fuerza has the immediate function of eliminating any form of measurement, which is finally a form of control. However, the purpose of such an act is definitely more symbolic than material. Because if CFE employees are not able to access territories, communities and villages, it doesn't make any difference to have or not a meter installed. As the anthropologist von Schnitzler rightly noted (Wuebben, Chatterjee and von Schnitzler 2017), as a semiotic object the meter also does things beyond measurement. In particular:

«It can assign responsibilities and produce obligations, it can chart the limits of the public and the private, and it can function within specific ethical and political assemblages. In places where the state may otherwise appear far removed, a meter can act as a marker of official recognition and belonging. In other places, it can be experienced as an object of punitive state surveillance. It is in this capacity, as public objects of sort, that meters have been bypassed, protested, or ripped out in places like Ireland or South Africa.

[...] Electricity meters not only mediate our lives with electric things and with the outside world, they may also constitute as particular persons - as consumers, citizens, and ethical beings.» (idem)

In the case of Luz y Fuerza, the semiotic capacity of the meter allows political opposition against the government and capitalists. And, at the same time, to display an identity as "person in resistance". A definition of identity that is reinforced by the seal of Luz y Fuerza painted in proximity of where the meter was installed. And reaffirmed by all the proofs of memberships used by Luz y Fuerza (e.g. ID cards and car stickers).

Following this path of analysis, a further set of considerations should be given to perceptions. The anthropologists Tanja Winther and Sophie Bouly de Lesdain (2013) compared the different perceptions on electricity that emerged in Norway and France, where people are inclined to be highly concerned about their countries' main sources of production (hydropower and nuclear, respectively). In Norway, people perceive electricity to be cheap, safe and clean, as it is generated by natural rivers which are regarded as common resources. In France, instead, electricity is perceived as risky, both economically and physically. In this case study the analysis looks particularly at the

relationship between perceptions and source of production. Furthermore, it highlights that "electricity cultures" are subject to both sociocultural and socio-material determinants.

When it comes to the militants of Luz y Fuerza, I never heard them questioning the good, clean and suitable nature of the electricity they use, neither have I ever heard them considering the issue of who pays for the electricity they use. First of all, Chiapas rivers supply an enormous share of all the national production of electricity in Mexican. June Nash wrote that during the 1990s, rivers in Chiapas were providing 52% of the national production of electricity (Nash 2001: 102). In the five years-period between 2013 and 2017, Chiapas has been the third out of the 32 states in Mexico, for effective capacity of electricity production with nearly 58 thousand Megawatt per year⁹⁵. Therefore, coming mainly from the rivers, the theme of pollution is not really felt. The use of electricity in most of the households in resistance is really modest and usually limited to powering a fridge, a radio or a television, some lightbulbs and phone chargers. Besides that, coming from the rivers means that electricity belongs to people. Rivers are considered by activists in protest as an essential component of *nuestra Madre Tierra*, which the "holy God" (according to a common syncretism between indigenous *cosmovisiones* and Christian theology) gifted "his people" to make a living, and «not for global corporations to exploit and destroy it for profit». Water and electricity by consequence are common resources. That also entails that the problem of who else is paying for the electricity is simply logically inconsistent. The Organization leaves the invitation open to anybody in society to stop paying electricity and join the *lucha*.

Furthermore, shifting from the world view into the legal sphere, Luz y Fuerza activists perceive electricity as a fundamental human right. A perception resting on the right to adequate housing, which is part of the right to the adequate standard of living recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OHCHR 2014). According to United Nations, electricity is indeed considered as a «*basic service*» (OHCHR 2014: 32), the access to which should be «*universal and non-discriminatory*» (OHCHR 2014: 34). But also, it is already a global common sentiment that electricity is

⁹⁵ Source: SENER – Sistema de Información Energética database:
<http://sie.energia.gob.mx/bdiController.do?action=temas> - accessed 15.2.2019

a basic right for a citizen of modern nation-state (Gupta 2015a: 561; Tully 2006). That is finally coherent with the Organization's general mission of human rights advocacy and protection.

Another interesting insight about perceptions related to electricity is offered again by Winther and Whilite when they wrote about the "sense of centrality" brought on by electricity (2015: 571). The authors particularly refer to the arrival of electricity and how this may change the meaning of place and perceptions of belonging. They report the example of an older man from rural Kenya expressing his expectations about the feelings of belonging and national identity electricity and television would bring: «*When I have seen what the President looks like, I will also feel as being part of Kenya*» (*ibid.*), declared the man. In Luz y Fuerza case, the sense of centrality applies to the whole civil resistance conducted by the Organization. The choice of electricity as a main battlefield, allows it to bring the struggle at the core of capitalist modernity (Escobar 2016). Electricity is indeed modernity par excellence. As Boyer noted, electricity is in many respects, *the* foundational apparatus upon which the experience of modernity has been constituted since the end of the XIX century (Boyer 2015: 532). This is echoed by Winther and Whilite, according to who the "tentacles of electrification" can be regarded as a central element of "modernity at large", in anthropologist Arjun Appadurai' sense (Appadurai 1996). In addition to fossil fuel, electricity is the core component/tool/device of contemporary energopower regimes. In practice, in the case of Luz y Fuerza, electricity allows the struggle of a subaltern poor, an excluded social group from a very periphery of "the empire" to become loud, evident, and not-negligible - in a word, central. Electricity, in this way generates, what Roberto Malighetti called the "centrality of the margins" (Malighetti 2012).

To conclude this spotlight on electricity, one last element has to be underscored. If we cross the exam of the literature of anthropology of energy on one side, with the more abundant literature of anthropology of social movements on the other, we will easily discover how original Luz y Fuerza case may be. Numerous cases of resistances against acts of exploitation and/or privatization of natural resources to produce energy are known. Many kinds of opposition to specific projects or specific forms of power production (e.g. nuclear or coal) are reported from both the global south and the global north (McNeish, Borchgrevink, and Logan 2015; Smith and Frehner, eds., 2010;

McAdam and Boudet 2012). In Mexico, the successful resistance of a group of people from the communities of Alvaro Obregon, Santa Maria del Mar and San Dionisio del Mar in Tehuantepec isthmus (Oaxaca), capable of frustrating the realization of the Mareña wind-power megaproject (Howe, Boyer, and Barrera 2015), is quite known and studied.

But fighting for electricity, the right to electricity, and universal access to electricity, still appears quite uncommon, except some accounts in the Indian (Howe, Boyer, and Barrera 2015) and South-African (von Schnitzler 2013) contexts, where more than "fights", micro-strategies and micro-solutions were at stake. Whereas electricity as an instrument of social struggle, or better, the creative and proactive agency over electrical infrastructure, appears even more rare, in literature. Fighting *for* electricity and fighting *through* electricity at the same time, are likely to be completely missing in literature.

However, in the Chiapas region and more generally in Mexico, several other organizations acting on electricity have appeared. As mentioned in chapter 8, a national network of resistance against the high electricity fees is also established and operates in more than 20 states. Yet, by doing a field assessment, it resulted that none of them share the same organic political project *for* and *through* electricity of Luz y Fuerza. Their claims are just centred on *tarifa justa* (fair fee) and/or "*borrón y cuenta nueva*" (debt cancellation and a new electricity account). However, these other realities are also representative of the fact that electricity is a major social and political issue in contemporary Mexico. And maybe, this is not going to be limited to Mexico. In Argentina, for instance, electricity fees rose of 300% in 2016⁹⁶, between 60% and 148% in 2017⁹⁷ and 24% in 2018⁹⁸. In Venezuela, they recorded an increase between 216% to 656% in 2017⁹⁹ (Ballesteros 2017). Of course, these increments are part of a serious generalized hyperinflation the two countries have been experiencing. However, when people are not able to pay for such an "obvious" good/service anymore, they may be

⁹⁶ Cué, C.E. 2016. "Macri toma su primera gran medida de ajuste: 300% de aumento en la luz". El País. January 28. https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/01/28/argentina/1453993580_894779.html – accessed 1.10.2018

⁹⁷ Centenera, M. 2017. "Argentina sube de nuevo la luz, hasta un 148%". El País. February 1. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/01/31/argentina/1485888151_239752.html – accessed 1.10.2018

⁹⁸ Bianchi, W. 2018. " Gobierno de Argentina sube tarifas de electricidad un 24,4 pct en promedio". Reuters. August 1. <https://lta.reuters.com/article/domesticNews/idLTAKBN1KM5B2-OUULD> – accessed 1.10.2018

⁹⁹ Ballesteros, A. 2017. " Estas son las tarifas eléctricas en Venezuela.". El Estímulo. March 3. <http://elestimulo.com/elinteres/estas-son-las-tarifas-electricas-vigentes-desde-diciembre-en-venezuela/> - accessed 1.10.2018

likely to "react". The so-called Anthropocene may in fact disclose new sceneries, with electricity being increasingly at the centre of the social arena for (at least) two reasons: the first is that electricity will be more and more integrated to what is considered essential for human subsistence. Thus, social groups fighting for subsistence are likely to increasingly fight for the access to electricity too. Which would mean, to a small extent, standing for the electrification of still unreached areas. But especially and more often, struggling for equitable, non-discriminatory and universal access to the grid. Grid that in many cases is already available and functioning, but hardly accessible for common people. (like in post-apartheid South-Africa) (von Schnitzler 2013). The second reason is that electricity is one of the two channels of energopower, as explained. Thence, if global, modern, neoliberal, capital and state power is going to be more and more exercised through electricity, people will simply react at the same level, exercising their agency on electricity, and expressing their criticisms, their resistances, their alternatives and their "alternative worlds".

Chapter 9. The Daily Resistance Towards.. a New Humanity

9.1 The shape and the practices of a *meshwork*

Among the aspects worthy of a specific focus is undoubtedly the structure of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. We already showed information on the organizational shape and adopted mode of functioning. Here I would resume from the notion of network I previously attributed to Luz y Fuerza, when I defined it as a problem-solving network.

Theorist Manuel De Landa, proposed an insightful distinction between two general kinds of network: *hierarchies* and *meshworks* (De Landa 1997). As Arturo Escobar further argued, this is a key distinction denoting two alternative life philosophies (Escobar 2009: 397-398). According to the Colombian anthropologist, hierarchies imply a high degree of centralised control, ranks, definite planning, homogenisation as well as specific goals and strict rules of behaviour (*ibid.*). They have tree-like structures and they characterise the existence of the military, capitalist enterprises and most bureaucratic organizations, which operate under the tyranny of linear time, whereas meshworks are quite the opposite (*ibid.*). They are based on de-centralised decision making processes, heterogeneity and diversity. Obviously non-hierarchical means that they are horizontal, and therefore do not have an all-structuring and all-defining single goal, but rather, they develop and adapt in relation with their environments, while conserving their basic structure (*ibid.*). The image used to describe meshworks is that of "rhizomes" (*ibid.*; Escobar 2008), borrowing the metaphor from the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 quoted in Escobar 2009: 397).

Unlike a tree-structure, rhizomes are known for the principles of connection and heterogeneity they represent (Escobar 2009: 397-398). This is due to the fact that any point of them can be connected to any other and to anything other, and if one point goes broken or the all structure goes broken, it can start up again (*ibid.*). Such a metaphor therefore serves to suggest networks of heterogeneous elements growing in unplanned directions, just following the real-life contingencies they encounter, therefore with a strong contact with their "soil" (*ibid.*). Diversity is the key-feature of rhizomes/meshworks, while hierarchies repudiated it (*ibid.*). Even if, Escobar warns, hierarchies and meshworks are mostly found mixed in real life examples - "pure" hierarchies or "pure" meshworks hardly exist (*ibid.*).

