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SÓLO TENÍAN LA VOLUNTAD: INDIGENOUS TEACHERS OF PUEBLA, MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

SÓLO TENÍAN LA VOLUNTAD:
INDIGENOUS TEACHERS OF PUEBLA, MEXICO

By

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The study focuses on the process of identity formation of indigenous schoolteachers who attended the Teacher's University in Puebla, Mexico. Puebla is located in Central Mexico and has a significant number of indigenous people (the 5th largest number in Mexico). The percentage of indigenous teachers is equally as high. In 1997-1999, they represented 10.6 percent of the total number of teachers in the state.

The research examines both influences of structural factors and of individual action in the processes of ethnic membership. For this study, ethnographic data of various types was collected including narrative material produced by the teachers (writings and interviews to create *life narratives*) and observations (of teacher's interactions at the University, workplaces, and private environments).

The study concluded that identity is formed in the interaction between agency and structure. Structure is conceptualized here as *sedimented* action. Structure cannot be understood as a general or abstract context, but as historically specific. The case of Puebla's teachers is a good example: they form a heterogeneous group with different features. Some of them are acculturated; others are more oriented towards native culture. State programs for training indigenous teachers have a differential impact depending on the type of teachers. This shows precisely that even in the case that individuals can manage ethnic ascription, they do not do so freely. Context is the scenario where teachers

have to negotiate their action.

The study shows ethnicity as a historical term. Ethnicity is not a timelessness element but on the contrary, it gets its meaning from the context. In Mexico this is related to the particular history of the country, where Indian symbols and culture have an old tradition of being appropriated by the State to create a national identity. Teachers have to deal with the consequences of this process.

In the end, although teachers are not puppets of their circumstances, and their actions show this, they do have finite possibilities to act, and the results do not necessarily help them obtain a better social position as a group.

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In any human action, however small it may be, many other contributions are condensed, sometimes involuntarily. We know this, and yet we hardly ever stop to think of our debts to the great number of people when the work is finished. A review of each of these contributions allows us to really perceive the nature and depth of these collective enterprises.

The work I present in these pages can never be at the level of the contributions I received in order to carry it out. Many have helped, some perhaps unknowingly. I hope to include the most important.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Individual Action and Social Context: The Case of Ethnicity

This study analyzes the processes of identity formation in a group of indigenous schoolteachers who studied for their *licenciatura* degree in indigenous education at *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* in Puebla, Mexico (cf. Figure 1). More specifically, the purpose here is to examine both the influence of structural factors and individual action in the processes of ethnic membership formation.

The explanation of the contribution which human action has, or does not have, in the production and reproduction of social structures, and how this happens, are central issues in social theory (Archer 1982; Giddens 1986 and 1990; Foley 1990 and Elster 1996). In ethnic studies, although these problems are not always mentioned directly, the production and reproduction of social structure are implicit within the fundamental theoretical-methodological problems of the field. The discussion of the nature of ethnicity has primarily revolved around the mechanisms through which individuals identify themselves, and are identified by others, as members of specific social groups, and the role played by the action of individuals within the changing social context.

Scholarly work in this field falls into four positions in this respect. First are authors who claim that ethnic membership is the result of factors situated beyond human will and action, and that those factors are not strictly structural. These scholars assume that the processes of identity are localized on levels outside of the social realm, be it in the biological (Van den Berghe 1978) or in an undefined field, prior to the social

experience (Geertz 1973; Isaacs 1989). The primordialists are found in this group. Human action does not fit into this perspective nor is it completely minimized, and the actors are presented as completely, or mostly "determined" by pre-existing forces, in ways seldom ever explained.

The second school includes scholars who believe that identities are results of the manipulations carried out by the actors, be it through self-association (Barth 1969) or by means of rational (Schiller 1977) or conscious (Leach 1965) choice. Among these scholars, great importance is given to the search for more or less immediate interests that are clearly defined. The *instrumentalists*, who reacting to the lack of explanatory power and to an excess of structuralism of the primordialists, are situated in this second group. Unfortunately we also find limitations in their model and an excessive emphasis on individual will, and failure to recognize mediations and obstacles of the context.

A third position is a reaction to voluntarist excesses of the instrumentalists. The authors of these critiques base their arguments on the importance of taking into account the role of social context -be it institutional- a framework within which are situated the so-called "*other ethnics*" or "*other powerfuls*" (Yelvington 1991) or the State (Bodemann 1990), the capitalist class structure (Bonacich, E. 1980), the geopolitical system of capitalism (Worsley, P. 1984) or the system of nation-states (specifically for the case of Latin America, cf. Díaz-Polanco 1988; Urban and Sherzer 1991; and Medina 1992).

A fourth position holds the problem of ethnic identification lie within the horizon of activity of the actors. This position assumes that identification is not a question of a strictly voluntary decision, but rather the result of social practices that have been mediated through social mechanisms, *predispositions*, following Bourdieu concept.

These predispositions would be situated beyond immediate individual conscience (Bentley 1991), so that there is a greater interaction between actors and context.

In spite of all the ongoing debates, the discussion is far from being resolved, and what is still under discussion are the concrete forms by means of which ethnic identities are produced and reproduced, and the manner in which social conditioning and the subjects' activities are introduced into the process. In the extent that identities seem to be a result of the interaction between actor's actions and social conditions, the fourth position offers more and better possibilities. This study is therefore based on this perspective. However, it is essential to make some observations as to the way in which this study faces the problem at hand.

A Proposal for the Study of Ethnicity

The focus of this investigation is the form in which individual action and social context intervene in the formation of ethnic identity of a particular group. For this purpose the general model of Anthony Giddens (1986) is drawn upon, specifically his formulation of action and structure along with other contributions that highlight the historical elements. Although Giddens takes into account power and refers in a more concrete sense to the context, his model still remains located in a very abstract level.

In this sense, the bases are mainly the studies by Douglas Foley (Foley 1990) and William Roseberry (1989). Both scholars put into frame class analysis and a historical perspective. Using all these approaches, I have tried to develop a view that combines a detailed but formal approach to both individual agency and social structure with a more historical perspective where actors exist in concrete settings.

I am defining ethnicity as a *specific form of social identity*, a definition that requires some explanation. To begin with, *identity* refers both to *internal and external processes of the identification of social groups*. Internal identification comprises the forms by which the actors "know" of their belonging to specific groups; in other words, this is a question of the processes of self-assignment derived from the mechanisms of formation of social groups. This self-assignment does not necessarily imply a conscious decision, since it can be said that it includes various levels of consciousness and manipulation, which may span the range from the *practical* to the *strategic*.

The practical level is derived from the concept of *practical consciousness* proposed by Anthony Giddens, which is a "tacit knowledge that is skillfully applied in the enactment of courses of conduct, but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively" (1986: 57). In other words, these are mechanisms that permit action and that base their efficiency on their non-conscious and automatic nature. This characterization captures precisely the fundamental features of what I conceive of as identity at a practical level: *everyday practices* that permit the subjects to form part of distinct groups, but which do not reach the level of a clear rationalization. They are part of a *stock of knowledge* (*ibid. 56-57*) situated in individual and social memory of the groups and that can be recovered or identified through action or inquiry.

The concept of the *strategic level*, on the other hand, is taken from the ideas of Judith Stein, who writes that "Popular identities, whether racial or nonracial, are constructed as people define their social and political objectives," and "The ways people define themselves are determined by their history, politics, and class. They change. The same words conveyed vastly different meanings and encouraged diverse actions. They

mean less and more than they seem. People employ *strategic fictions* that can be understood only in a context" (Stein1989: 77 and 78. Italics are mine). Thus the strategic level indicates a more conscious and instrumental, and therefore more rationalized, form of identity. On this level actors can make use of the elements of group traditions or *invented traditions.* This generally happens in a situation of confrontation between groups, when identity turns into a defense mechanism (Hobsbawm1989).

External identification, on the other hand, alludes to the role the social context plays in the definition and acknowledgment of groups. It is clear that creation processes are not only a question of self-identification, but also one of social sanction which may help or hinder, validate or invalidate such self-identification, so that the result is a process of *social negotiation.* This context is composed of more or less precise elements, among which the *other powerfuls* mentioned above stand out, i.e. those instances which have more weight in social categorization. What stands out most among these other powerful entities are the institutions and especially the State.

Thus identity appears to be the result of the action of both processes: internal and external identification on the one hand, and as part of the existence of social groups on the other. In other words, identity is a phenomenon which forms part of the formation, conservation and transformation of social groups that in themselves must be understood as *processes*. To understand these groups as processes means to consider first of all their dynamic nature and the possibility of interpenetration of social components (Clifford 1988). This will also be discussed further below.

Returning to the definition of ethnicity, it must also be clearly defined how this type of social identity distinguishes itself from others, or what it is that makes it specific.

Here I return to the historical nature of social concepts. For the case at hand this means that the ethnic question is not a transhistorical or universal phenomenon, but is, quite to the contrary, defined in very clear terms from a standpoint of time and space.

Based on the above expositions, it may be said that ethnicity is the set of processes that permit the identification of distinct groups, either by their own members or by external observers by means of *fundamentally cultural criteria* and in a precise socio-political context, namely the system of nation-states.

It is essential to analyze the ethnic component within the process of the creation of new socio-political units that took place during the 18th and 19th centuries. However, it must be pointed out that the ideas associated with nationalism begin to appear before that, in the transition from absolute monarchy to bourgeois democracy by means of illustrated despotism (Woolf 1989; Hobsbawm 1991). This process involves, among other things, the appearance of a new State that becomes secular, more centralized, and in general monopolizes more efficiently a series of attributes which up to this moment had been dispersed in more decentralized political bodies (Giddens1990; Hobsbawm 1991).