As the anthropologist Maurice Magaña (2010) noted, the use of meshwork concept results especially fruitful for social movements scholars (Alex Khasnabhis employed it referring to EZLN, for instance) (see Khasnabish 2013). It allows to continue benefiting from the flexibility of the network concept, still more suitable than any structuralist approach to account for transformative social phenomena (Magaña 2010: 73). At the same time, it enables to highlight the unique organizational, strategic and membership characteristics of meshworks, which makes them different from any strictly-defined movement whose agenda focuses on a specific policy or political structure to transform (*ibid.*). Through the lenses of meshworks, the "multilayered entanglements" occurring in contemporary social movements can clearly emerge as multiple interlinked networks bridging scales and differences, yet without missing the wider perspective on the total effect they are capable of producing (*idem*: 74). In an era where the hegemony of "neoliberalism" is increasingly dissolving the illusion that social and political change may be reached via traditional forms of political engagement codified by electoral democracies, meshworking is a spreading form of organization articulating different sectors of civil society, social actors and discourses of activism (*idem*: 73).

Concerning Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, the best fitting definition is certainly that of meshwork. In the Organization we clearly observe a centrality of the assembly dimension (or "ideology"), as it is often the case of indigenous resistance movements (Gasparello and Quintana Guerrero 2010b; Howe, Boyer, and Barrera 2015; Dove 2006). A decentralized, consensus-based decision-making rules the structure, which is

horizontal, as it doesn't contemplate any form of hierarchy. For sure, there are the three different coordination levels of community, regional and state assembly. But more than a pyramidal structure, they may be represented as three concentric circles laying on the same soil (level), where the larger ring represents communities, the intermediate regions, and the innermost representing the state coordination. The differences between the various levels of representatives and between them and common members, are not of hierarchical type, as they do not entail authority differences and degrees.

They rather reveal a progressive charge of responsibility and coordination workload. This is because representatives are not leaders. They represent the will of members according to the Zapatista paradigm of "*mandar obedeciendo*" ("to rule/lead by obeying") and its seven principles: to serve and to not make use of; to represent and not to take the place of; to build and not to destroy; to obey and not to order; to propose and not to impose; to convince and not to overcome; to descend and not to climb (EZLN 2016b). Representatives are just spokespersons for communities and this is the vision I have heard them using in any public or internal circumstance. They can't take any decision or position without prior consultation with the communities they represent and the coordination assembly in which they participate. Representatives are democratically elected at the different levels of assembly. They stay in charge one year, especially to avoid *liderazgos* and *caciquismos* (leaderships and strongmen). But also to prevent the Organization from becoming too dependent on a single specific person, and to give relief and share the high responsibility and work charge the role of representatives entails. At least, to promote a form of diffused participation and spread conscience across the communities. A solution, this of short-time offices, also implemented among Zapatistas municipalities, for the same reasons (see Melenotte 2015). However, representatives may be consecutively reconfirmed for more than one year, if the communities they represent find it necessary, due to their good conduct and satisfying results. But still, they remain under the constant vigilance of communities, which are the final depository of the collective, horizontal, democratic authority ruling the Organization.

We may infer that the opinion of the single simple member from the smallest and most remote community has the same value and authority of a representative of the biggest regions sitting at the state assembly. And it is so in both theory and practice. Of course,

representatives are usually appointed among those members with longer paths *en la lucha*, either in Luz y Fuerza or in other organizations (EZLN, catholic activism, etc.), well-versed in conscientization and considered as wise and upright persons. For these reasons, they benefit from the esteem, the trust and often, even the admiration of their comrades. Their views, their opinions and their evaluations are also highly considered from "the base". But in all the assemblies I attended (community, regional and state), I could record many cases in which the position of the representative was acknowledged (as any other), but the assembly eventually approved other resolutions at times even very different from that.

The same non-hegemonic, fluid and territory-oriented management features in the dialectic between the state coordination and the single regions. These latter benefit of high margins of autonomous manoeuvre, according to the specific issues and needs in their territories and the orientations, the visions and the backgrounds of their bases. A very telling case in this sense has been offered by two contemporaneous political proposals that reached Luz y Fuerza at the end of 2016. The EZLN-CNI indigenous independent candidate Marichuy (see Chapter 3) on one side, and on the other, the *Nueva Constituyente Ciudadana Popular* (New Popular Civic Assembly Constituent Assembly). Where the latter was an initiative launched for the centenary of the 1917 Mexican revolutionary constitution, by Saltillo bishop Raúl Vera López - former assistant of *tatik* Samuel Ruiz García - and aimed to reach a new political constitution issued by popular assemblies to take place all over the nation.

Luz y Fuerza state assemblies that took place between the end of 2016 and June 2017, saw very long and animated debates about the two proposals: if the Organization had to join one or the other, or both, or none, and if so how and with what precautions etc. An intensive bottom-up and top-down flow of consultations never ceased during those months. What interestingly revealed the different "souls" coexisting inside the Organization, namely was one belonging or oriented to catholic activism and the other to EZLN. There were also high concerns about the independence and the unity of the Organization. At the end, the final decision was to grant each region full freedom of conscience and action on the matter. Some regions decided to support the indigenous candidate and participate in signature collections, Others preferred to contribute to the

Nueva Constituyente. Some more didn't reach a unanimous resolution and left in turn, freedom of conscience and actions to the single communities and militants.

What is said until this point, concerned the internal structure of the Organization. If we now look at the outside, at the engagements between Luz y Fuerza and other organizations and actors from civil society, the rhizomes metaphor is even more revealing. As previously underlined, the Organization is elusive inasmuch as it doesn't establish any fixed and permanent tie. It rather promotes or simply joins fluid and adaptable alliances, according to the territory and the specific issues to face. The most representative example in this regard comes from the region of Palenque. There, Luz y Fuerza has been the engine of a transversal and heterogeneous alliance including: the local section of SNTE (National Educational Workers Syndicate); the local section n. 50 of the SNTSA (National Health System Workers Syndicate); MODEVITE - *Movimiento en Defensa de la Vida y el Territorio* (Movement in Defence of Life and Territory); and as in June 2018, dialogues were undergoing with the workers of INAH - National Institute of Anthropology and History employed in Palenque world-famous ruins, to join the alliance too. Each of the organizations has a specific field and a given set of claims. The SNTE has been fighting against educational system reform. Palenque workers of the SNTA have been fighting against the robbery of public funds allocated for the functioning of the local hospital and related facilities, due to which workers have been missing their salaries for more than 6 months, as well as even the most basic equipment in the hospital and laboratories (disposable gloves, gauzes, drugs, etc.). MODEVITE is a movement opposing the touristic, mining and oil megaprojects threatening the region. INAH workers demanded the respect of their working conditions and rights that have been infringed for long time.

These entities decided to join efforts and coordinate their actions building a "confederation of resistance(s)" whose diversity is impressive. Its components are very different for socioeconomic extraction, as Luz y Fuerza and MODEVITE are mainly grass-root peasant organizations while the others gather skilled and white-collars workers, with medium-high levels of formal education and decent salaries. For Luz y Fuerza and MODEVITE it's an ethnic group, with a mainly indigenous composition, more of a mix for SNTE and a majority of *mestizos* for SNTA and INAH workers. For organisational form, inasmuch SNTE and SNTA are truly syndicates, most of INAH

workers militate in the syndicates of cultural sector, while MODEVITE has much of catholic activist formations. Additionally, MODEVITE and SNTA do not disdain relationships and cooperation with political parties, while SNTE (at least the sections in resistance against the reforms) is more reluctant and Luz y Fuerza, as known, completely refuses any. At the core of such a rhizome of civil society expressions there is the opposition to *malgobierno* and to the consequent unbearable state of things affecting all the different aspects of life in society. In 2016 and 2017, the confederation gave a show of force with more than ten thousand protesters marching through the streets of Palenque on September 15, to impede the mayor from giving *el Grito de Dolores* (the "Cry of Dolores", the ritual proclamation pronounced on the eve of Independence Day to commemorate the beginning of the Mexican War of Independence). They eventually occupied the municipal hall and gave the *Grito* instead of the mayor.

However, such a politics of alliances, hardly crosses the borders of Chiapas and not at all the Mexican ones. Alliances are based and performed on the territory. Until four-five years ago Luz y Fuerza used to have a strategic coordination with the National Assembly of Electricity Users, but the latter's opening to political parties occasioned the end of the cooperation. When it comes to international coordination or participation into international/global networks or meshworks, this aspect is still not contemplated by the Organization, not for a specific ideological reason, but rather for mere practical and strategical reasons. The Organizations focuses all efforts on consolidation and further expansion across the Chiapas territory. This is reasonable because looking at the wider Chiapas society, Luz y Fuerza still seems to be a kind of niche phenomenon, not widely known outside of those sectors more or less directly related to it, or related to its fields of actions and to its claims.

Finally, one last consideration in the wake of the meshwork concept, is the context of the World Social Forum generally referring to anti-globalization movements used by Escobar in the early 2000s (Escobar 2009). In his vision, "cyberspace" (a definition which now sounds very "twentieth century") played an essential role in the building of the alternative, subaltern, counterhegemonic intelligence by world anti-globalization movements. That, in a continuous back and forth between place-based politics and a cyberpolitics that resists, transforms and present alternatives to the dominant real and

virtual worlds. In this regard, Luz y Fuerza goes very few "cyber", "2.0" or "social" (in the sense of social media). Unlike EZLN which since after the 1994 uprising made full and pioneering use of the internet (Martinez-Torres 2001; Castells 1997; Froehling 1997), Luz y Fuerza on the other hand is definitely "analogic" and not digital. This is not only in external communication, but rather in the more general everyday management of the Organization. Due to their economic conditions, the availability and use of computers among its members is extremely rare. Official papers (public statements, pamphlets, ID cards, car stickers, etc.) are devised by one or two members of the state assembly, owning a computer and the necessary technical and writing skills. These are then sent across the regions in paper, or in some cases, by e-mail where internet points are available. The minutes of the assemblies are handwritten on paper notebook and kept by the board (community or regional) or by someone in charge at the state assembly. The same happens with the registers of members, of expenses and contributions at all levels. A centralized computerized storage and management of all the information is missing.

When it comes to communication, a couple of profiles related to different regions of the Organization are on Facebook, but some are not updated since years. And those active, more than "institutional communication" share counter-information and critical contents in regard of the state and capitalist powers. Internal communication occurs mainly through face-to-face in communities. Communication between different communities and the different coordination levels, is done by cellular phone. We have to stress that the situation on the field is still light years away from the global north "normality" of at least one mobile phone, or better, one smartphone per person. An extremely limited group of militants I met held a smartphone. And they usually live in cities like San Cristóbal and Comitán, and towns like Palenque and Las Margaritas, or in their close neighbouring communities. A little more were in possession of a basic mobile phone not connected to the internet. But the absolute majority of them had no mobile phone at all. In a number of the communities where I have been for this research, cell phone coverage is not available and neither landline phones. Phone communications are only possible via a satellite-based phone and/or internet centre, which nevertheless, is not available in every community. In some communities, communications with the outside world are by radio only.

From the point of view of a European observer, used to the hyper-technologized communications and relationships, to the cult of efficiency, to rigid time-schedules and "logical framework matrix" reasoning and acting, the daily organization and functioning of Luz y Fuerza may appear inefficient by definition and hardly functional. But in reality, it does work! Of course, for example assemblies have an agenda of topics but no time-limit for interventions and discussions. And given that a systematic centralized register of topics and resolutions is missing, topics already "solved" are sometimes presented again at new assemblies and re-discussed. What makes assemblies lasting up to 8, 12 or even 16 hours non-stop. And often - usually state coordination assemblies - two consecutive days of day-long reunion interrupted by 4-5 hours for sleeping on the floor over some cartons (when available), between 2-3 a.m. to 7 a.m.: rhythms and conditions many Europeans can hardly resist, by the way, me included. Similarly, some misunderstandings may occur about meeting points or delays on meeting hours, because for instance, a representative took imprecise notes about the location of the next assembly and when arrived at the venue, I didn't find anybody. Moreover, he had no mobile phone and no phone contacts of the local *compañeros*. *And yet it moves!*

9.2 Physical Resistance and Danger, Violence and Non-Violence.

When talking about civil resistance, there is a dimension that although fundamental, may not immediately stand out - it is that of the body. One of anthropological discipline's forefathers, Marcel Mauss, in 1934 wrote that the body is man's first and most natural instrument (1934). Since then, the body has known great fortune in anthropological analysis. More specifically, the political uses, techniques and positioning of the body as well as the processes of embodiment of broader social and political orders, resulted into a very fertile field of investigation. When it comes to social movements, activists use numerous "techniques of the body" to occupy space and resist domination(s) and, at the same time, to convey political messages and to signify alternative values and identities (Juris and Khasnabish 2015).