This new political core developed a new form of territorial power based on an ideology that combined pre-existing notions, such as the claim of ancestral rights to territories, with completely new ideas, such as popular sovereignty and citizenship. It is precisely in this growing *national territory* where new forms of political legitimization were developed, which involved new forms of group membership.

This is how a new demarcation line emerged between *us* and *the others*, where the former were identified as those who maintained a common origin, blood ties, or who possessed *natural* rights over *ancestral* territories, and who were now, above all,

represented by a State. The *others* were those with whom there was supposedly nothing in common and who, in practical terms, were subjects of other political units.

As part of this process of creation of new national communities, elements and practices appeared that encouraged real or imagined homogeneities: national languages that imposed themselves on dialect varieties or other languages that from this moment on became less prestigious and were considered marginal (Anderson 1991). Also State religions were imposed on regional, local and family cults. In short, the physical prototypes that would create the illusion of physical distinction were associated with socio-cultural particularities (Dikötter 1990).

Nonetheless, diversities inside the national body often persisted, and a variable number of populations –immigrants or natives– differed to a greater or lesser degree from the national prototype. This is the modern sense of ethnicity. *Ethnic populations* hence came to be those that maintained a distinctive contrast in features such as language, religion and/or physiognomy as compared with the national models, while these populations were not necessarily foreign, although this could be the case.

The sense of the ethnic, i.e. the meaning and characteristics it has acquired, differs from one nation to the next, from highly homogeneous countries to nations with ample diversity. Under these conditions, the *ethnic* does not have a unique and general sense. On the contrary, it may be said that it is situational: it depends on the historical processes of national composition.

In the case of the Americas (a similar classification can be found in Ribeiro 1977), there are four general trends. First, are nations where populations from Europe have displaced, by conquest and annihilation, the indigenous populations. In these cases

national features were defined by means of transfer and acclimation of the European mold, which became *criollos* (in regional terminology, Spaniards born in the Americas). In some places populations survived or arrived at a later time, but were "*invisible*" in the national imagination. Argentina and Uruguay are examples of this situation. The ethnicity appears in these cases as a marginal element in the nation and has been used above all to describe the European heritage of the colonizing groups more than that of the aboriginal populations, which are almost always disappeared and imperceptible to the dominating view.

The second type comprises those nations where native populations maintained themselves as important components of the total population. In general terms, these nations can be grouped around the so-called pre-Spanish high cultures, i.e. Mesoamerica (Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua), and the Andean region (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Chile). In these regions the dominant groups from the beginning of national emancipation were *criollos* who implemented, with changing fortune, national standards in which the American aborigine, without being absent (which was near impossible), was combined with elements of European origin. Here the groups of different origin –such as Africans and Asians– had a greater weight, and their influence has almost always been regional or local. Thus ethnicity in those countries has generally designated those native groups that continue maintaining an important presence. Frequently ethnicity, by means of the appropriation of symbols and practices, has been an important component of the nationalist ideology that supports the State.

A third variant is exemplified by nations in which the African component has played a fundamental role in the building of the nation. It may be said that some

demographic components in these countries are a product of the processes of U.S. expansion at the beginning of the 19th century and of the plantation economy (Hamilton 1988). Brazil, most of the Caribbean countries, Honduras, Panama and Costa Rica form this category. Ethnicity in these contexts is understood as something characterized by racial elements.

The fourth case is constituted by those countries where a total extermination of native populations has taken place, hand in hand with the transfer of other populations, leading to a difficult national coexistence. Under these conditions ethnicity has meant an amalgam of groups and characteristics that maintain a complicated form of living together. Some authors (Furnivall and Kuper 1978) have defined this kind of situation as a *plural society*. Here, Jamaica and Surinam are the most known examples.

The Mexican case.

In Mexico ethnicity refers initially to a contrast between the national culture and a group of native populations referred generically as *indígenas* or *indios*. Beyond this line, a careful examination shows that it is not possible to talk about a dual scheme with two well-defined sets of populations. One the one hand, the group representing national culture is the outcome of four and a half hundred of years of biological miscegenation and cultural blending among native populations, Africans, Asians and Europeans.

The result has been a great *mestizo* group with remarkably cultural and physical differences: some strata are more Westernized and have a "white" appearance and allegiances, while other have strong indigenous influences in culture and physiognomy. Additionally, even though there is not a mechanical relation between social class and

ethnicity, upper classes tend to be whiter and more westernized than working classes. Also working class culture seems to be more influenced by ethnicity: social practices with indigenous roots such as the dead' day ceremonies and native symbols, among others features (Medina 1990b).

It is important to emphasize that these categories are historical based and contextually defined. *Mestizo* has changed in its meaning and context from a colonial usage referring only to the mixed descent of Europeans and *indios* to a current use, designating the overall non-indigenous population. Moreover, *mestizo* seems to be mostly an observer category used mainly by scholars and politicians. Examined more carefully, both sociologically and anthropologically, it would be difficult to find features common to the overall *mestizo* group aside of the Spanish language. Some authors have mentioned that the strongest link among Mexican *mestizos* is an ideological and political one, provided by the State through nationalism (Bartra 1987).

For actors the most common term probably would be *mexicanos*. However, this term is not part of everyday social relationships in Mexico in the extent that it is a contrasting category that only makes sense in distinguishing situations and it only arises for instance when international soccer games take place or during the national celebrations. Interestingly, some *nahua* groups identify themselves also as *mexicanos* or *mexicaneros* not meaning Mexicans but members of *mexicano* ethnic group, that is *nahuas* (Cortés 1990).

On the other hand, indigenous populations also have a very wide range of variation in terms of culture, language, external links, social conditions, and so forth. It is possible to find communities with high distinctiveness (physical, cultural and linguistic)

such as the case of *lacandones* in Chiapas (but even among them it is possible to find European and African genes and indigenous cultural elements. Manrique 1994: 4) but also those groups practically similar to their *mestizo* neighbors, such as the case of *kiliwa* and *paipai* of Baja California (*ibid.*). It is important to emphasize that indigenous traditional culture is basically the result of colonial contact. Many elements recognized as traditional ones (such as the civil-religious cargo system, religious beliefs, and dress) were brought by Spanish missionaries in the early years of colonization and blended with Prehispanic features (Manrique *op. cit.*; Medina 1983a).

Also in terms of economic activities it is possible to find variation among indigenous peoples. Although the majority of Indians live in rural communities and many of them are smallholder peasants (Manrique *op. cit.*), this is not always the case. In some areas, Chiapas for instance, many of them are *jornaleros* [wage agricultural workers] related to capitalist agriculture. In other areas, they migrate massively abroad, like the case of *mixtecos* who find jobs in services and in agriculture (Medina 1983a; Nagengast and Kearny 1990).

In other places they have urban occupations, like *zapotecos* of Oaxaca Isthmus who work for the State oil company (PEMEX), in trade (especially women), and in the local government. In Mexico City, *triques* of Oaxaca and *mazahuas* of the state of Mexico, among others, are part of informal sectors earning their livelihood as artisans and street vendors; *nahuas* can be found as bureaucrats in State institutions, and *otomíes* in construction labor force (Arizpe 1979).

In terms of geographical location, although migration has spread indigenous populations practically throughout the national territory, they tend to concentrate in the

traditional area of Central and Southern Mexico called *Mesoamerica*. In this area, several regions can be distinguished: 1) *Huasteca*, highland zone in the confluence of Veracruz, San Luis Potosí and Hidalgo states. 2) *Mezquital Valley*, in central Hidalgo. 3) *Tarascan region*, in Michoacan. 4) *Sierra Norte* in northern Puebla. 5) *Mexico basin*, in the surroundings of the capital city. 6) *Toluca Valley*, in the state of Mexico. 7) *Mixtec-Tlapanec* area in southern Puebla and northeast Guerrero. 8) *Mixtec-Zapotec* area in Oaxaca. 9) *Chiapas Highlands*. 10) *Mayan area* in Yucatán, Quintana Roo and Campeche states. These regions are identified in Figure 2.

In these areas, indigenous populations are basically located in rural communities. Communities themselves show a range of variation from the most traditional ones, where native language and practices are well alive, to those where ethnicity exists without Indians. Several causes are behind the nature of all this variation: regional social structure, economical development, and historical interethnic relationships, among others.

In summary, although to a certain extent ethnicity in Mexico can be depicted as a contrast between a "national" non-indigenous group and native populations, social relationships are much more complicated.

Many Indian expressive practices and beliefs are broadly spread among many non-indigenous groups; also, biological miscegenation has produced a mixed population that exhibits many physical indigenous features. Additionally, social class usually is linked to ethnic markers but not in a mechanical way. In rural indigenous areas, ethnicity (signalized through a multitude of social diacritics) is the crucial difference to locate individuals in social structure. A *mestizo* peasant usually is located at a higher level than

an *indio* peasant, and even Indian *caciques* are in lower places than their *mestizo* counterparts.

In urban settings, ethnicity tends to be more linked to social class. Migration and the possibility of reinventing oneself with a new identity allows the people to mask and change traditional markers of indigenous identity. In some cases, the new identities draw on *mestizo* working class characteristics. The result is a highly discriminated sector labeled *naco*; a term that unifies in a single category stigmatized features attributed both to working class and Indian sectors (Ortíz Pinchetti 1989a and b).

Ethnicity as a social construction.

The Mexican case exemplifies the process of "making ethnic populations", a process that is far beyond an automatic or a general one. Nor are the features employed to this end by nature immediately *objective* or perceptible for the external observer. On the contrary, what is found is the *social construction of ethnicity*, namely, a *political negotiation* by which ethnic characteristics are constantly defined by actors in a specific social context.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that ethnic distinction is not a neutral fact or a simple indication of cultural differences, but this differentiation under the conditions of contemporary capitalist society is adjusting to the currently existing global system of stratification.

Even though a discussion of contemporary social inequality goes much beyond the limits of this study, in order to conclude this specification of ethnicity it is necessary to mention some points regarding the relationship between ethnicity and the *global stratification system*. I believe it is useful to think of this system as a network in which

social class, gender, physical and ethnic features are fundamental systems to situate certain groups within the social structure. These systems do not operate in isolated form, but jointly in order to reproduce social life. This result can be thought of as a *social algebra* in which values are provided by each system, and where these values are not corresponding to each other perfectly, i.e. there may be contradictions between them.

In the specific case of ethnicity, this aspect can be seen as a *marker* which in general terms situates certain populations in a position of subordination, although with the combination of the other systems there could be ethnic populations or segments thereof which maintain a privileged position in certain societies. It must be underlined here that these are not formal operations, where all alternatives are possible, but political processes determined by the concrete conditions in which the social actors develop.

Action and Structure in Ethnicity

A fundamental part in the study of ethnicity is the elucidation of the manner in which action and social context intervene in the creation and reproduction of identities. The different positions existing in this respect were mentioned, and it has been pointed out which of them appear to be the most promising. Now it is necessary to determine the manner in which action and structure will be understood for the purpose of this study. As previously mentioned, Anthony Giddens' model (1986: 55 *et passim*) will be used in order to understand both elements. It is important to state again that this author will try to overcome the fruitless separation that has been created between these terms.

Thus *agency* will be viewed as a flow of causal interventions of human beings in the facts of the world, which furthermore implies a) a concept of the *acting agent;* b) a

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theory of the *institutions*; c) a notion of the intervention of *temporality;* and d) a proposal on the role of *power*. For the integration of these elements, Giddens proposes a *stratified model of action,* in which four components must be acknowledged: 1) *the reflexive monitoring of action*, which alludes to the intentional nature of all human activity, and which, however, rarely implies the rationalization or the conscious nature of that activity. Giddens also says that the most distinctive characteristic of this monitoring is the possibility the agents have to give account of their behavior, based on a *common stock of knowledge*; this stock of knowledge is what Giddens calls *practical consciousness*. 2) *The rationalization of agency* is the agents' ability to *explain* their acts. Giddens affirms that just like the intentions, these reasons only form discrete accounts in the context of questions asked by others or by the actor himself as part of a self-reflexive process. 3) *The unknown conditions of action* include all unconscious motives and all motives foreign to the agent's understanding. 4) *The unintended consequences of action* are consequences that escape the initial propositions of the actor; Giddens points out that they are of central importance, since they are systematically incorporated into the process of reproduction of the institutions, and also form part of the *conditions* of agency as they become part of social reproduction.

As far as *structure* is concerned, Giddens mentions that this term is applied to a set of properties which permit the *binding* of time and space in social systems and refer to rules and resources used in recurrent form in the reproduction of social systems. On the other hand, these resources are what Giddens identifies as *power* and understands more as an ability than a state of things. According to him, all this implies a) *A certain type of knowledge,* which appears as *traces of memory* of *how things should be done* by the

actors. b) *Organized social practices,* by means of the repetitive mobilization of this knowledge. c) Finally, the *abilities* which presuppose the production of these practices.

An important issue that must be pointed out is the distinction Giddens establishes between *structure* and *system.* He frequently mentions that both terms have been confused in social theory. For Giddens, *system* refers to the set of relations of interdependence between individuals and groups, which are repetitive and can best be analyzed as *recurrent social practices.* Consequently, social practices are understood as systems of social interaction that achieve a self-regulation by self-reflection.

A second fundamental element in this proposal is the definition of *individual.* According to Giddens, this concept has generally been considered in the specialized literature with enough clarity and thus does not warrant a major explanation. For him, however, it is essential to define what is meant by individual, underlining that it may *not* be understood in the trivial sense of the human organism. Consequently, individual is a synonym of *agent*, *subject* or *actor*; concepts that are used to emphasize the *mediations* existing between individual activity and social results. It is clear that his model of agency and structure allows a better understanding of these mediations. It is also important to underline another characteristic of the individual as agent, derived from the stratified model of agency, namely the knowledge that all actors have, albeit not always consciously, of the society of which they are members. Giddens refers here to the concept of *penetration* proposed by Paul Willis, in order to emphasize knowledge, however minimal it may be, held by the subjects about social structures that oppress them. Giddens states that this knowledge must be understood in terms of practical and reflective

consciousness, since even where there is a substantial penetration of the subjects, this is not necessarily or normally expressed in the manner of a proposition.

Lastly, and in order to overcome the dichotomy between agency and structure, Giddens comments on the structural properties of agency, namely that the results of agency become conditions of the same.

All of this permits a better approach to the object of study, because not only does it give clarity to fundamental concepts, but it also helps to derive methodological strategies that allow empirical access to the problem of the definition of identities.

Indigenous teachers and ethnicity.

In Mexico, ethnicity is a multifaceted phenomenon displaying different *meanings* and *uses* depending on the *levels* where ethnic contrast takes place, and the *actors* involved in the process. By levels, I understand the social contexts where actors interact between them and with institutions. In the case of indigenous teachers, these *levels of ethnic identification* are working place, University, neighborhood, family, and community of origin. In each of these levels, ethnic identification comprises different elements, actors, meanings, and *ethnic performances*.

Working place goes from the *Subsistema de Educación Indígena* (Subsystem of Indigenous Education) to school. At the *Subsistema*, teachers are a distinctive group with particular practices, culture, and identity that is a mixture of general teacher culture, with specific ideology about the Indian heritage. Here, teachers face a twofold situation; on one hand, they find *Indianess* as the core of official educative discourse and ideology and representing a positive value. Indianess encourages a display of ethnic attributes but in a

very restricted way: it is a narrow cultural view that detaches ethnicity from its social and class context. On the other hand, they find the usual negative connotation attributed to ethnicity and discriminatory practices in everyday interactions with non-indigenous teachers and officials. At this level the role of State institutions appears crucial for group definition in the extent that these institutions actively encourage group distinctiveness.

At the school level, ethnic identification depends greatly on the location of the working place. In rural, indigenous settings, teachers, in spite of their origins, tend to form a different group from the Indigenous, rural population: they behave and dress differently, and generally live outside of communities. A combination of causes accounts for this: their very job, change of activity, State policies of job location[1], and even communities and teachers' strategies[2]. In urban schools, teachers are not very different from the *mestizo* working class people living in the places where schools are located. Additionally, teachers look and behave as any *mestizo* teacher; they interact with *mestizo* parents in *mestizo* fashion. In classes they teach a normal, national curricula, always in Spanish.

At the University, indigenous teachers form a different group from the rest of the teachers. Although they speak in Spanish and dress as *mestizos*, indigenous teachers show subtle differences discernible for local observers. For instance, they are generally more shy than other teachers, they are not active in the University's student organizations, and they tend to separate from the rest of the non-indigenous teachers during recesses and other general activities.

[1] As a rule, new teachers are located far away from their origin communities in their initial position.
[2] Some teachers commented that they preferred to work in different communities than those where they came from, in order to gain respect from the villagers.

In the neighborhood where teachers live, generally they are not different from other working class *mestizo* inhabitant of suburbs. Many of these settlers are themselves newcomers from elsewhere in the country.

At the family level, ethnicity appears in *practical* fashion combined with *strategic* elements. Teachers, in spite of their *mestizaje*, retain attachments, food preferences, beliefs, religious practices, and even the use of social space[3] that have clear ethnic references. But, at the same time, teachers almost never teach native languages to their children or teach them to take part in native practices. It is as if they could handle those more visible and conscious features but remain filled with ethnic *predispositions*.

At the level of the community of origin, when teachers return for holidays, they are members of the group again: many of them give away of more urban clothes, using the rural attire and participate in festivities and agricultural work. The stock of knowledge that remains latent in memory becomes active and allows them to regain ethnic attachments and indigenous teacher identification is put in a "stand by" condition. Of course, this depends on the fact that the community itself has strong ethnic structure with cultural practices and beliefs alive.

All of these levels show that different ethnic performances and allegations are possible for the same individual, depending on the level where s/he is situated and to the individuals to whom s/he is related. Also, there must be common information available context bounded (ethnic markers) to actors (indigenous and not indigenous) that allows them to know how to interact and keep social relations flowing.

[3] Teachers' houses frequently have a "rural look" with domestic animals as turkeys and chicken and other objects.

Methodological and Research Strategy

As can be shown, the phenomena of ethnic membership is the result of the processes of interaction between self-association and external identification, which can be best understood in terms of *negotiation*, i.e. as a *political* process in which various actors participate, mobilizing resources and media with the not always explicit object of creating an identity. This process may or may not have the form of direct confrontation, but must always be defined over and over again.

In this negotiation the agency of the subjects and the intervention of the structural elements appear with the aforementioned characteristics. In this self-ascription the subjects thus establish their membership in certain groups by means of certain facts that in general terms are not rationalized or put in discursive form, but are *acted practically and automatically,* since identity is an element that permits the preservation of social relations. This does not mean that the individuals are completely unable to discourse about the processes created by their actions, since at the same time there is a level of rationalization that can be accessed by the actors under the necessary conditions, for instance in the course of a reflexive action, initiated by themselves or by others, or when social conditions make the recovery of certain facts *necessary,* as is the case in the course of a social mobilization.