In the case of Luz y Fuerza, addressing the attention to the body, first of all brings to light how its physical and material dimension is used at the service of resistance. The body of *compañeros* for example obstruct, impede, surround, block, occupy, interlay,

shield, or simply stay to deny CFE technicians access to communities in resistance. To obtain the liberation of a fellow unjustly detained. To stop an extractivist project to realize on the territory. To prevent criminal activities inside the communities and across the territories. Or to accomplish any other of the specific or wider goals sought by the Organization. But what I find more relevant to emphasize, is not resistance *through* the body, but rather resistance *of* the body. In other terms, the dimension of physical resistance - endless hours of work for the Resistencia, often with very few hours of rest, and when granted, sleeping on the floor in small shacks, eating very frugal meals of corn *tortilla*, *caldo* (broth), *agua de fruta* (natural fruit flavoured water) and when available, coffee offered by the community where the action is taking place. Exposed to extremely high temperatures, but also very low ones, near or below zero. Travelling standing up on crowded cargo bed of pick-up trucks, for many hours, under every weather condition and along any kind of road and trail. That's a normality that recurred in the participant observation I carried out during my fieldworks. But there have been some episodes where conditions were even harder than usual. I would just report one special case, based on the feelings, perceptions and emotions coming from my own body, considering that – as Juris highlighted – when studying political protests and actions, the ethnographer's body turns into an important research tool (Juris 2008).

In February 2017, I accompanied a delegation of the Altos Region, to visit the community of Taniperla, located just at the entry of the Montes Azules natural reserve. The purpose of the visit was to formalize the entry into the Organization of a *barrio* of the community, whose issues with electricity were solved one month earlier thanks to the intervention of Luz y Fuerza technicians. This visit was meant to paint the seal of the Organization on the new members' households (as displayed in pictures 1 and 2). A general assembly was also to be held to illustrate at the whole community the functioning of the Organization, in view of a forthcoming potential adhesion of the entire community. I had left my house, at 2.45 a.m., after a barely couple hours of rest, with the thermometer indicating 3° Celsius. The appointment was at 3 a.m., just outside the centre of San Cristobal. Two pick-ups were there, to carry a group of 15 *compañeros* from the Altos, including the board committee. One more pick-up joined the group with some more fellows, on the way to Oxchuc. At 3.30 we left San Cristobal. I sat in the open-air at the back of a pick-up, on one of the two benches disposed one on the left and one on the right of the cargo bed, with four other militants. After 15 minutes

of travel, San Cristobal at our back and crossing the woods into Oxchuc, the cold was already hardly bearable. I immediately took from my backpack and wore the multiple layers of clothes I learned to always carry with me, to adapt myself at the multiple climates one may find while travelling in Chiapas. With three technical jackets of growing thickness, a wool cap plus two jacket hoods, a scarf, a wool jumper, a sweatshirt, a denim shirt on, I could barely stop shivering. While some of the *compañeros* travelling with me, wore just a shirt and a leather jacket or a sweatshirt.

I had made that same trip to Taniperla by car, two months earlier, when a technician from the Altos carried out the first inspection to assess the nature of the electrical issue experienced by a part of the community. It had taken us 4.5 hours. But this time very soon, things started to get more complicated. Before reaching Oxchuc, a first road block held by a community protesting for the killing of one of its citizens, obliged our little caravan to a detour across some arduous mule tracks, highly punishing to the bones of us travelling on the back of the pick-up that had already become like a pinball machine. After about two hours and half of a roller-coaster ride across the mountains, we emerged on the main paved road. With a more regular pace now, some of us were able to fall sleep, sitting on the benches with our head inserted between the shoulders and the chest, like turtles. However, it was not more than one hour after we mounted on the paved road, we encountered a second road block, with hundreds of stranded travellers waiting in their cars or sitting on the border of the roadway. This time the protest was held by a social movement, for no known specific reason. The board of the Altos region went to talk with the protesters, and after a long dialogue, they realized that they had participated together to a big demonstration in the past and that, by consequence, they were part of the *misma lucha*. The block was opened to let our cars to pass by, and immediately closed again after our passage. Our trip continue, but now the cold was not a problem anymore. On the contrary, the more the sun rose up in the sky, the more the temperature rose. With my several layers of clothes, I kept wearing just a t-shirt and the scarf, but this time to protect my head from the sun and my nose from the dust. When we passed the town of Ocosingo, we took the last 50 km of unpaved road to our final destination. The sun was shining high and with sharp rays. When we finally reached our destination, it was around 11 a.m. after almost 8 hours of travel. We were all whitened by the dust of the road. The temperature was surely near 30° C. The community offered

us a meal of black beans, two boiled eggs each, delicious tortilla and coffee. Then the assembly took place in the overfilled and suffocating hot community hall.

After the welcoming remarks by the community authorities, the board of the Altos region took the floor and explained the principles inspiring the Organization, its *modus operandi*, its structure, its goals and successes. Several more *compañeros* of Luz y Fuerza also spoke and shared their personal experiences and in particular, how the Organization solved their problems, of electricity, but not only. Several questions came from the audience, in Tzeltal language. And the floor replied to each of them, in Tzotzil, or with the translation of someone from the community. The assembly lasted nearly two hours. In more than one moment, my eyes and those of some other *compañeros* sitting near me were overcome by tiredness. As soon as the assembly finished, I followed Luz y Fuerza people and a group of local residents, to seal between 30-40 households and little shops that had joined the Organization, since the intervention on the grid one month earlier. Under the blazing sun, we walked through different *barrios* of the community and they proceeded to sealing operations, while I documented their action with my camera (see pictures 1 and 2). When they concluded, the community offered us a meal, which included a delicious chayote broth and coffee. We left the community at 4.30 p.m. and after running behind the caravan that almost forgot me at the toilet, we were going down to the unpaved road, with a generalized good humour and jovial ambience, surrounded by breath taking landscapes.

Last updates one of the drivers received news in Ocosingo, as soon as cellular phones coverage was found again, that the road was still blocked, but in another point and this time by another group of people. Therefore, an alternative itinerary was decided, with a detour through Altamirano, even if some tracks would have been more dangerous for robberies. The temperature went progressively down again, with my clothes progressively appearing again on me. None of us was able to sit on the benches anymore, because every single bones hurt at every tremor of the car. Most of us remained up for almost all the way back. Some others, exhausted, just lied down on the hard floor of the cargo load, without caring about the pain. Some of them, had frequent cough, the more it got cold. Nobody spoke. Everybody closed in himself and in his personal effort to resist the tiredness, the cold, and the physical pain in particular. We arrived at San Cristobal around midnight, with the temperature low again, around 5°C

according to my smartphone. When I arrived home, I put aside my clothes white of dust and sand. I could barely take a hot shower, holding on the wall to not fall down. I ate something and went to bed, where I slept deeply and without interruption for almost 12 hours. While the same day, a dozen of *compañeros* that accompanied us the day before had to meet again at 5 a.m. for another action to hold, this time, at the tribunal of the city of Comitán.

The day I just described was quite a hard one. But if for me that was just an exception to my routine, even if doing ethnographic fieldwork in a place like Chiapas may often entail "exceptions" of this kind. I was very well equipped, well-nourished and generally healthy and in good shape, which was not exactly the case for at least a part of fellows I had travelled with. But for Luz y Fuerza *compañeros*, that represented their normality. They are used to wake up when it is still night, without the "canonical" 8 hours sleeping, to go before 5 a.m. to work corn, coffee, beans, or fruits, in their plot (those who own one). In every season, under any weather, for very long hours, even 12 or more. With a just little bottle of *pozol*¹⁰⁰ to satisfy hunger and thirst. And car transportations - which in most of the case are not at all a daily habit - are always like that, on the back, uncomfortable, and unsafe: a simply puncture of a tire may cause deadly consequences for passengers on the cargo-load, whose number may even exceed 20 persons, according to the capacity of the car.

For one day or two or three, whenever the Organization requires it, they renounce to cultivate their plot. They turn the physical resistance that is usually and daily required to survive, to another goal: social change. Since hundreds years, the power inscribed in their bodies the signs of iniquity and suffering, to which people had to develop resistance. They therefore use the physical resistance they acquired (which is of course connected to an equal psychological one), against the same power. After all, the only resource they can count on, is their body and the work they are able to perform with it. They therefore break a routine determined by poverty and absorbed by the struggle for existence, to stand and try to jam in their own small way, the "big-machine" oppressing them. They shift their efforts from the level of material survival, to the political level of transformative change. Representatives, especially regional ones, which usually are

¹⁰⁰ A very nourishing drink based on fermented corn dough, from pre-Hispanic Maya tradition and still diffused in Mexico southern states.

those in the Organization burdening the highest responsibilities and heaviest workloads, may live entire weeks of consecutive days like the one I described. Or, according to their accounts, even several months, to the detriment of their own work, incomes and presence in family.

In addition to the hard work, resistance, and the sacrifice put at the service of the cause, there is an omnipresent, pervasive, and multifaceted dimension of danger. As we illustrated in detail at chapter 2; Mexico became a highly insecure country, especially since the *narcowar* started. Figures states that Chiapas is still a "calm" state, compared to those inflamed by the conflict (e.g. Colima, Baja California, Guerrero). Nevertheless, the same impunity, the lack of rule of law, and human rights violations happen in Chiapas too, even if on a different scale. Moreover, Chiapas still lives in the shadows of the so-called low-intensity warfare the Mexican government probably never stopped completely, after almost 25 years since the Zapatista uprising. The recent reappearances of paramilitary groups in Tila and Ocosingo (the infamous *Paz y Justicia*, operative since the 1990s) and Chenalhó may be read as evidence in this sense. It is far from true that *narco* cartels are absent in Chiapas. Written accounts in this regard are hardly available, probably so as not to discourage tourists. But it is popular opinion that for example, an entire district (*colonia*) on the outskirts of San Cristobal is controlled by indigenous cartels. As well as few tourists know that the municipality of Palenque, which hosts the world famous Maya ruins, has for a long time been under control of a powerful drug cartel. Therefore, violence, abuses, and oppression are just around the corner in Chiapas too, as the cases of the 24 families, Francisco Javier, and Maximiliano (even if it happened just outside the state border) prove. As Stefano Boni wrote, if one decides to undertake "the steep route of opposition to state institution" (Boni 2012: 39) dangers greatly increase.

Almost all the regional representatives of Luz y Fuerza I met, have been victims of intimidations of various kind, and often, life threats, anonymous phone calls, or letters. Suspicious luxury trucks with tinted windows coming and going around their houses, or menacingly following their movements. There are also offers of corruption "hard to refuse". Intimidations often came for example, in conjunction with specific initiatives or struggles, and lasted for variable periods of time, with variable frequencies and patterns. All representatives that have undergone such unpleasant experiences, admitted that they

had lived very troubled periods. Here I specifically referred to representatives of the Organization (those in office during my fieldworks, of course), because they are those more visible for the role they fulfil and are therefore more exposed to attacks from the outside. But "common" members may be exposed to threats too, for the mere reason of participating in actions and activities of the Organization, or just for belonging to it.

I vividly recall the strained smiles and the attempted jokes to minimize anxiety when at the end of 2016, I went with a group from the Altos Region, to bring solidarity to a community in resistance in the territory of Amatenango del Valle. Some days earlier, the community had been heavily attacked by an armed group, and according to Luz y Fuerza, supposedly, a government backed paramilitary. The day of the visit, the attackers were still lined up just outside the community, distributing pamphlets telling their version of the facts, to the cars passing by the road. That's why out of more than 70 *compañeros* expected to participate to the visit, barely 20 showed up. The rest gave excuses of all kinds for not coming, all those present declared that fear was the real cause of the massive defection. Finally, the visit went without incident or violence. But there were several hundreds of bullet casings we saw around the community, and the rival group was just on the outskirts, observing us through binoculars which revealed that the danger was evident. This was just one episode, but potential dangers (such as police violent repression, violent reaction by opposed community factions or social groups, armed attacks by paramilitary forces or *narco* cartels) happen more often than not in the ordinary action of the Resistance.

When I explored this topic with some representatives and regular members of Luz y Fuerza, a common vision emerged. First of all, they invoke justice and necessity, to explain their assumption of the danger. Their struggle is just, fair, and necessary – they say. The ends justify the means but also, the risks. In any case, they considered themselves as already sentenced to death, as individuals and as group of population (the poor and/or the indigenous), by the iniquitous, "neoliberal", oppressive and violent socio-political system in which they live. Therefore, according to their interpretation, they have two options: they may accept such a condition with resignation, or at least try to fight against it. Even if at the end of the day, the result will be death, at least they tried. These are all rational arguments, that find their place in a lucid and calm reasoning around a cup of locally grown coffee.

However, when confronted with concrete circumstances, religious faith is the real determining element that allows them to resist intimidations, accept potential and actual risks, to bear the fear and go straight on. Christian faith, in most of the cases catholic. I found this discourse articulated in the following levels, that I paraphrase and summarize with my own words:

1. «I'm fighting for a good cause, because also Jesus Christ fought for the poor, marginalized and needy persons. And he even gave his life for them. I'm therefore fighting the same Jesus' struggle, to eventually make God's will. As far as I'm fighting on God's side, he protects me. And if someone wants to hurt or to kill me, God might prevent it.»
2. «If something bad finally happens to me, if I got killed, that would be fine too, because the same happened to Jesus. He was killed because he was a revolutionary that fought against injustices and the powerful ones. If this will also happen to me, it would mean that God planned this for me. Because he has a project for each of us. And in his project for me, it was written that I had to die struggling against injustices and the powerful ones.»
3. «In any case, a higher universal divine justice does exist. Therefore, at the end of the day, justice will be made: it's a fact. And everybody will receive what he deserved. Even if the evil persons will have finally killed me, accordingly to God's project, they will not win and will be finally punished for eternity.»

Once again in this circumstance, we can clearly recognize the strong influence of Liberation Theology, particularly in the characteristic socially-oriented reading of the evangelical message and the promotion of this latter's change potential. A strong identification with the figure of Jesus Christ is evident too. A very humanized Jesus, whose "normality" may recall the portrait of him emerging from apocryphal Gospel. And took as a life model for having been a mythical revolutionary fighting and giving his life for the most desperate ones. A Jesus that somehow is seen as the forefather of a dynasty of mythicized revolutionaries which also counts Emiliano Zapata, *Pancho Villa*, *Che Guevara*, and sub-commander Marcos. all nurtured by a deep and vigorous

fatalism, which at least in a certain measure, is widely diffused in Mexico, in particular among the lower social classes.

As a result, at this point we can no longer avoid the theme of violence and non-violence. As we explained at chapter 2, Mexico is undergoing an age of "structural violence" (see Farmer 2004). Luz y Fuerza militants are notably exposed to such a systematic violence because they are poor and marginalized and decided to stand against such an iniquitous system. However, the Organization responds to violence with non-violence. Generally, non-violence was preferred to violence as theory and praxis of struggle. A genesis of this resolution is not unequivocally traceable. The militants assume non-violence as a fact, self-evident and intrinsic in Luz y Fuerza, they do not necessarily motivate it. Trying to rebuild the moral economies - in the sense of the concept proposed by Didier Fassin (2009) - of non-violent resistance, by analysing declarations and narratives I collected in multiple different circumstances, I consider that the first factor is the memory of the war that started with the Zapatista uprising in 1994 that protracted until today in the form of a low-intensity conflict.

All members of Luz y Fuerza have had more or less a direct or traumatic experience of the Chiapas war. Some of them have been directly involved as Zapatista fighters during the phases of open conflict. Or as civilian bases of support (*bases de apoyo*). Some were involved in catholic activist groups and/or as catechists or workers for San Cristobal dioceses. In general, everybody has a direct experience and/or vivid memories of the militarization of the territory (land, villages, towns, roads), of military checkpoints, sweeps, arrests and occupations, of soldiers' abuses and arbitrariness, of the police state imposed to civil society, of governors and politicians' arrogance and betrayals. They all bear in mind the blood, the dead, and the massacres. Some of the Luz y Fuerza militants I met were among the first to reach the scene of one of the most atrocious massacres in recent Mexican history - Acteal¹⁰¹. Today youngest militants in Luz y Fuerza were

¹⁰¹ On December 22, 1997, a heavily armed paramilitary unit massacred a group of people belonging to the pacifist organization of "*Las Abejas*" ("The Bees"), while they were praying for peace, in the church of Acteal village, Municipality of San Pedro Chenaló on Chiapas Highlands (Melenotte 2017: 77). 45 *Tzotzil* persons were killed: 18 women (4 of whom were pregnant), 16 girls aged between 8 months and 17 years, 4 boys aged between 2 and 15 years, and 7 men. 26 persons were also wounded, mainly children that suffered permanent lesions (*ibid.*). In 1996, EZLN established an autonomous municipality in the area, inherently, shaking the power of local *caciques* from the ruling party PRI (*ibid.*). The massacre represented the culmination of months of harassment, which had led to the exile of over 16,000 indigenous people from villages all over the region (Nash 2001: 24). So far, Acteal massacre remained unpunished (CDH Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas 2018). To know more about the religious genesis of the

children at the time of the uprising, but many of them had parents who were personally involved in those events, and many have war-related memories coming from the first-childhood.

Therefore, being *compañeros* deeply aware of what armed conflicts are and entail, taking arms and fighting an armed struggle has never been an option on the table. It wasn't when the Organization was founded, and it never had to be reconsidered. Generally, it's clearly not by chance that Luz y Fuerza was born from the will of civilians seeking an alternative form of social engagement to the one proposed by EZLN. For sure, the pacifist and non-violent discourse in the Catholic doctrine also grants a major spiritual and ideological reference to such a determination. In addition, it is worth remembering that non-violence may also be the result of a strategical evaluation about convenience and side-effects.

Engaging in an armed conflict against the state would have inevitably caused a destructive and definitive reaction from the state. On the contrary - as the sociologist Daniel Ritter argued trying to provide a structural explanation to unarmed revolutionary success (Ritter 2015a; b) – governments and even authoritarian regimes well integrated into the Western political system of trade, aid and military collaboration (as it definitely is the case of Mexico), may eventually find themselves restrained to violently repress domestic nonviolent oppositions (Ritter 2015a: 471-472). This is because of their rhetorical embracing of Western values such as democracy and human rights whose open violation may entail the loss of international support, and indirectly also internal support to the ruling government (*ibid.*). As a result, rulers may vacillate, allowing opposition movements to grow until they may become – in some cases – overwhelming (*ibid.*). That means - going back to Luz y Fuerza – that all things considered, nonviolent resistance is likely to be the strategy offering the highest chances of success with an acceptable risk of casualties. As Ritter rightly highlighted, civil resistance does not necessarily require a moral commitment to nonviolent ideals - on the contrary many activists turn to civil resistance for purely pragmatic reasons (Ritter 2015a: 469). Additionally, we may conclude that the *plan de lucha* (struggle plan) of Luz y Fuerza never contemplated violence, due to the reason that it has also been based - since the beginning - on civil society and seeking democratization from below.

conflict that inflamed the Municipality of San Pedro Chenaló since the 1950-1960s, I recommend Moksnes 2012

However, the general systematization of violence that affected Mexico in the last 12 years and the increase of violent acts against Luz y Fuerza members, made non-violence the object of an internal dialectic (in Hegel terms), at times even very intense. I had witnessed several debates in this regard, brought up at coordination assemblies, in informal meetings or simple conversations between militants. At the February 2017 state assembly, the accounts on the armed intimidations against Francisco Javier and Alejandro were received with great emotion and triggered an animated discussion. Oscar, a man aged around 35 and serving as representative of the *Olvidados* region, where the events occurred, emblematically pictured the dilemma at stake:

«What if one day they kill a compañero of ours? What will we do? How will we react? Will we just keep issuing public announcements and reporting to public authorities? Really, we have to prepare ourselves in advance for the eventuality of one of us being killed. Because if we look at the increasing aggressiveness with which some organizations and in particular, OCEZ Carranza, are operating, this possibility is very likely!» (Field notes 28.2.2017)

Camilo further developed this reasoning, connecting it to a broader interpretation:

«Compañeros, we have to be careful with this kind of situations. Actually, during the last months, attacks against people of the Resistencia have grown. It could be that in the background, this is a government strategy to assess the strength and real determination of our organization. If so, if every time they give us a slap, we always just turn the other cheek, sooner or later they will decide to crush us completely, because they know that in any case, we will not react.» (Field notes 28.2.2017)

The discussion lasted at least one hour and a half. The lucidity and maturity of the state assembly, as the highest level of coordination of the Organization, emerged by the decisions adopted under such distressing circumstances. The long debate led the assembly to agree that in the end, the real one responsible for what happening was "the system", and that OCEZ, even if manipulated "from above" and guilty of the violence

that occurred, was made of "people like us", peasants and poor. Therefore, to start a fight between peasants would exclusively benefit the system and indeed, that's exactly what the system was trying to generate – they said. It was finally decided that the Organization would once again reply by resorting to the state tribunals, claiming the execution of the arrest warrants pending. As well, a massive campaign of denouncement of the events would be carried out and officially calling for the intervention of major human rights agencies (a strategy that would have resulted successful, as we said). But at the same time, two more essential components of the praxis of the Organization were strongly reaffirmed both at the assembly and outside, in the public statements that would be issued.

First of all, non-violent doesn't mean weakness. The Organization showed in numerous circumstances that whenever required, it doesn't hesitate to use the force, while still remaining non-violent. The occupation of MOSCAMED installations is an example. In three different situations - as far as I know - civil servants were held hostages (but treating them respectfully and non-violently, according to the activists) to stop biopiracy projects in the forest. Or more recently, in August 2018, some 500 *compañeros* surrounded a community in the municipality of Las Margaritas, to obtain the liberation of one of their fellows from the community, seemingly unjustly imprisoned by community authorities because he refused to accept the government welfare payments.

Secondly, non-violence doesn't imply renouncing the right to self-defence. I quote the words of Emiliano on this matter:

«We want to do it peacefully [our struggle], but the damned government keep killing and harming. It is like when someone wants to punch you, and you tell him: "No, please, don't be bad". And pum, pum! He beats you up. But you keep from reacting and again you say: "No, wait. Don't be bad. Punches are not the solution.". And still: pum, pum, pum! He continues hitting you. At that point, you must defend yourself! We have no other option than defend ourselves! » (Interview 4.8.2017)

These words perfectly embody the official position of the Organization as well as the general spirit of the militants. Everybody I spoke with about the armed aggressions in

the *Olvidados* region and in general, about the topic, stood absolutely clear and resolute in this position. If you are attacked, you must defend yourself and protect your beloved. And if you are attacked with firearms, you are also allowed to defend yourself and protect your beloved, with firearms too, as *extrema ratio*.