Besides this, it must also be taken into consideration that the actions of agents do not take place in a social vacuum, but on the contrary will always be complemented by the participation of other wishes and actions, namely those of other actors who intervene in the process, mainly institutions and the State, due to their role in the configuration of these contexts. Thus the inclusion of the *unintended consequences of action* must be

taken into account, i.e. those results which are not contemplated in the original propositions of the actor, but do represent the result of the activity of all actors. These consequences may come to acquire a greater importance than the initial intentions.

There is yet another element to be considered in this process: the factor of time. History, understood as temporality in social matters, is a component of social phenomena. In this context I only wish to mention one particular aspect of the impact of temporality on the creation of identities: the process which permits groups to preserve their coherence over long periods of time. This phenomenon may be called *sedimentation*[4] of social facts, which means a process through which actions become permanent, essentially by their repetitive nature.

This sedimentation consists of both objective elements, such as collective practices or material records, and of subjective elements that give meaning to the former,[5] such as the *common stock* represented by *social memory*.

Paul Connerton (1989) points out that memory is a fundamental component of social groups. As a matter of fact, he distinguishes three types of memory: *personal memory*, which includes recollections associated with individual experiences; *cognitive memory*, when we speak of remembering the meaning of words, jokes or the layout of a city. He writes that this memory exists because there is the knowledge of a cognitive past or a sensorial state distinct from the first type, since it is unnecessary to have any information on the context or episode of learning in order to retain and use the memories

[4] This term was apparently first used by Paul Ricoeur in the context of his discussion of the *autonomization* of the action of his producer agents, and of the way it is being transformed in institutions. Paul Connerton then uses this concept in his analysis of social memory, specifically when he reviews how the positions and movements of the body are transformed (sedimented) in corporal shape. Giddens himself uses it to refer to institutions understood as practices that are deeply rooted in time and space. Connerton 1989: 94. Giddens 1986: 80; Ricoeur 1989: 206-207.

of this class. And finally there is the *habit memory*, defined as the ability to reproduce certain actions, such as reading or riding a bicycle. Often one does not remember how or where certain knowledge was acquired, and only when the action is performed the ability to remember is shown (*Ibid: 22-23).*

Insofar as the building of identities is part of temporal processes, mechanisms like memory, which allow the fixing or sedimentation of certain collective practices becomes fundamental. The analysis is conducted in accord with this methodological direction. It is assumed that teachers' recollections are a good key to the processes of identity formation in the extent that memories condense common experiences even in the case of personal recollections that finally acquire their meaning through collective practices.

This research is a case study carried out with two cohorts of teachers who were studying for a *licenciatura*[6] in indigenous education. In the case reviewed, there are formally two *licenciaturas*: one in pre-school education, and one in primary education, according to the level at which the teachers were teaching. In real terms both study courses operated with the same plan of studies, the same programs, and the teachers in both courses of study formed unique groups that attended the same classes. The creation of this program was the result of the demands of a group of indigenous people who were working in different governmental programs and asked for an expansion of educational services provided to indigenous populations (centered in preschool and elementary education). The result was not entirely satisfactory in the extent that the program was designed just for teachers and as a compensatory nature, namely, designed for those teachers who were working without educational training.

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[5] The distinction between objective and subjective elements is merely methodological and does not mean that an absolute separation between the two is assumed.

Among teachers who attended the university, two classes were chosen for this purpose: class 1990 (N=31) and class 1992 (N=31). This means that one of them was relatively advanced in their studies (in fact, this was the first class to study this *licenciatura* at the Puebla campus), and the other had entered during the course of this research (the third class in this specialty). My fieldwork was conducted from 1993 to1995, when I was their professor.

In order to clarify the conditions of the study I need to examine the process of the representation of the other. Specifically I am interested in two aspects of this process: first, the influence on the depiction of the indigenous teachers of my dual role as a professor and as a researcher. Secondly, a description of how I ended being a teacher and how this relates to the conditions of conducting fieldwork in Third World countries and its implications in terms of anthropological knowledge, a subject that also has been pointed out by Mexican anthropologists. Both aspects are related (Medina 1996).

Beginning with my double role, I have to say that appealing to *participant observation* makes perfect sense in the extent that I was deeply involved in part of the process through which teachers *performed*, *reenacted*, *displayed*, in sum, *elaborated*, their identities: the school experience. At the same time, this involvement clearly influenced my perception of teachers: not infrequently I found myself pursuing my own ideas about what "must" be ethnic, sometimes against the readings or against teachers' ideas. Some of these problems were worked out through the discussion and analysis with the help of two-research assistants[7] in which I tried to become self-aware and pinpoint

[6] *Licenciatura* is a college degree roughly equivalent to a Bachelor's degree in the American system.
[7] These assistants were at that time undergraduate students of anthropology at *Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*: Ana Laura Méndez Rivera and Ana María Cuautli.

them. In the end, as Geertz says, I realize that I have produced an interpretation of second order, about teachers but one that, I presume, it is possible to argue reasonably.

I recognize my sympathy for the teachers. The title of this study shows this: "The only thing they had was their will" refers to a phrase quoted to me by a teacher in the course of a conversation about his parents, but which I found perfectly applicable to indigenous teachers. To me, teachers are in the midst of a process initiated by structural forces and constantly struggling against things that put them in a disadvantageous position. This process made them an intermediate, new group not entirely Indian but not entirely mestizos, having only their will to negotiate their identities. Reading my fieldwork diary, I discover a closeness to teachers (being in the Sierra) contrasting with a more negative image I had of teachers when I was doing research, in the early eighties, in the *Mezquital* Valley in the state of Hidalgo (Coronado, Ramos and Téllez, 1982). At that time, schools and teachers seemed to me to be agents of national acculturation, displacing *otomí* culture and language. Today I found both images complementary, depending on the perspective used, encompassing the diverse levels (and meanings) of social life. At that time teachers were partially blurred in the landscape of communal practices. In this study, they appear with all their strength.

I became involved with the subject of education and indigenous teachers while teaching at the University, but in a different program. I was looking for a research problem related to ethnicity (my academic interest). At that time, it seemed to be a "logical" solution for me to study indigenous teachers who were attending one of the programs offered by the University as I did not have time to go far away from my job duties. Initially, I wanted to study topics related to urban ethnicity but I found myself

"trapped" by teachers and their problems (I was having informal conversations with them in order to find a good research place). So, the decision implied more than a matter of convenience and underscored deeper issues related to the question of ethnic dynamics: how groups transform and persist across the time. Additionally, there were other advantages related to the conditions of conducting anthropological research in a country as Mexico. Andrés Medina (1996) has pointed out how Third World conditions depart from the ideal situations portrayed in textbooks. The point here is not a mere complaint or a confessional description of a specific situation, but to disclose of theoretical consequences of these conditions. Third World anthropologists because of their situation have needed to develop different methodological strategies in order to fulfill academic requirements, by allowing the subjects to come to the anthropologists, instead of the opposite, and to use classroom teaching as a means of eliciting procedures.

In the case of this study, several conditions influenced the selection of research subject, location, and strategies. It is possible to find traces of them in the overall results shown here. This is not to say that the study is circumstantial, but that it is important to put circumstances into context in order to get a better picture of indigenous teachers.

Narrative materials produced by the teachers for my classes were used in this study to reflect their perspectives on different aspects of their lives. Through the use of *writings and interviews*, the purpose was to create *life narratives*, as opposed to *life histories* insofar as they do not pretend to be a total reconstruction of the history of the individuals under study, since they are based on shorter periods of elicitation.

These written materials are very important in this research, because they allow a fairly adequate approach to the self-reflection of identity. First, the teachers were asked to

write their biography in their own terms. Additionally they were asked to write about a personal experience associated with their work and which they considered important, as well as an explanation of their choice. They were also asked to describe the communities where they were working. Finally they were requested to describe how they would define their identity on the grounds of their personal experiences.

Twenty-eight biographies were obtained in this manner, as well as 27 written statements on identity, 54 descriptions of work communities, 25 narratives on personal experiences, 18 descriptions of how the Spanish language was acquired, and 28 statements on their ethnic association. Other materials could not be used, either because upon first analysis they did not shed any light on the questions related to the study, as in the case of stories written by the teachers (23), or because of insufficient numbers, as in the case of descriptions of their home communities.

The general goal of obtaining all these materials was to have different ways to access both personal and group memory and to set in motion an argumentative organization of personal definition, that is to say access to the forms of ascription of the individuals.

The interviews were conducted with 17 teachers, who were chosen on the basis of knowledge acquired in the course of the work. Two kinds of interviews were used: the open interviews in which the subjects were asked to speak freely of their lives and, based upon this material, a semi-structured interview addressing those elements which remained unclear or which were considered interesting.

This approach, combined with the picture obtained through the writings and interviews, can be defined as a *narrative recovery* of identity, showing in an efficient

manner the ways in which individuals make decisions with the help of context, not always based on a conscious decision. All of this was combined with *observations* of different contexts.

Three types of environments can be distinguished in which the observations were made: *university, work,* and *private life*. In the first environment, teachers were observed in some of the classes they attended and in their interaction outside the classroom. In the classroom, observation was systematic during one semester in which the subjects were students in my classes. I was helped by the research assistants who recorded, in writing and on audiocassette, classroom events and discussion. The object was mainly the observation of interaction between the teachers and myself, especially in the *forms of discourse* and, above all, *the types of behavior* that would appear in important situations for the topic of this study.