9.3 Strategic realism

Finally, one relevant element worth highlighting is what I would call "strategic realism", which refers to a vision of the movement a few of the most experienced members of Luz y Fuerza shared with me. This is a definition that has an evident assonance with a key-concept that generated intense debate in anthropology, and generally in the social sciences dating back to the late 1980s. The concept of "strategic essentialism" by theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, had a profound impact on post-colonial and subaltern studies (Spivak 1988, 1993). However, what I mean with respect to Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo has nothing to do with essentialism. It is rather the contrary. Spivak's strategic essentialism can be intended as a deconstructive strategy of representation that entails taking the risk of adopting an essentialist position about identity categories (such as woman, worker, nation, or more generally, the subaltern), as a means of mobilizing a collective consciousness towards achieving a set of political goals (see Pande 2017). Whether our case is about a strategy of representation that can be also considered deconstructive, but that involves the acceptance of the mutability and plasticity of individuals in light of the contingency of life. In simpler terms, whoever is a good and loyal activists today, he may turn tomorrow into a "treacherous" one.

At the state assembly I attended in February 2017, around 1 a.m. and after 8 hours of reunion, the topic of corruption inside the Organization came out as a part of a wider discussion, about the attacks that the state was potentially preparing to discredit and disassemble it. The incisive intervention on the matter by Camilo - there as representative of the Northern region - strongly captured my attention. He said:

«Compañeros, here the question is not if it is going to happen, if corruption will finally reach our Resistancia... because it has already reached it! It has happened already in a couple of communities. Of course: who wants to die? When they put you in front of the alternative "plata o plomo" [money or

bullets] *very few of us decide to die, obviously. So, as Jesus Christ was betrayed by one of his, the same will happen among us too! It is just a matter of time. The danger is not if that happens in a community: we can deal with that. The really serious problem is if corruption comes here, at the state assembly, among us here in this room now, because we fulfil the highest responsibilities in our Resistencia. However, we have to get prepared, because sooner or later, this is going to happen among us too.* (Field notes 28.2.2017)

After having listened to this I decided to look closer at this aspect. Which is not really about trust or mistrust, but rather about being realistic. I included this point in several interviews I carried out in my second fieldwork; and with different degrees of elaboration, most of interviewees shared the same thought. The most revealing narrative I recorded on this subject, came once again from Ernesto:

«"En la Resistencia hay de todo" [There is a bit of everything in the Resistencia]. *There are people belonging to political parties, people acting as police informant, people passing information about the Organization to the government, people on board just for convenience... Really: we have a bit of everything! Therefore, the compañeros you can completely trust are really few, very few. You must be careful of whom you trust...*» (Field notes 17.9.2017)

Some days later, at lunch we retook the argument under my prompt and he further elaborated:

«*It is just as I said the last time. But you know what? Often I think about what happened to Judas, after his betrayal. He could not live with the burden of his betrayal and hanged himself. Because who betrays afterwards has to bear the burden of his guilt and often he cannot survive. Therefore, in any case it is not worthwhile. [...], but you know, this does not only happen in the Resistencia. In all social movements it is the same. Because in all social movements there is a bit of everything. And that's normal, it could not be otherwise. Because how is society today? The same with a bit of*

everything. And the Resistencia is a product of this society which is a deeply corrupted and sick society. By consequence, we need to build a new society through building a new generation of people. Have you ever been to Cuba? Well, in Cuba everybody talks about the revolution: youngsters, people in the streets... everybody! Because they grew up in another kind of world. They are a new society, born from the Cuban revolution. They are a new human generation. And we are going to experience something similar here, with the Zapatista compas. Because now, after almost 25 years since el levantamiento [the armed uprising], we are going to be in the presence of the first generation of people who were born and lived all their life in the Zapatista world. Therefore, our purpose should be the same: to build a new humanity. And the very first and fundamental role towards that goal is played by us, the parents, with the example of our lucha that we bring in our homes and we transmit to our sons and daughters.» (Field notes 22.9.2017).

On the basis of these commentaries, I find appropriate to speak of "strategic realism", under three consecutive levels.

The first is analysis of reality. Key-members of the Movement are completely aware that their organization is not an exception to the "rules" of human behaviour. They do not idealize their fellows, who are mostly poor (and extremely poor) peasants living in a society where corruption has been systematized in both culture and practices, by the institutionalization in post-revolutionary Mexico, of what the political scientist Jonathan Fox termed "authoritarian clientelism" (Fox 1994). Ton Salman and Willem Assies spoke about alternative cultural repertoires, that may support social movements, but also, on the contrary, may also hamper them (Salman and Assies 2017: 87). They believe that for sure, the participation in social movements may contribute to improve peoples' capacities and skills, as an ideal learning school for citizenship. However, experiences in social movements are confronted with the heavy-weighting experiences in the reality outside these movements, where governments and dominant classes resort to all their forces and skills to defend and perpetuate the structures of inequality, exclusion and domination (*ibid.*) (like Mexican authoritarian clientelism). As a consequence, the "weight of reality" often obstruct the process of personal innovation an individual may experience by seriously participating in a social movement (*ibid.*). And overall –

sentenced Salman and Assies - «no radically new, politically skilled people emerge out of movement participation» (*ibid.*). What would give reason to Ernesto's wish to build a "new humanity". But they also recognized that, still, participation in social movements may erode «a culture of 'voluntary' abstention, a culture of meekness vis á vis the given authorities, and a culture of unquestioned acceptance of subalternity» (*ibid.*).

In Luz y Fuerza, undoubtedly, many of the activists are truly trustworthy and incorruptible, or at least, uncorrupted so far. Some notable *compañeros* confided to me the attempts of corruption they received from government emissaries and how they were able to say no, even if scared by the possible deadly consequences the refusal could bring on them or on their families. But it stands to reason that the more inclusive the Organization is and the more its size grows, the more it will be vulnerable to the presence of corruptible and/or corrupted persons. Nevertheless, it is a risk to run, as another representative underlined during the discussion that follows Camilo's above quoted intervention at the state assembly:

«The issue is especially with those people joining a social organization only out of necessity and not for conscience. Because what happens with them? Once the necessity is satisfied, they will most probably go back to the government's "breast" and leave the Organization... However, we cannot do otherwise. Nevertheless, we need to welcome them, to work on them, and make them conscious. Thence, at that point we will see if they will really go back into the arms of the government.» (Field notes 28.2.2017)

The second level of strategic realism is preparedness. This means prevention, especially in terms of reliable preliminary information on new members and systematic and increasing efforts of conscientization. It implies a constant surveillance at all levels, as explained earlier in Emiliano's words in the chapter. It includes the refusal of any leader in the organizational charts, as well as the avoidance of leadership-like attitudes and power concentrations in single individuals. And it also imposes to acknowledge that, in any case, corruption is going to make "victims".

Finally, the third level is about the definitive goal the Resistencia has to seek. Which is necessarily much wider and more ambitious than solving problems, obtaining the right

to electricity and the respect of constitutional and human rights, and creating autonomous spaces and forms of government. The "final destination" is a new humanity. With this aim in mind, any occasion should be used to dismantle domination structures, many of them are cultural. As a matter of fact, the Organization is working in many ways to build a counter hegemonic culture, in Antonio Gramsci's sense (Gramsci 2014). By refusing state money and bringing the members to refuse welfare allowances, which are seen as a tool of clientelist power and social control *par excellence*. By rejecting to hold the electoral ID card (*credencial electoral*, necessary to vote), avoiding in this way, to become *legible* to state administration, in Scott's terms (Scott 1999). By promoting life models based on solidarity, equality, diversity and social justice. As well as a world view hinged on universal harmony. By competing with the state also in the symbolic level, with the re-appropriation of national festivities and their subtraction to the state ritual monopoly (as happened in Palenque with the *Grito de Dolores*). But also with the adoption of a local time different from the official one: the *hora de Dios* (God's time), one hour earlier than the *hora del Diablo* (the Devil's time), the official time of the government. All these actions are for the (day)dream of a new humanity to inhabit the *otro mundo posible* (other world possible).

One concluding but inevitable remark. It is true and evident that the Organization hosts a "bit of everything" as Ernesto pictured it. However, looking closer, it results that from that "everything", something is missing. In the Organization there is a bit of everything, yes, except women. Not in theory. Because it is absolutely open also to women. But in practice, women are an overwhelming minority. Among the approximately 300 militants I could meet at different regional assemblies and at the state assembly, I probably saw two women. No women were among the community representatives of the different regions. No women among the regional representatives participating in the state assembly. No women among the trained technicians or among those starting the training. In concrete actions that I could assist, only two women were present at two different visits to communities. However and somehow surprisingly, in case of marches and rallies, women were massively participating. And whenever a community hosts a visit, an assembly, an event or an action of the Organization, local women spend their day preparing food, coffee and *aguas de fruta* for the visitors. The following picture was shot during a public debate organized by Luz y Fuerza in the community of La Candelaria, Municipality of San Cristóbal de las Casas, on December 2016:



Photo 8. La Candelaria.

Women of the community preparing meals for over 150 attendants.

What it looks clear is that the Organization is a mainly male and masculine social environment. The *de facto* membership per household, determines that is the head of the household to be formally associated to the Organization, which is the man, husband and father. I wrote "de facto" because the rules of the Organization don't really establish this custom. But given that the Organization was born with electricity at its core, the praxis remained one electric meter - one member. Also because, in practice, all the family of the member is "covered" by the services and support of the Organization, in case of need. But only the formal member has the ID of the Organization and the right to participate to the assemblies and to be appointed as representative at any level. This means that women are *de facto*, not represented in the decision-making and management system of Luz y Fuerza. And although involved in some activities or public events, they are clearly not participating as main characters, taking the floor and speaking with their own voices. But usually as accessories of their husbands or male close relatives. They play what anthropologist Rosalva Hernández Castillo defined as a role of "accompaniment", referring to the marginal way women were involved in *the* indigenous movement that saw the light in Chiapas with 1974 Indigenous Congress:

«Though academic studies of the period make no mention of the participation of women, we know from firsthand accounts that women took charge of the logistics of many of the marches, sit-downs, and meetings that these studies document. This role of "accompaniment" continued to exclude indigenous women from decision making and active participation in their organizations [...].» (Hernández de Castillo 2006: 59)

The result is that also under this point of view, the Organization is definitely a product of the contemporary society it belongs to. A society that in Mexico - as in most of the countries in the world - women still live a serious condition of exclusion, subalternity, inequality and systematic violence (OECD 2017b; Amnesty International 2018; Moctezuma Navarro, Narro Robles, and Orozco Hernández 2014). They suffer from patriarchal ideology emanating not only from the nation-state, but also from within their communities – as EZLN *Comandantas* Esther, Yolanda and Susana vividly explained in the speeches they gave in 2001 in Mexico City (Comandanta Esther 2006; Comandanta Esther, Comandanta Yolanda, and Comandanta Susana 2006). Although some members (few, to be true) realize that the Organization is not doing enough with women and for women, this topic is nowhere in the agenda of the Organization or in the concerns of its representatives. But I'm truly convinced that their walk to build a "new humanity", can't absolute leave out of consideration among its primary and most urgent milestones, a deep and systematic inclusion and empowerment of women at all levels of society (beginning with the family) and a great improvement of their condition. And some very good practice in regard are already available just around the corner. Zapatistas have done and are still doing much in this sense¹⁰². And the independent candidature of Marichuy to 2018 elections has been just the last act of the long, of course not perfect, but still revolutionary process on improving women' status and conditions, started on December 21, 1993, with the declaration of the Women Revolutionary Law (EZLN 1993; Millán 2014), that has become a symbol of the possibility of a better life (Hernández de Castillo 2006: 67).