Observations outside the classroom were less systematic and were undertaken to identify interactions among the teachers during the breaks, namely, how they behaved among themselves and with the rest of the people at the university.

Insofar as the *work environment* is concerned, the work situations of seven teachers were observed. This included a two-week research stay in each of the two communities: *San Miguel Jojupango* and *Santa María Xoyatla*. Both communities are shown on Figure 3. Jojupango is a Totonac village in the Northern Sierra of Puebla, where one of the grade-school teachers of the 1992 generation worked, whereas Xoyatla is a Nahua community in the valley of Izúcar de Matamoros, situated in the southern part of the state, where a pre-school teacher of the 1990 generation worked. These two villages show the diversity of the teachers who were the subjects of this study, and on the

other they display the variety of characteristics that can still be found today in the Puebla region.

Since a number of the teachers work at urban schools in the areas of Puebla and Atlixco, a few were also selected from these work contexts. Several visits were performed to the schools *Potreros del Sur* and *San José Los Cerritos* at the pre-school level, as well as *San Baltazar Resurección*, *La Nueva Resurección* and *Santa Anita* at the primary level. These are working-class neighborhoods situated in the periphery of the city of Puebla, nearly all of them characterized by a population who has recently arrived in the city from other parts of the state and the nation. There were few children who were speakers of an indigenous language. Children were always speaking Spanish among themselves, and their ethnic situation was only discovered by the inquisitive curiosity of the teachers. At some point *San Baltazar* and *Nueva Resurección* had a concentrated indigenous population, which was displaced by arriving migrants (the former occupants sold their land to the recently arrived migrants). I have no data of the places where those families moved.

In these cases, as well as in the community of *San Bernandino Chalchihuapan*, a Nahua community in the Atlixco region (where pre-school institutions and primary schools were visited), observations were made in the course of one-day visits to the schools of these places.

The object of observation during all these visits was to study the manner in which the teachers communicated with their students and the relations they established with the environment of their professional activities. I was searching for those elements that were linked to the questions of identity. For instance, to determine if the teachers made their

ethnic affiliation known or not. At the same time, data were obtained to complete the characterization of these indigenous communities and *mestizo* neighborhoods.

Finally, in the *private field*, I participated in an excursion to the city and port of Veracruz, organized by class 1990 on May 13, 14 and 15, 1994. Also, there was an opportunity to observe the weddings of a male teacher of class 1990 who got married in the city of Puebla, and of a female teacher of class 1992 whose ceremony was held in the *nahua* community of *San Pedro Benito Juárez* in the Atlixco region.

All of these observations had the purpose of identifying elements that would identify the ethnic origin in the teachers' everyday life, for instance through the use of an indigenous language, dress, or other distinctive practices. The information obtained both from the narratives and the observations has the same objective: to propose an interpretation of how the teachers conceive of themselves within the historical context of their lives.

On the Limits of This Study

The present thesis is a case study, and therefore does not aspire to produce a representative description of the situation of indigenous teachers in Mexico, not even of the teachers in the state of Puebla. The strategy of explanation goes in a different direction. Here the intent is to show a micro-social process, which cannot be described or explained, in an autonomous form and in the local realm. In this process it is possible to find intelligibility in good measure by means of connections with what happens beyond the immediate contexts of daily action.

I believe that the analysis of action and structure teaches us, among other things, precisely how social facts of diverse caliber are linked, how diverse actors, collective and individual, interact on the same level. Teachers' experiences, even those comprised in personal memories, call for the incorporation of wider locales, actors and processes. Through their recollections, their doubts, and their ideas, teachers show the actual presence of the State and its various institutions and agents, of the dominant classes and their odious forms of control and contempt, and of the national groups which turn culture into folklore. In short, this encompasses everything that is not created entirely by themselves in their villages, in their schools or in their families) but significantly influences their lives.

No, I do not believe this to be a representative image of the indigenous teachers. I rather believe it to be a story and a history of some of them, which allows a contribution to the comprehension of all of them.

On work organization

After this introductory chapter, Chapter Two describes the situation of ethnicity in Mexico, showing that the phenomenon is multidimensional and comprises aspects as diverse as linguistics, history, ethnography, sociology and politics. The following chapter, deals with the indigenous teachers on the national and local stages, showing how they appeared, linked to national processes and, more specifically, to the actions of the State. At the same time it is demonstrated how the group changed, and to affirm the description of the case in hand, it contains the characteristics of training at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* during the years of this study and their relation with

the studied group. To round off this description, the cases of three teachers are included, contributing additional elements to this small aspect of the group.

Chapter Four presents teacher's narratives, showing that there are some recurring topics that exist behind the particular experiences of the individuals. These narratives are above all built on the basis of recollection and reflection.

Finally, the fifth chapter contains an abstract of the work and establishes the conclusions for the case.

Figure 1 Geographical location of the State of Puebla

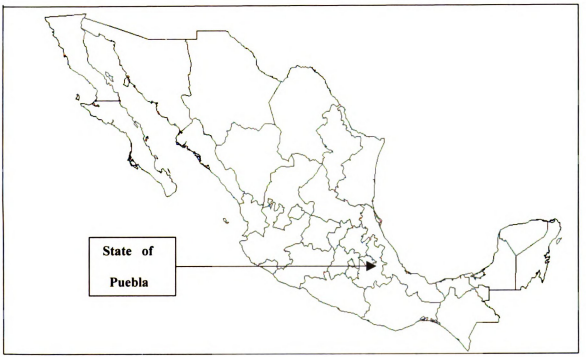
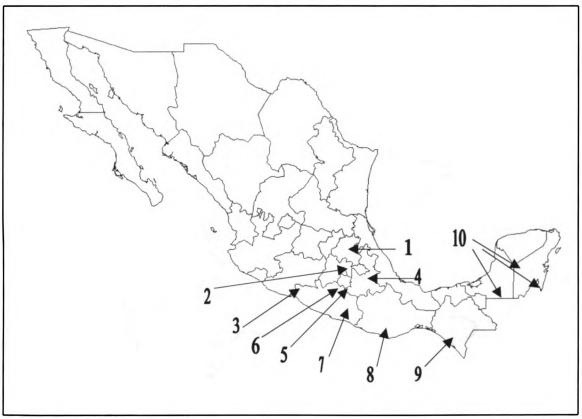


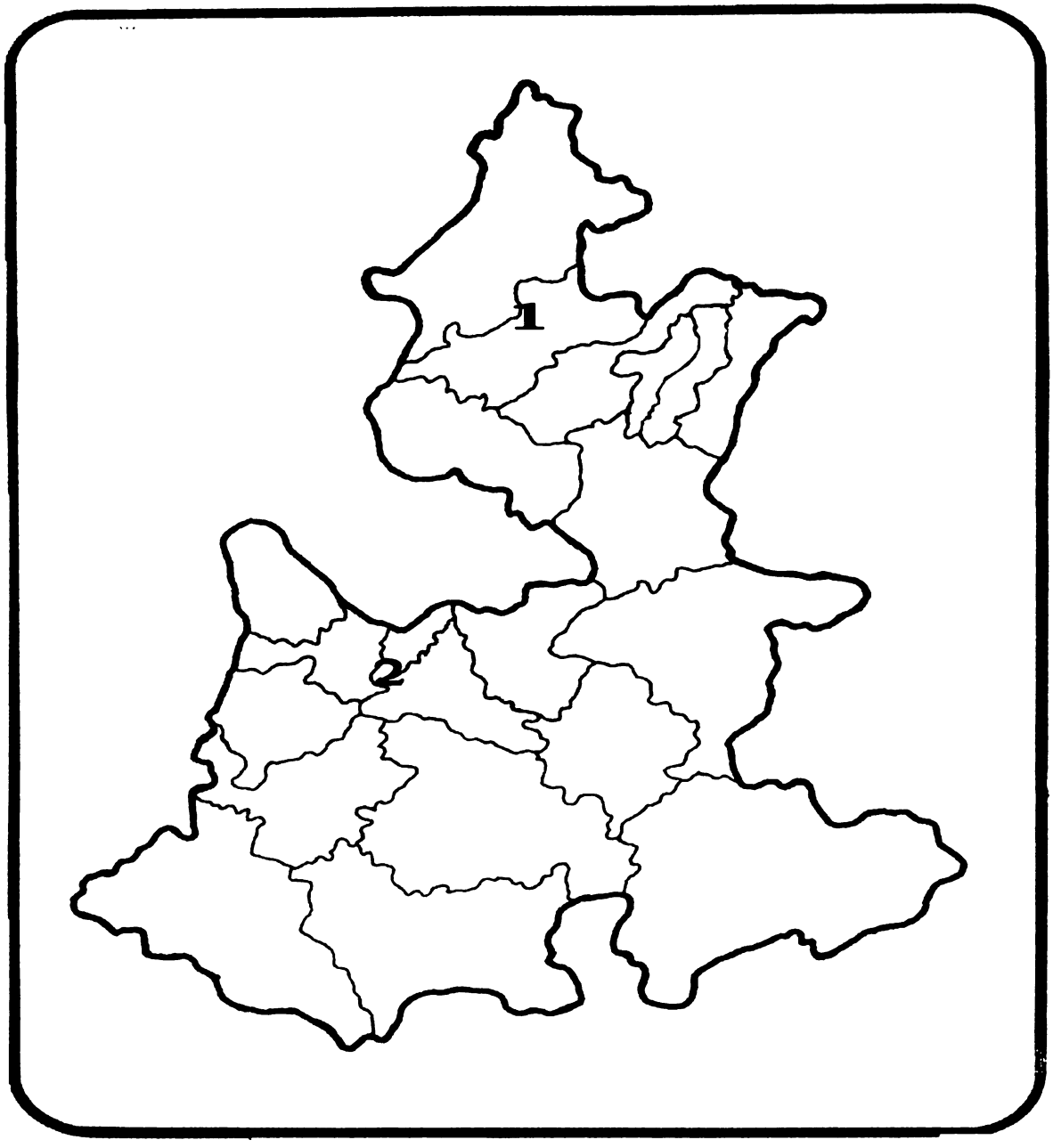
Figure 2 Indigenous Regions in Mexico



1. Huasteca.
2. Mezquital Valley.
3. Tarascan Region.
4. Sierra Norte.
5. Mexico Basin.
6. Toluca Valley.
7. Mixrtec-Tlapanec Region.
8. Mixtec-Zapotec Region.
9. Chiapas Highlands.
10. Mayan Area.

Figur

Figure 3 Location of the communities visited



1 San Miguel Jojupango
2 Santa María Xoyatla
Note: The State is divided by Municipalities.

CHAPTER 2

ETHNICITY IN MEXICO

"Now I knew that I had the worst name
one can have in this country: *indio*"
R.C.C.

Establishing terms

In order to be able to situate the processes of formation of ethnic identity, and thus also the identity of the teachers, their actions, memories and rationalizations, it is necessary to show the ties between the individuals and the larger context, that in this case refers to the nation. Although an initial overview of ethnicity in Mexico has been presented in the former chapter, it is necessary to go into more detail, including those historical, symbolic, political, sociological and ethnographic aspects that give ethnic contrast its particular features in the country.

It was argued in Chapter one that ethnicity is a form of social identity, made from the interaction (*negotiation*) between a self-ascription and an external identification. Additionally, self-ascription is seen as involving a range of situations that go from the more automatic and unconscious (*practical*) to more conscious and manipulating (*strategic*).

Applied to the concrete case of Mexico, the model allows a good understanding of the nature of ethnicity. Concerning self-identification, ethnic contrast *initially* arises from specific conditions of indigenous populations, namely, communal structures linked to a particular socio-political organization based on a cargo system and an accompanying worldview. A native tongue is also important, in the extent of its association to worldview but is not a *sine qua non* condition.

This double structure of worldview and organization seems to be the core of ethnic distinction among native peoples in Mexico (Medina 1983a and b). In urban ethnic enclaves, individuals, or more frequently families, who keep ethnic elements, are those coming from communities where a worldview and the socio-political organization are alive, and frequently preserve links to these nuclei (Arizpe 1979; Molina 1992). Also, communities, or even small cities, that can still be labeled as ethnic without having a distinctive Indian population, show the existence of this core or at least part of its structure (Bonfil 1988; Romano 1998).

These conditions represent the basic elements of self-identification among indigenous populations. Consequently, individuals recognize their position in social space and are recognized by others.

However, self-identification is just one aspect of ethnic ascription. Social context and more concretely the role of the *other powerful* is crucial. In the case of Mexico, ethnic markers are not only circumscribed to those individuals who actually are linked to ethnic communities but to all individuals who display some sort of feature identified as indigenous, specially if they also are identified as working class members.

However, links between social class and ethnicity are complex (Ortíz Pinchetti 1989a and b). Sometimes, it is possible to find that working class Indians and *mestizos* in rural areas tend to identify and even more, to act politically together (Medina 1983a). In other moments, working class *mestizos* situate themselves (and are recognized as such) in at a level above than Indians. Also it is possible to find Indian *caciques* that *use* ethnic features to their benefit against the majority of their Indian fellows (Pineda 1993; Robledo 1987). Although in regional terms these *caciques* are at the top of social

structure, in a wider context they would be situated in lower levels. On the other hand, middle class Indians are an important sector (indigenous teachers are a good example); in general, they live in *mestizo* cities and towns and do not deliberately display ethnic diacritics in everyday interactions. Ethnic features among them are kept latent until collective celebrations are held, within the family or in their villages.

The current position of Indian peoples in Mexico comprises a diversity of situations that is the result of the evolution of interethnic relations over the span of more than four centuries. The following section is a general historical overview.

Indigenous population in Mexico: the origins

After the Conquest[1] and as a consequence of the demographic catastrophes suffered by the native population, the Spanish crown established a new set of laws (the so-called *Nuevas Leyes de Indias*, 1542). These laws assured the conservation of the Indian communities by means of the abolition of slavery of *indios*, with the exception of those who were at war with the Crown (Toscano 1980).

These laws included the spatial and social segregation between the blocks of European colonizers and natives, and the protection of the latter, and lead to the development of the so-called *Repúblicas de Indios*, a semi-autonomous political system of Indian communities. This system was developed in order to provide the Spanish society with a work force, and was fairly well adapted to the existing tributary systems in central and southern Mexico before the arrival of the Spaniards.

The structure ensured a relative development of the Indian communities in many parts of Mexico, for example in Oaxaca and Tlaxcala (Carmagnani 1988; Florescano

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1997; Taylor 1972). It must be pointed out, however, that the communal structures that were preserved were not simply pre-Spanish survivals, but a complex fusion between the European and the native culture.

Importation of African slaves was another colonial group created to block some of the effects of conquest and colonization. Although the number of slaves was not that much higher than in other countries of the Americas, their offspring became one of the important groups in New Spain (Aguirre Beltrán 1972).

Spaniards created a system of social segregation in colonial Mexico to keep each group isolated from the others; this separation, however, was not absolute; miscegenation among the major groups (Indians, Spaniards and Africans) existed and gave origin to new, mixed groups. In order to control colonial society, Spaniards created a system of classification, the so-called *castas* [castes] to categorize these mixed individuals in a proper and convenient way (Aguirre Beltrán *op. cit.*: 153 *et passim*). Miscegenation, however, was not a homogeneous process throughout the colony; on the contrary, it depended on the geographical distribution of the different groups of population and on their figures. Generally speaking it happened in a more accelerated way in those places where colonial activities were concentrated such as in cities, *reales de minas* (mining places) and haciendas. Although *mestizaje* was a growing process, Indian populations remained as the majority group during the colonial period (1521-1821).

As part of these processes, in New Spain some communities were able to maintain themselves as semi-autonomous groups. This happened mainly in the traditional areas of prehispanic settlement (the center-south of *Mesoamerica* and the north-western part of the country), where the social structure and culture were recreated with the incorporation

[1] 1521, the year of the fall of Tenochtitlan but later on northern territories

of elements brought by the Europeans. In some instances indigenous nobility was reconstituted, and on various occasions at certain points in time, especially during the 17th century. This process included hispanization. In any event, the majority of indigenous populations maintained its position as peasant smallholders (Carmagnani 1988).

This situation continued during the first years of Independence, although in those years the protected status that the Indian Republics had enjoyed during colonial times was terminated. All this does not mean that the colonial era was a period of peace. There is a documented history of social discontent in those years, which included "native insurrections, movements of defense of the threatened indigenous communities, peasant rebellions, urban mutinies and messianic and millenarian movements" (Florescano 1997: 243 *et passim*).

The political turmoil of the first independent years allowed the communities certain tranquility; but as early as the decades of 1820 and 1830 there were attempts to undermine communal property on behalf of the authorities in different states of Mexico. These policies gave rise to the agrarian rebellions of the following decades (*ibid.*). This trend culminated with the enactment of the *Ley Lerdo* in 1856. This Law aimed basically at undermining the political and economic predominance of the Church and attacked the property of corporations, but which also was applied to the indigenous communities. The purpose was the development of a class of small agricultural producers, but the final result was the expansion property of great estates (latifundia) which grew at the expense of community lands, especially towards the end of the 19th century.

From this period until the agrarian reforms of Cárdenas (1934-1940) indigenous populations suffered a decreasing capacity for social reproduction; although in many

places the haciendas depended upon a seasonal workforce, which permitted a relative stability for the communities. The agrarian reform of President Lázaro Cárdenas allowed a certain recomposition of the smallholding peasant class by creating the so-called *ejido* [communal property], restoring part of the land that had been taken away from the communities. However, at the same time communities became ever more dependent in economic and political terms. The following regimes returned to anti-agrarian policies. As a result peasant villages depended more and more on external activities to guarantee their subsistence, particularly on paid labor, which was generally sought by way of migration.

Present conditions

Today the indigenous population is a highly complex entity: on the one hand, it has common elements of the social, cultural and political type especially in the Mesoamerican area. These elements include a series of beliefs, communal nuclei, social subordination based on ethnic elements or regional historical events of diverse historical depth, which give the entity a certain homogeneity. On the other hand, there is also a great diversity in aspects such as geographical distribution, demographics, linguistic situation, and economic conditions.

Both state policies and the development of the country had diverse effects on the indigenous population, favoring their decrease in relative terms over the centuries, even though this trend encompasses some particularities that are worth mentioning. For example, in some cases the pace of their reduction was slower than in others.

Demographic changes in the indigenous population in the country during the 20th century can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Number of indigenous populations in the 20th Century

Year	Total population in the country	Indigenous population	Percentage of indigenous population
1930	16 552 722	2 251 086	13.6
1940	19 653 552	2 490 909	12.7
1950	25 791 017	2 447 609	9.5
1960	34 923 129	3 030 254	8.7
1970	48 225 238	3 111 415	6.5
1980	66 846 833	5 1 81 038	7.8
1990	81 249 645	6 406 154	7.9

Sources: Valdés and Menéndez 1987; INEGI (National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics) 1993.