¹⁰² For a comprehensive and sound analysis of gender and cultural politics until the first half of the 2000s, in Chiapas and specifically in relation to EZLN, I recommend (Speed, Hernández de Castillo, and Stephen, Eds., 2006)

Conclusions

Mexico is a country ruled by structural violence, to quote the concept of medical anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004). Poverty hits hard all over the country, and in particular among indigenous peoples, as measured through the indicators of international organizations and the Mexican government. We eventually observed a dramatic context that, in addition to poverty, determines structural violence in Mexico. More specifically, we learned about some 30 thousand *desaparecidos*, with over 1,5 thousand mass graves around the country and further ones discovered almost daily. About widespread tortures and human rights violations more often than not perpetrated by state authorities. About a country where 2 women on 5 have suffered sexual abuses at least once in their lifetime. About an evil twist of systematic impunity, overwhelming corruption and of an astonishing lack of rule of law. All these, driven and exacerbated by the notorious war to drugs, the armed internal conflict that since its burst, in 2006, instituted and normalized a state of exception in the country, in Giorgio Agamben's sense (Agamben 2005).

Structural violence (also) in Mexico, acts along the axis of "race" or "ethnicity". Which are concepts completely unfounded and unscientific. Yet nevertheless employed to produce and legitimate iniquitous balances of power (and by consequence of wealth) among different social groups. As a matter of fact, the information we examined proved that Mexican indigenous people are far more likely to be in conditions of poverty, than non-indigenous Mexicans. Their political representation is severely limited, and their rights are hardly respected, an example being the right to free, informed and prior consultation. The Mexican government betrayed 1996 San Andrés Peace Accords, expected to drastically boost the empowerment of indigenous peoples, while continuing

to handle its indigenous citizens in line with the old indigenist paradigm, a traditional receipt made of essentialist rhetorical celebrations, anachronistic paternalism, and evergreen exploitation, coercion and repression. It is a long-term history, which started with the beginning of the Spanish colonization, and continued over the centuries. Local actors are "trapped" in these structures of violence, which inform individuals' lives by denying them the conditions and the opportunities to freely negotiate the terms of their own existence. But it would be unfair to consider them as mere "suffering bodies", squashed under the weight of inequalities, implementing an "ethos of compassion" - to use the terms of Didier Fassin (Fassin 2006) – that reduces subjects to bare life, to mere biological existences (Quaranta 2006: 9). Re-discovering" and re-legitimizing the "native" point of view is the task of the anthropologist: we are not called to state what it is best for the Other, as Mexican "revolutionary anthropology" did at the service of institutional indigenismo in the twentieth century (Lomnitz 2016). In a more humble manner, thanks to the fact that local actors accepted our presence and made us part of their lives, we are called to weave together in a sensible way the different threads of their historical agency.

In spite of all structural restraints, the men I met in Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo were busy imbuing their lives with meaning on a daily basis, and resist the iniquitous political, social and economic system that keeps them onto the margins of Mexico. Through the concept of "autonomic grammar", as explained at chapter 5 (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 65), their efforts to overcome the system come in the limelight. The brings together between 30 to 50 thousand activists, 85% of which are indigenous. Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo is not an indigenous and indigenist social movement, however. It is rather an organization of poor and suffering people, mostly peasants and, as I said, in large part indigenous. The organization gives voice to specific sections of civil society, where civil society stands for the theoretical and analytical dispositive devised by the social sciences to fill the empty space left by the conceptual abolition of social classes analysis. To a large extent, the study of social movements remains a prerogative of political sciences and sociology (Lichterman 2013: 1). By considering autonomy a theoretical-political, conceptual and programmatic field in the making, fundamentally inspired by the right to self-determination (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010), the second part of this thesis has reviewed the 60 years-long process that has reconfigured Mexican indigenous and peasants movements, and particularly those from Chiapas, from a

struggle over lands to a struggle over territory, from a struggling for rights to a struggle for autonomy, and from resistance to domination(s) to the affirmation of their difference(s) (Zibeche 2008: 76, 200-201).

The three axis of motivations, politics, and practices has framed the analysis of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo in part III of this thesis. People joining the movement are in search of security in the sense and dimensions articulated in the paradigm of human security. They build on a habitus of organized social activism, which roots in the history of their families, in their educational trajectory and in their participation in the practices and the organizational structures provided by the Catholic Church through the implementation of the Liberation Theology. Among the many available options in the local field of social organizations, people join Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo thanks to its range of action (electricity, human rights, and environment), practices (civil resistance and problem-solving network), ideological orientations (anti-capitalist and non-violent), and organizational form (civilian, inclusive, "horizontal" and without leaders). Still, the most interesting elements emerged while addressing the way in which the movement pursue autonomy. In indigenous struggles autonomy has been either interpreted as a process or as an end (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2010: 65). For Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo autonomy is a process towards the transformation of social relationship and the construction of an alternative model to the liberal system, and possibly, of a new Mexico. Such a struggle for autonomy fully fits in the socio-political landscape resulted from the state betrayal of San Andrés Peace Agreements signed in 1996 with EZLN. Since then, autonomy has become the main battleground between the state and grassroots social movements, particularly those coming from EZLN "galaxy". Luz y Fuerza was an active signatory of the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, which EZLN issued in 2005. Its purpose, however, is not to achieve autonomous territorial or regional entities alike the MAREZ – Rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities. Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo practices instead a "jigsaw puzzle" conception of authonomy. Pieces of the movement occupy the territorial, political, legal and even social interstices available in the state of Chiapas. The result is elusive. There are not without formal physical landmarks such as "headquarters", and the movement is everywhere and nowhere at once, represented in the most remote villages as well as in the main cities of Chiapas. It is hard for authorities to assess and eventually control or repress this structure. In the strategy of the movement, the "jigsaw puzzle" is meant to

progressively encircle state institutions, and compel them to comply with popular will. This makes unnecessary any potential purpose of seizing power and collide with the state. "Change the world without taking power" – to quote John Holloway (Holloway 2002) - is clearly the objective of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. In other words, this is a war of position whose goal is the grassroots democratization of the state (Álvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998: 7). Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo does not challenge Mexican structures of inequality as such. It transforms local politics and economy through the interstitial spaces of autonomy the movement, and the people who compound it, gain on a daily basis: the activists provide "local solutions" to broader structural problems. Inspired by Arturo Escobar's (2010) political lexicon, this thesis has described Luz y Fuerza in the process of implementing "place politics" (Escobar 2010: 86). This emerging form of politics drives a new political imaginary that underlines the importance of the difference and the potentiality of change embodied by a plurality of actors that pursue a shared agenda in their daily lives. In this perspective, before being nodes of a global and totalizing political and economic system, places are sites of thriving cultures, economies and environment: the more local alternatives to capitalist modernity expand their spaces of re/existence, the more they debilitate the one-world project of empire (Escobar 2016: 22). Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo activists struggle to assert the right to live in a territory and more generally, in a world, whose subsistence base is diminishing (Nash 2001: 20). At the same time, they are fighting to affirm a vision of the world, of society, of nature and of the relationship between society and environment, absolutely divergent from the one promoted by capitalism (Ceceña 2010: 196-198). The material level of confrontation daily observable in the localities where Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo has an ontological dimension: two different world-views confront each other. The struggle for autonomy is therefore a struggle over the meaning of "being humans".

Escobar's analysis helps us to understand that the two abstract entities of state and capital carry along an ontology associated to what John Law named "one-world world" (Law 2015). This is the world structured around the absolute affirmation of "euromodernity": a capitalistic, rationalistic, liberal, secular, patriarchal, white and eurocentric modernity (Escobar 2016: 15). Historically, this world has assumed the right to be "the" World, the only one possible, subjugating all the other worlds and condemning them to erasure (Santos 2014: 179). "The" World bases on the idea of converting wild environments into "nature" and subsequently, nature into "resource" to

own, destroy and pillage, for profit. Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, similarly to other social realities from Latin America, subscribes an ontology of relationality wherein these world-views. things and beings exist only in interrelation, they do not exist on their own. Common lands do exist, and keep human beings together, insofar they are not ruled by the tyranny of private property and profit. Furthermore, relational ontology contemplates the existence and the co-existence of a plurality of different worlds: a "pluri-verse" (plurality of universes) instead of a "uni-verse" (unique universe) (Santos 2014; Escobar 2016: 15). This notion of pluri-verse bases on what Santos calls the "epistemologies of the south", which are today represent by the persistence of non-dualistic philosophies among indigenous people of Latin America (Santos 2014). An example is the Mayan *cosmovisiones*, which is the main horizon of inspiration for Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, also in the case of electricity which is probably the most peculiar and also innovative trait of the movement. The riverine system of Chiapas rivers supplies a very conspicuous share of Mexican electric energy consumption. Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo activists consider the rivers as an essential component of «*nuestra Madre Tierra*» (our Mother earth), gifted by the «holy God» to «his people» so that they could earn a living from it. It is definitely "not for global corporations to exploit and destroy it for profit", as Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo's activists use to say. Consequently, rivers and therefore electricity, are part of the environment and people have the rights to access them. There is a confrontation going on: on the one hand electricity is a basic right, as also acknowledged by United Nations (OHCHR 2014: 32) and claimed by Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo, while on the other one, electricity is a commercial good, as affirmed since 1992, with the application of liberal reforms to the Mexican electric utility and energetic sector in general (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2016: 28). Our analysis has shown that electricity has triggered the social protest of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo. It both represents an end and a instrument of social struggle, inasmuch as it is a concrete and urgent issue to solve for purpose large section of the population of Chiapas. Electricity is the veritable "battlefield" in which Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo challenges the Mexican state and capitalism together, as private capitals participate in the Mexican state-owned electric utility, through the construction of an autonomous alternative. This invests not only the flow of energy passing through the grid, by the use and management of the grid itself which ends up representing, practically and symbolically, state control and (Dourish and Bell 2007: 416-417; Larkin 2013: 329; Boyer 2014: 532; Winther and Wilhite 2015: 571-572). Whenever it can count on enough forces on the field, the Luz y

Fuerza del Pueblo takes the infrastructure over. In doing so, it disarms the government, it reverts the usual top-down, centre-periphery, state-citizen direction of energo-power (Boyer 2014: 328). The grid becomes an instrument to challenge state authority with an expression of deep-rooted discontent. Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo is exemplary of the the struggle of subaltern, poor, excluded social groups for centrality (Malighetti 2012: 1). Electricity is innovative in at least two senses. There is evidence of a multitude of cases of resistances towards exploitation and/or privatization of natural resources in general and specifically both in the Global South and North, and in Mexico itself (see McNeish, Borchgrevink, and Logan 2015; Smith and Frehner, eds., 2010; McAdam and Boudet 2012; Howe, Boyer, and Barrera 2015). Fighting for electricity for the right to electricity and for universal access to it, as LYFDP does is uncommon. Creative and proactive agency over the electrical infrastructure, as a way to transform society is even less documented. Definitely, both fighting *for* electricity and fighting *through* electricity are considerably original strategies. The leading role electricity plays in the resistance of Luz y Fuerza is revealing of a trend that may inform social mobilizations in the immediate future with electricity increasingly at the centre of the social arena. Boyer's work has brought us to define "energopower" as a concept helpful to analyse «*how energetic forces and infrastructures interrelate with institutions and ideations of political power*» (Boyer 2014: 309). As shown in chapter 8, the two historical modalities of contemporary energopower regimes, are fuel and electricity, with fuel being predominant since the advancements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*idem*: 311). Today, the balance within the current regime of energopower seems shifting in favor of electricity. The implications for our analysis are double. In the next future, electricity will be more and more considered essential for human subsistence. Consequently, social groups fighting for subsistence are likely to increasingly fight for access to electricity too. In some areas of the world, this will translate in claims for the electrification of still unreached areas. In others, the struggle will concern equitable, non-discriminatory and universal access to the grid. In many cases, the grid is already available and functioning but hardly accessible for common people. In post-apartheid South-Africa, where many poor Africans especially from the townships and homelands, have been finally plugged to the grid, but they remained without electricity, as the fees were unaffordable for them (von Schnitzler 2013). The second effect is that economic and political power will be increasingly exercised through electricity. Consequently, people as well may react on the same level, by exercising their agency on electricity,

and expressing through it, their criticisms, their resistances, and their aspirations for "other worlds possible". Electricity has therefore the potential to emerge as a primary glue and common denominator for the aggregate of heterogeneous elements, interests and visions represented in civil society, instead of – for example - class (like the working class, or the poor, or the peasants), origin (like being indigenous), religion (like catholic activism) or other (like the membership to a political party). It can surely trigger social mobilizations, even on a large scale. This kind of double dynamic is clearly not new, having already manifested itself in worldwide mobilizations to defend water or the environment in general, or against different kinds of megaprojects. The novelty is the role played by electricity. Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo represents a living example of this possible development of the the dialectic to come, between people on a one side and power in all its manifestations on the other one.