Although some scholars (Manrique 1994; Medina 1990b) have stressed that governmental figures concerning indigenous population must be taken cautiously, because of the mistakes and deficiencies of the criteria and methodologies used to raise data, generally speaking the diminishing trend shown is acurate. This, of course, does not allow speaking of an inevitable disappearance of Indian population in Mexico. As a matter of fact, the meaning of demographic tendencies for the indigenous population is a complex phenomenon and comprises different patterns depending on specific groups (Manrique *op. cit.*).

In terms of geographical distribution, indigenous population shows an uneven pattern, although it tends to concentrate in the traditional areas of Central Mexico. Currently, 81 percent of the total indigenous population is concentrated in eight states:

Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz, Yucatán, Puebla, Hidalgo, México and Guerrero. Table 2 contains the specific data:

Table 2 Entities with a major proportion of speakers of indigenous languages in 1990

State	No. Of speakers	% In relation to the total in the entity
Oaxaca	1 018 106	39.1
Chiapas	716 012	26.4
Veracruz	580 386	10.7
Yucatán	525 264	44.2
Puebla	**503 277**	**14.1**
Hidalgo	317 838	19.5
Guerrero	298 532	13.4
San Luis Potosí	204 328	11.9

Source: INEGI 1993.

Data used in Table 2 are native language spoken, a fact that must be to take into account, especially when it has been argued that ethnicity in Mexico is not reduced to language, but censuses use language spoken as the main criterion to identify indigenous peoples.

On the other hand, within each of the entities where an Indian population is located, its distribution is not even (with the exception of Yucatán, where the indigenous people occupy 92.5% of the total of the municipalities). Indian settlements tends to be concentrated in certain municipalities, generally the most rural and those which lack public services. Thus, traditional form of settlement has been combined with an unequal development and tendencies to proletarianization and social differentiation.

In terms of native languages, taking as a basis the number of speakers, *three types of groups* has been detected in the 1990 census within the indigenous languages: in the first place are those that can be called *macro-languages*, with more than 200,000 speakers. In second place are the *intermediate languages*, which are those that have between 100,000 and 200,000 speakers. Macro and intermediate languages encompass most speakers and comprise a total of 81.4 percent of all speakers of indigenous languages, representing languages with a great viability. Finally, there is a group composed of what could be called *micro-languages*. These languages together only comprise 0.07 percent of the total speakers and with all reason may be considered as endangered or practically extinct languages (Manrique, 1994). These languages are shown in the following tables.

Table 3 Macro-Languages in 1990

Language	Amount of speakers
Náhuatl	1,197,328
Maya	713,520
Mixtec languages	383,544
Zapotec languages	380,690
Otomí	280,238

Source: INEGI 1993.

Table 4 Medium Languages in 1990

Language	Amount of Speakers
Tzeltal	261,084
Tzotzil	229,203
Totonac	207,876
Mazatec	168,374
Chol	128,240
Mazahua	127,826
Huasteco	120,739
Chinantec languages	103,942

Source: INEGI 1993.

Table 5 Micro Languages in 1990

Language	Amount of Speakers
Ocuiltec	971
Texistepec Popoluc	773
Seri	629
Opata or Low Pima	347
Kickapoo	271
Cochimí	182
High Pima	157
Cucapá	153
Lacandón	130
Teco	126
Kumiai	112
Kiliwa	47
Papabuco	22
Rincón Zapotec	22
Papago	10
Petlapa Chinantec	1

Source INEGI 1993.

Another circumstance that must be taken into account related to the linguistic factor is that by itself it is not a decisive element for the identification of significant ethnic units. The reason is that even though it might be argued that each language represents one community of speakers, this community does not represent an ethnic unit.

Náhuatl, the largest indigenous language in the country with the greatest geographical distribution, represents a good example of this. *Náhuatl* has a great variety of dialects, which is particularly underlined by the speakers. Thus the "*Náhuatl* group" actually consists of a series of communities which are spread out over various states and which have no more sense of an affiliation to a supracommunal entity than the speakers of the Spanish language of the different Latin American countries would have. Besides, *Náhuatl* speakers [*nahautlatos*] do not have any common institutions beyond the community level, nor are there *extensive* ties (in geographical and temporal terms)

beyond the region. Among *Nahuas* themselves there are cultural, social, political and economic differences that make it impossible to see them as a unique group, especially under the currently prevailing conditions where communication between the *Nahua* communities is not encouraged. The State has attempted to create some forms of supracommunal organization, like the so-called Supreme Councils, but these attempts failed. Additionally, other forms of organization have not always followed ethnic lines, as in the case of the agrarian organizations (Cortés 1990; Medina 1983a).

This goes to show that the smallest ethnic and social unit is the community (sometimes located in a single or in various settlements), understood as a socio-political nucleus which articulates the practices of a certain group. In fact, what appears to be a good indicator for ethnic change of a community is the profound transformation of this nucleus. On the other hand it must also be acknowledged that it is necessary to define the term *community* in a more concrete manner, since it has undergone constant changes. Perhaps it would therefore be more adequate to speak of *communities*, or *types of communities*.

One apparently essential element is the internal ethnic composition. Communities vary immensely and it possible to identify at least three types of communities: *monoethnic*, *mixed* and *communities with ethnic roots*. *Monoethnic communities*, are those where the entire community–or an immense majority of its residents–are indigenous. In these type of villages, culture is not the determining element in the social differentiation of the community. These communities may be divided by age groups, whether they are migrants or not, who begin to develop alternative cultural forms. Ethnic homogeneity, however, neither ensures social homogeneity nor the absence of conflict,

since there may be an acute economic differentiation, and the existing relations between the *indio caciques* and the *indio* peasants may be just as violent as among the *mestizos*. A perfect example for this is the events of Chamula in highland Chiapas (Medina 1983a; Robledo1987).

Mixed communities,[2] on the other hand, are those which are dominated by groups of *mestizos* who generally have monopolized the upper positions in the local social structure. Here the community relations reproduce those from the outside, and the social distance between economic and cultural groups is greater. Ethnic distinction is crucial for social stratification, because individuals who have the same economic position occupy different social positions, if there are ethnic differences between them. Non-indigenous have a higher position than the indigenous. Thus it appears that even though upon first glance, these nuclei seem to be *indio* communities, the insertion of a *mestizo* population which controls the most important resources changes its nature radically and turns them into *inter-ethnic communities*.

The study of this type of community helps us to understand the operation of social differentiation in a local context. Despite their small size, these social nuclei are characterized by an internal cleavage in cultural, political and economic terms. This fracture causes the existence of various types of systems of social differentiation that often function both separately and jointly. The most important of these systems are cultural, economic (including occupation and income), gendered and physical. Here I am not only referring to the indigenous or *mestizo* appearance according to local patterns, but

[2] This passage has been prepared using fieldwork data collected on one of the communities visited: San Miguel Jojupango.

also to the possession of some type of physical handicap which, at least in the referred community, was another element of segregation of individuals.

These systems are important because their situation as a whole defines whether the individuals have access or do not have access to the *total assets* of the community (understood not only as economic resources but also others, less tangible, such as ties of friendship). Starting from an initial division between *gente de razón* [people of reason, non-indigenous people in local jargon] and *gente de calzón* [people of cotton trousers, indigenous people], other systems begin to appear which operate in different directions. For instance, women in the community are situated in a lower position than men are; however *mestizo* women are in a better position than *Indian* men are; young girls, regardless of their ethnic origin, frequently are the target of discriminating practices (including brushes) from local boys. Even my two female research assistants, both of them urban *mestizo* young women, were victims of this behavior from boys.

Thus each individual participates simultaneously in various different systems, whose *sum* (in the algebraic sense) determines their situation within the local social structure. The final result is the conservation of subordination, in which contradictions and points of friction are ever present. This suggests the insufficiency of dichotomy schemes that describe subordination on the basis of two main groups (sometimes in a Manichean fashion). Individuals find themselves in a network of advantages/benefits, but also at the same time of disadvantages/losses; in other words, an individual can be at the same time dominant and dominated with respect to other individuals in the community and in the region.

Other elements to consider in this type of community may be called *micro-advantages*, understood as the ability to obtain benefits on the basis of small factors which are used to reaffirm social position. These advantages, which in broader contexts would be insignificant, acquire great importance in the immediate local space.[3] Friendships and acquaintances are such an example. Although they do not guarantee an immediate and necessary profit, they are strategic elements that must not be underestimated. In San Miguel Jojupango *mestizos* attempt –and generally achieve– to monopolize the contacts of all the external agents who come into the community: doctors, teachers, engineers, and the occasional absentminded anthropologist. Even though these relations do not always imply real benefits, within a global strategy the final balance is positive, because at least some of these relations will be fruitful. There is also the *willingness* with which the external agents let themselves be monopolized or even look for this monopolization, thus helping to weave these nets of social differentiation beyond the community, which causes an articulation between the local and regional/national system of subordination, and often follows the same rules as the former.

Other micro-advantages that appear in the community are certain possessions, which can be qualified as minimal, of elements that again are decisive in the local context: the number of rooms in a house, the amount of draft animals, the number and gender of the children, among others. All these factors combine to form the mechanisms that institutionalize inequality.