Finally, some last considerations about the potential developments for Mexico and for Luz y Fuerza. Polish journalist and writer Ryszard Kapuściński reported on 27 revolutions and coups, from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, between the 1950s and the beginning of the 1980s. He wrote that revolutions are always caused by ruling power itself (Kapuściński 2001[1982]: 129-133), although not intentionally. Nevertheless, the ruling class' lifestyle and mode of government end appearing as a provocation. This happens when elites develop a sense of impunity, and they feel they are allowed to do as they please. It is an illusion, but not completely unfounded. There is a moment – explains Kapuściński (*ibid.*) – during which elites really looks like being omnipotent. It doesn't matter how many and how deplorable scandals and transgressions they commit: they look to have always a lucky escape granted. People just observe, keep quiet, wait patiently and remain prudent while keeping track of every single abuse they undergo. Sooner or later, they will fire back. Fear keeps people temporarily static or even paralysed. They are scared and they do not really realize how strong they are until revolution finally starts.

In the case of Mexico, the impunity and omnipotence of national and local elites is as evident as deep-rooted. However, such a privileged and unfair condition received a considerable boost during last three decades, by the privatization of the state key-assets (telecommunications, infrastructures, oil concessions, etc.) imposed since the 1980s, as shown at chapter 1. This clearance sale granted local and foreign businessmen and

speculators, as well as politicians and state authorities at all levels, great fortunes almost overnight. The rich and powerful became rich and powerful as ever before, and closed ranks. The number of poor and powerless augmented, as well as their distance from the elites. They kept suffering although not always quietly, as the Zapatista armed insurrection in 1994 demonstrated. But as soon as the clamour and international attention for 1994 facts died away, at the beginning of 2000s the elites could fully and openly resume their run towards omnipotence. In 2006 the war to drugs came, and it soon proved to be a formidable machine to spread fear all over the country. It also paved the way to systematize repression in the name of security. The climax of elites pretensions has been reached during Peña Nieto's presidency (2012 - 2018), that will probably pass into the annals of history for having completely neglected the 53 millions "army" of poor and made the country falling into the worst abyss of blood, violence and abuses ever known since the 1910s revolution. A common sentiment many Mexicans shared with while I was carrying out fieldwork was that during Peña Nieto years, elites had turned to be "shameless as ever before" (literally: "*descarado*"). This feeling stemmed from the unprecedented sequence of scandals burst during the six years of Peña Nieto's presidency, the high-levels corruption, massive misappropriations of public funds, absolute impunity even for the worst crimes. At some point, however, people started to organize. The establishment between 2012 and 2013 of voluntary self-defenders groups or community police corps in Michoacán and Guerrero was a first signal. The thought "no options left" (literally: "*no nos queda de otra*") was used by most of my research interlocutors to express their determination to struggle at any cost, even at the expense of their own lives. This was another, ethnographically relevant, signal. As Kapuściński (Kapuściński 2001[1982]: 133) maintains, when people overcome fear, revolutions are in the making.

A quiet revolution actually took place, on 1 July 2018, with the overwhelming victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador at the presidential elections. For the first time in the history of Mexico, a declared leftist president holds office. The PRI (and to a smaller extent the PAN) monopoly over the highest office in the state was overthrown. Popular aspirations of change proved to be so strong and widespread, that it was able to neutralize the infamous "fraud machine" Mexican rulers have historically deployed to ensure the victory of the presidential seat. In the 2006 elections, and probably also in 2012, López Obrador's victory was shockingly defrauded by PAN first and PRI later.

The new president is non-aligned with traditional parties, and refused to join the questionable *Pacto por Mexico* political "business" stipulated between the main political forces (see Elizondo Mayer-Serra 2017). López Obrador is instead the promoter of socialist positions and strongly critical of Mexican ruling elites and their "neoliberal" model of national development, as he defined it in several occasions. Once in office in December 2018, he launched an ambitious plan of political, economic and social change, pretentiously baptized as "Fourth Transformation", being Independence the first (1810-1821), Reform (1858-1861) the second, and Revolution (1910-1917) the third. This includes a range of urgent measures, and most notably: the end of the war to drugs, a systematic fight against corruption, an effort to build a more participatory democracy, and conspicuous investments for the development of the most "underdeveloped" areas of the country¹⁰³. Though, the balance of the first hundred days of his administration, is somewhat ambiguous.

As Claudio Lomnitz argued¹⁰⁴, the president has so far performed an idolatry of the state. Or in other words, he has declared an absolute faith in the mystic power of the state, and shown a consideration of the state as fetish. Accordingly, he surrounds himself with national symbols and a magic vision where the state is a president's instrument, and the presidential power is an absolute, sovereign and ancestral force. Thus, if the president is honest, upright, uncorrupt, so it will be – necessarily - the state: here resides the fetishism of sovereignty incarnated in the presidential body. Yet, until now López Obrador's "Fourth Transformation" has materialized in the sanctioning power of the state to forbid, punish, and act always *against* something or someone that stand as representative of evil (a process outstandingly described by Mary Douglas in her classic "Purity and Danger") (see Douglas 1966). According to Lomnitz¹⁰⁵ the real challenge the president is called to face is the transformation of this punishing state into a state capable to guarantee freedom, democracy and wellbeing.

¹⁰³ Editorial Note, 2019. "AMLO: 100 días". La Jornada. March 12. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2019/03/12/opinion/002a1edi> – accessed 12.3.2019

Lopez y Rivas, G., 2018. "¿Cuarta Transformación?". La Jornada. December 28. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2018/12/28/opinion/014a1pol> – accessed 29.12.2018

¹⁰⁴ Lomnitz, C., 2019. "Estatolatría". La Jornada. February 27. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2019/02/27/opinion/017a2pol> – accessed 28.2.2018

¹⁰⁵ *Idem*

Of course, his term of office has just began and there is time left. Indeed, it would be unrealistic and unreasonable to expect that in only six years, he may fix all the troubles that decades of misrule bequeath to the country. Mexicans, however, expect a truly and concrete change, measurable in solid facts, rather than in rhetoric and allegories. The revolutionary spirit kindled by the outrageous behaviors of the previously ruling elites was canalized into the institutional forms and mechanisms of representative democracy, and ended up granting the presidency to López Obrador. After a decade at the opposition, he now holds the power: or better – recalling Lomnitz¹⁰⁶ - he is the power. Together with his establishment, he has the burden to meet the revolutionary spirit that raised him to power. The future is open. In six years it may be very hard to contain and control again a revolution into democratic channels. People may also express their disillusion by voting for extreme right wing candidates, as it has just been the case in Brazil with the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, after over a decade of left-wing power, with Luis Lula da Silva first and Dilma Rouseff then, both heavily charged with corruption. After all, Kapuściński's (1982) analysis is almost forty-years old and the world has changed drastically since then. Internet and social networks impact on politics at all levels.

Chiapas in itself is very different from the rest of Mexico and far from the national and global centers of power. If López Obrador "fails", things may follow a very different path compared to the rest of the country, and not necessarily manageable through the electoral system. The beginning of the new presidency has not been especially encouraging for the interlocutors of this thesis. In July 2018, soon after the successful electoral run, the president-elect visited the town of Palenque, one of Luz y Fuerza's strongholds. There, he publicly stated that his administration was going to grant a cancellation for electricity debtors. But he added also that he was going to apply a zero-tolerance policy against civil resistances refusing to pay for electricity¹⁰⁷. Although Luz y Fuerza was never mentioned, its activists interpreted the presidential declarations as a clear message, or better a warning, in their respect. Even in this case, the real issue at stake stood beyond electricity as such. López Obrador was referring to the so-called

¹⁰⁶ Lomnitz, C., 2019. "Estatolatría". La Jornada. February 27. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2019/02/27/opinion/017a2pol> – accessed 28.2.2018

¹⁰⁷ Redacción, 2018. "López Obrador anuncia borrón y cuenta nueva para morosos en resistencia civil contra la CFE". Animal Político. August 1. <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2018/08/amlo-morosos-cfe/> - accessed 20.3.2019

“Maya Train”, one the pillars of his administration economic and development program. The Maya Train is the megaproject of a railway for mainly touristic purposes, that should link Palenque with the main tourist sites across the Yucatan Peninsula. The new administration considers this initiative as a universal remedy for the chronic "under-development" of the southern states of the country (Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo) and the severe poverty of much of their inhabitants. Several villages and social organizations from the concerned territories have already begun to protest, as they see the Maya Train an umpteenth megaproject with huge impacts on the environment and no real benefits for local populations. EZLN (EZLN 2019) and Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo were among the first to stand against it. Furthermore and not completely unrelated to Maya Train, there is López Obrador’s policy on indigenous people. This sounds as a remake of the old-school state indigenismo from PRI dictatorship times. The new INPI - National Institute of Indigenous People- is in the process of being launched with 130 new offices planned to be set in indigenous territories, with relevant budgets available and employing local indigenous languages speakers. As the anthropologist Gilberto López y Silva denounced¹⁰⁸, such an approach is a clear aggression against the autonomy of people and territories and their mobilization against capitalistic invasions. The latter is a serious threat, especially in Mexican regions where long-term autonomous realities resulted from armed conflicts: namely, Chiapas. There, INPI officials may end up performing counter-insurgency tasks to tame local resistances. If López Obrador’s “Fourth Transformation” will continue along the same path undertaken during the first hundred days, for Luz y Fuerza and all the other people of Chiapas the president's overall success or failure will not make any difference. In both cases, they will have to keep fighting for survival, as they have done for the last 500 years. But there is probably more at stake.

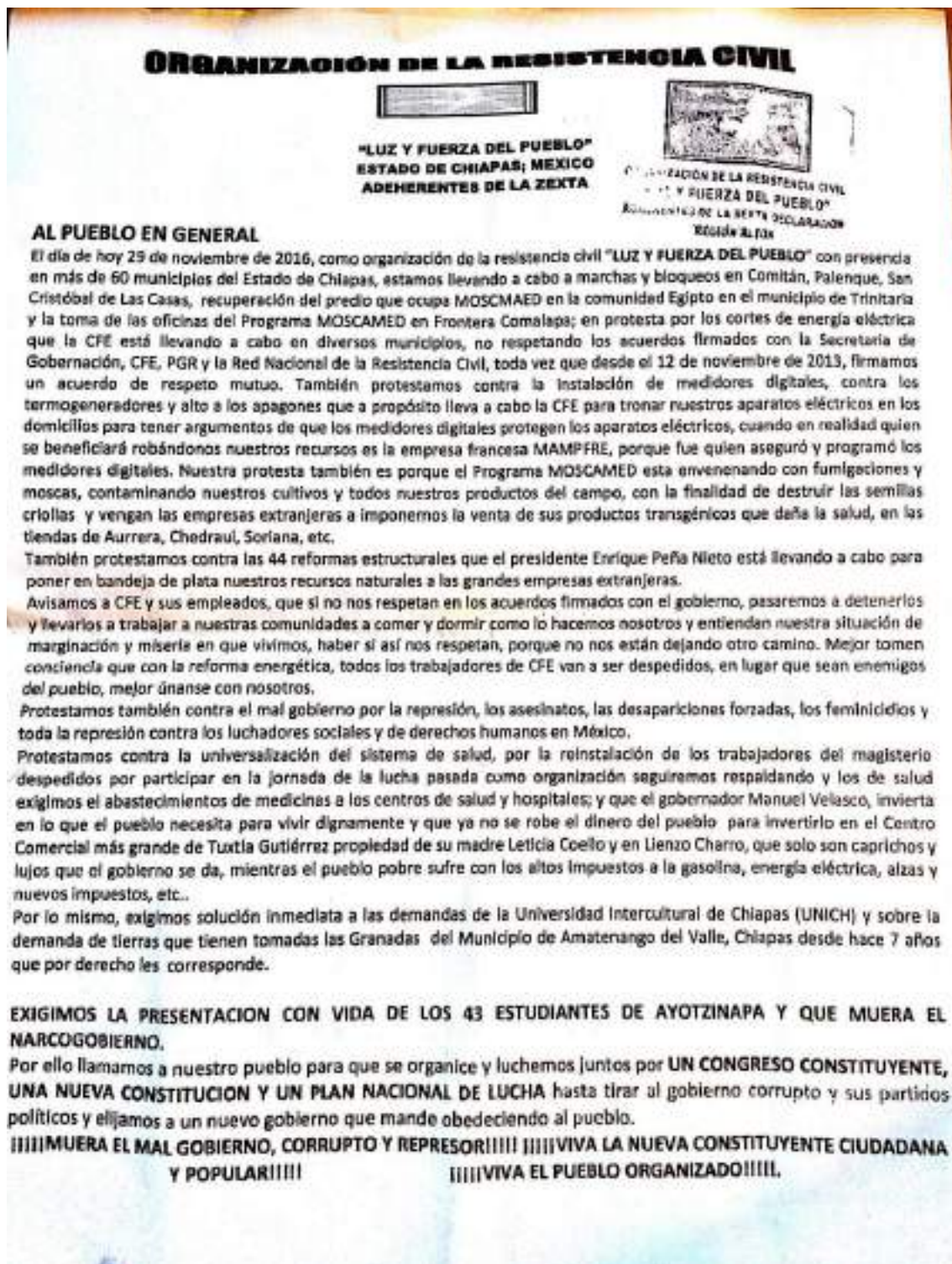
Eric Wolf wrote that the process of revolution always entail not only organizational changes but also changes in the perception and understanding of the world one inhabits (Wolf and Silverman 2001: 239). He mentions the examples of Mexican revolution, that was preceded by the wide spread of anarchist ideas (*ibid.*). As well as the Algerian revolution was preceded by the reformist Islamic movement Badissa (*ibid.*). Or the Russian revolution, that was anticipated by the succession of the Old Believers and the

¹⁰⁸ Lopez y Rivas, G., 2018. "¿Cuarta Transformación?". La Jornada. December 28. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2018/12/28/opinion/014a1pol> – accessed 29.12.2018

spread of a millenarian ideology among the peasantry. Such ideological movements offer people the opportunity to imagine alternatives to the present condition and to become "familiar" with the possible changes to come (*ibid.*). In Chiapas, a major change in the perception and the understanding of the world has been introduced by EZLN. 25 years later the armed uprising, this new imaginary still exercise a strong appeal on the poor, the peasant and the indigenous – as I could observe. Therefore, if during López Obrador' presidency worse comes to worst, the preconditions are already established – following Wolf's analysis – to make the "big masterstroke" Luz y Fuerza founder - Ernesto – imagined, no longer avoidable or delayable.

March 2019

Annex 1. Leaflet about the general protest Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo held all over the state of Chiapas on November 29, 2016.



Annex 2 (2 pages). Press release issued by the state assembly of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo on February 26, 2017. The acts of violence suffered by some of the activists are denounced and the organization "OCEZ – Carranza Region" is overtly blamed.

ORGANIZACIÓN DE LA RESISTENCIA CIVIL

"LUZ Y FUERZA DEL PUEBLO"
ADEHERENTES DE LA SEXTA
CHIAPAS, MEXICO

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS; 26 DE FEBRERO DE 2017

ORGANIZACIÓN DE LA RESISTENCIA CIVIL
"LUZ Y FUERZA DEL PUEBLO"
REGION SIERRA
ADEHERENTES DE LA SEXTA
A LOS MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN
AL PUBLICO EN GENERAL

RESISTENCIA CIVIL
"LUZ Y FUERZA DEL PUEBLO"
REGION NORTE

FRONTES DE SIERRA
CHIAPAS
MEXICO

"LUZ Y FUERZA DEL PUEBLO"
REGION OLVIDADA

ORGANIZACIÓN DE LA RESISTENCIA CIVIL
"LUZ Y FUERZA DEL PUEBLO"
REGION SUR
ADEHERENTES DE LA SEXTA

Por este medio nuestra organización denuncia ante la opinión pública en general que la Organización Campesina "Emiliano Zapata" Región Carranza (OCEZ-RC) nos ha hecho una serie de agresiones de manera violenta y armada a compañeros que pertenecen a nuestra organización, lamentamos mucho su falta de claridad política y que se haya transformado en una organización delincuencia y paramilitar, como lo denunciamos con los siguientes hechos:

- 1.- Desalojo violento y con armas de alto poder del Rancho La Granada municipio de Amatenango del Valle, el 29 de marzo de 2016, donde militantes de la OCEZ RC lastimaron a varios compañeros de nuestra Organización de la Resistencia Civil "Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo"
- 2.- El 15 de diciembre 2016, por segunda ocasión agredieron con armas de grueso calibre a nuestros compañeros que mantienen ocupado el Rancho La Granada.
- 3.- En el mes de enero de 2017 elementos que dicen ser de la OCEZ RC, tomaron 7 hectáreas de tierras propiedad de nuestro compañero José Luis Jiménez Pérez en el municipio de Villa Las Rosas. Nuestro compañero está llevando por la vía legal el proceso jurídico. Pero en la madrugada del 20 de febrero fue agredida con 16 balazos la casa de nuestro compañero Martín Ordoñez en la cabecera municipal de Villa Las Rosas, porque según los agresores (ya identificados), piensan que Martín Ordoñez asesora a José Luis Jiménez, cuando la responsabilidad y asesoría es de nuestra organización.

Durante los días 19, 22 y 26 de febrero del presente año, ha sido agredido a balazos en su domicilio en la zona del vertedor, nuestro compañero José Luis Jiménez Pérez, quien es legítimo propietario de las tierras, lo corrieron de su domicilio con la finalidad de quitárselas.

Por lo tanto, los 60 municipios donde tiene presencia nuestra organización, exigimos al gobierno del estado, a las diferentes instancias de gobierno y de procuración de justicia,

actúen para proteger a nuestros compañeros, ya que los delincuentes andan libres y armados por las calles de la cabecera municipal de Villas Las Rosas; por lo que exigimos seguridad para nuestros compañeros y si llegara a suceder algo más grave, responsabilizamos directamente al gobierno del estado, la OCEZ RC y las personas ya identificadas de las agresiones.

Exigimos la intervención de las autoridades y a la Comisión Estatal de los Derechos Humanos, para la ola de violencia que se ha empezado a generar en Villa Las Rosas y en la carretera que conduce de Villa Las Rosas al Vertedor.

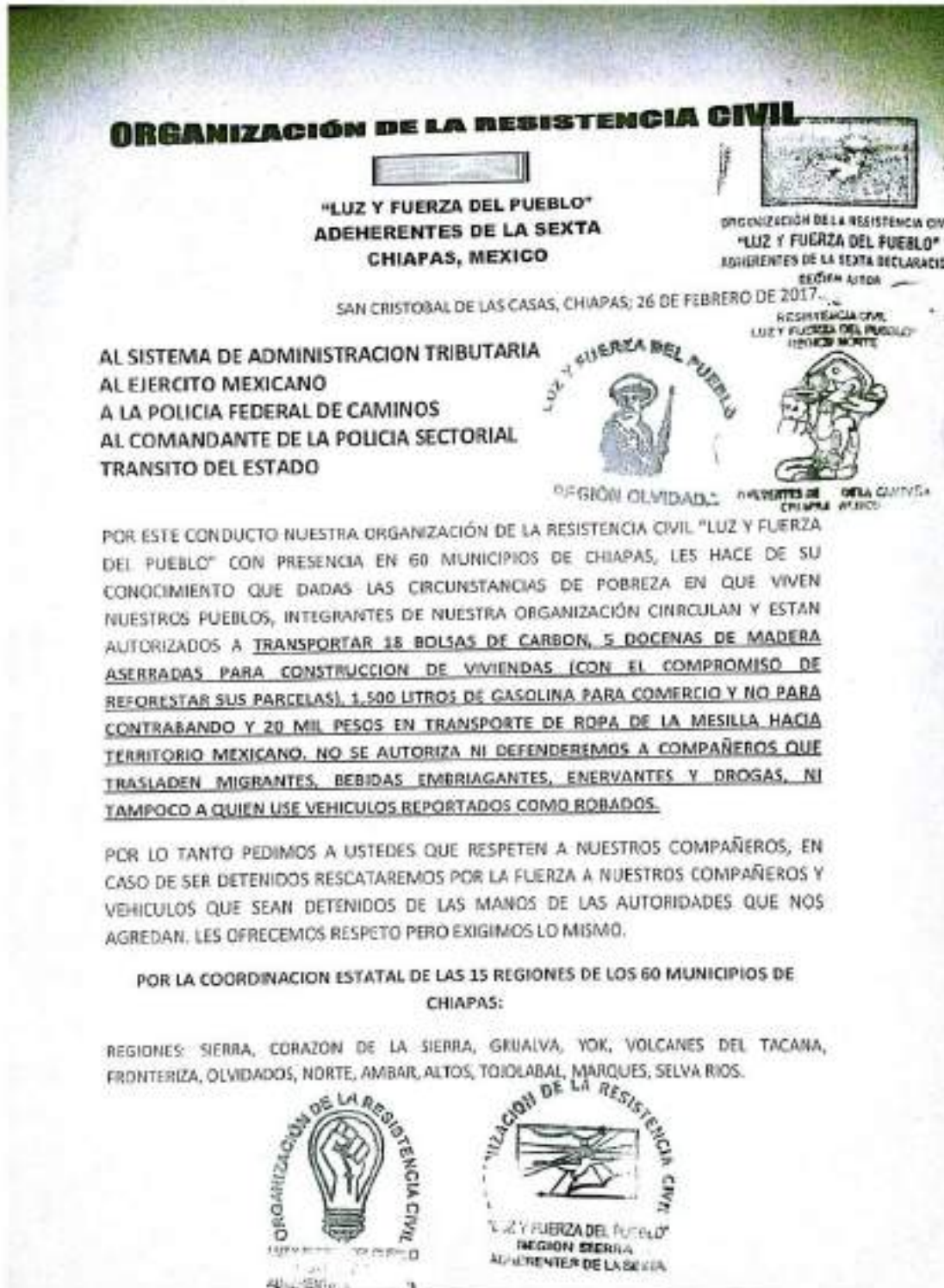
POR LA COORDINACION ESTATAL DE LOS SESENTA MUNICIPIOS DE CHIAPAS:

REGIONES: SIERRA, CORAZON DE LA SIERRA, GRIJALVA, VOK, VOLCANES DEL TACANA, FRONTERIZA, OLVIDADOS, NORTE, AMBAR, ALTOS, TOJOLABAL, MARQUES, SELVA RIOS.



RESPONSABLES DE LA COMUNICACIÓN: MARCOS PEREZ GOMEZ Y PEDRO MORALES JIMENEZ

Annex 3. Declaration issued by the state assembly of Luz y Fuerza del Pueblo on February 26, 2017, and informing the duty office, the army and the main police corps, about the new limits for the importation of goods that must applied to the activists, «due to the conditions of poverty of our peoples».



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