The third type of community is the one that could be called *of ethnic roots*. This term alludes to the ethnic change this community has undergone: a large part of the most

[3] It could be assumed that these advantages are also important in other contexts, for instance the importance of *contacts* in the processes of informal politics such as lobbying.

visible elements of ethnicity have disappeared (language, clothing, and considerable segments of social and political organization). Despite all this, however, there are still elements that indicate the weight of the ethnic structures. These almost always include segments of the system of tasks or charges associated with civil or religious festivities, and a worldview that can be identified in indigenous communities.

One example of the difficulty of understanding these communities, where apparently there is an *ethnicity without indigenous people*, is the concept of the *post-Nahua community* proposed by Eileen M. Mulhare to characterize the village of San Bernardino Contla, a Nahua community in the state of Tlaxcala. According to this debatable notion, the post-Nahua are "*those persons who have Nahua ancestors but have adopted new life forms in the 20th century*" (Quoted by Romano 1998: 61, note 1), which additionally implies that the ethnic aspect is understood as something static. What can be concluded from this is that the ethnic phenomenon has deep roots that are not easy to pull up and are tied to a heritage involving multiple cultural aspects that are still present in many *mestizo* communities.

The indigenous people, the national imaginary and the really existing relations

Apart from these more ethnographic and sociological aspects, the indigenous population is important in the country as part of national culture. From this standpoint the weight of the indigenous phenomenon is much more than solely the quantitative issue, since in the case of Mexico the building of the nation has included the incorporation of ethnic elements; the case of nationalism would be an example, insofar as it is broadly based on our indigenous heritage.

If we assume with Benedict Anderson that a nation is basically an *imagined political community*, to the degree to which it is able to imagine itself as a specific entity, it can be understood why the indigenous has been a privileged element in this process. Indeed, ever since the earliest stages of Mexican nationalism during colonial times, the search for the *American specificity* was based on the Indian heritage. Simplifying a complex process, what can be seen is a considerable continuity in this incorporation of native elements in national projects in the course of history.

The recovery of indigenous elements within national projects may be defined as *ideological work*, understood as "*the role of the State in the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of ethnicity*" (Bodemann 1990: 37), i.e. taking into account the political component ethnicity has had for the State. This ideological work shows how "*minority groups can be considered as constructed in benefit of the State by means of labor performed by the minorities for themselves, in spite of doing it involuntarily*" (*Ibid.*).

Thus the indigenous phenomenon forms part of an official ideology created mainly by the State, which uses those aspects of the indigenous that have sufficient force to be socially accepted, as for example in the case of the national emblem, which symbolizes the foundation of Tenochtitlan. This appropriation by the State is a process that has taken place in other Latin American countries, as pointed out by Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer, which mention the processes of *folklorization* and *exotization* of indigenous cultures. In these processes the recovery of indigenous symbols operates using a process of reduction of the complexity of the cultures to their most superficial aspects.

Another feature of the process of folklorization as witnessed by Mexico is its *dual* nature: it combines an idealized image of the indigenous, almost always linked to the past, with another negative or at least *opaque* image. This double representation creates the original culture and people, negating any association with the living indigenous people.

In this fashion the indigenous phenomenon is exalted by means of its most superficial and attractive elements, or else by those elements with a mystified past, whereas at the same time and on the level of social relations and interaction, indigenous peoples are tied to discrimination and denigration. This combination has been a recurrent theme in recent history, both in Mexican culture in general and in the culture of indigenous teachers in particular (cf. Florescano1997: 329 *et passim*).

With regard to the manner in which the ethnic phenomenon fits into the social relations of the regions and the country, it must be pointed out that ethnicity functions effectively like a system of social stratification. This system situates the identified groups and subjects as indigenous people in positions of subordination within the global social structure. Although Mexican social structure cannot be defined on the basis of ethnic lines (since the processes of intermarriage do not allow clear distinction between the groups), the ethnic phenomenon contributes decisively to the establishment of mechanisms of distribution of social goods.

In the more immediate contexts, ethnicity (together with other elements) *guides* social interactions between individuals and between groups, establishing forms of conduct, treatment and discriminatory ties using ethnic *markers* or *diacritical aspects*. Among these markers can be mentioned language and forms of speech, physical

appearance, manner of dressing, place of origin, place of residence, and patronymics, among other elements. It is important to point out that none of these markers are exact or self-sufficient, and their functioning is contextual, i.e. linked to the place where interaction occurs.

How this operates has been demonstrated in the teachers' narratives and a series of experiences that abound not only in the areas of interaction between *mestizos* and indigenous people (the areas where the indigenous population predominates, the so-called interethnic regions), but in any context of Mexican society. The following examples illustrate this point. The first is part of the testimony of a bilingual mestizo teacher who clearly identifies a difference in social condition between his family and the natives:

> "... my relatives are of humble origin, but they... are situated in a circle which is a little different from the others; and the same people really put us there, I mean we were the family with a certain difference, because in those times we dressed in trousers and shirts, and our language... in the family has always been Spanish, although I could say that my relatives are speakers of *Náhuatl*, or rather bilingual, because in order to communicate with the people of my village, they had to do it in *Náhuatl*." J.L.H.

The second example is from another *mestizo* teacher who describes the community where he worked, pointing out the local criteria for social separation:

> "The population is clearly divided by the only street that goes through nearly the entire urban nucleus. Nearly all the Spanish speaking people live on this street, with the exception of two bilingual families (who also live there). The rest of the people, monolingual or bilingual of Totonac origin... we can find in the lower part where the bus comes through, or in the upper part; upon first sight it can be observed that these are the worst parts of the village and that... the *people of reason*, be it for better or worse, are situated in the... better part of main street." J.M.A.

The following additional information was obtained about the same community, regarding distinction and segregation, sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant, made on the basis of manner of dress and use of language. This shows again the existence of systems of social stratification which operate simultaneously:[4]

> "Among the girls... the elements that can differentiate them in a discriminatory fashion are the dresses they use and the language(s) they speak... The dress marks a mainly economic differentiation [sic]: those who use the *tetixtle* (indigenous attire consisting of a skirt of white unbleached cotton, embroidered blouse of the same material, and an embroidered belt in the colors orange, red and blue) and speak Totonac are looked down upon by those who use a dress of different color and fashion; these [the latter] girls can speak Spanish and Totonac, although sometimes they deny being able to speak or understand it. In some cases, when the girls use the same type of dress, the differentiation can be made by the kind of dress their mothers use. In fact they used to ask me if my mother used a *tetixtle* or a dress... Some of the girls who speak Spanish as a first language are forbidden to... have any relationship with Totonac-speaking girls; but they themselves say that sometimes they don't obey and still speak to them. Apart from that the boys generally discriminate against the girls. Among the boys there is also a rejection of those children who speak Totonac; and the Spanish speakers also deny understanding or speaking that language. On the other side the insult the Totonac-speaking children use against the Spanish speakers is the word 'monkey' in Totonac (*muxni*)."

Finally, the last testimony is by an anthropology student from Puebla who is of indigenous descent. This shows once more the violent discrimination to which the indigenous people are submitted once their ethnic features are detected:

> "... I was severely criticized by some people of my community for being one of the first of the village to go on studying in the nearby city of Puebla. The change of environment caused a strong impact in me; it was like waking up from a beautiful dream to a reality I didn't understand well at all; the secondary school in which I enrolled was the most prestigious and had in its bosom the children of the proud and racist *criolla* middle class of the city. After having lived like a fish in the water with my

[4] The source of information is the field report by Ana Laura Méndez Rivera, one of my research assistants.

> schoolmates who had considered me as one of them, in my new situation I had to endure, together with another boy with the last name of Totolhua, the contempt and mockery of my new fellow students. The sin was to be different or appear different; that's when I learned that I wasn't just another citizen, inserted into a democratic country and lord of great riches generated by the 'horn of plenty,'[an allusion to the idea that Mexico has the shape of a horn of plenty or cornucopia] as the textbooks said. Now I knew that I had the worst name anyone can have in this country: *indio...* and *pinche indito,* which was even more pejorative, just as if being little could be reduced to being nothing. I also endured the jeering of some of the workers at the carpenter's shop where I was working, and for whom the worst thing that could happen to them was to be from the country... And you, what are you, *poblano o pueblano*? [a game of words: from Puebla or from the country]. That's how a short time ago a creole from the southern part of the city insulted me, and this sentence contained the entire charge of discrimination and racism that fills the livers of the Puebla elite." R.C.C.

This is the context, then, in which the everyday interaction of the indigenous population is situated and from which also emerges the idealized conceptions, and it is precisely here where the indigenous teachers are situated as well.

Political situation

It must be pointed out that historically the indigenous population has by no means been a passive protagonist, but on the contrary, indigenous people have agency and have resisted the structural violence and discrimination in many ways over time. From innumerable rebellions that abound throughout their history to more indirect resistance strategies, the indigenous peoples' actions have been visible, forcing the State to mediation. In the post-revolutionary era, these State development programs have been directed towards the creation of institutions that were intended to aggregate the villages and to control their indigenous demands integrating them into the political and economic system.

In the immediate context, in 1975 the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (*CNC*) [National Peasant Confederation], the official party's campesino branch, the *Departamento de la Reforma Agraria* [Department of Agrarian Reform] and the *National Indian Institute* organized the *1st' Congress of Indian Peoples* in Pátzcuaro, in the state of Michoacán. In this Congress, the *Carta de las Comunidades Indígenas* [Charter of the Indigenous Communities] was established and the *Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indios* (*CNPI*) [National Council of Indian Villages] came into being, the first indigenous mass association. This Council, which was composed of by 56 *Supreme Councils,* was created by indigenist policies under the assumption that the councils would represent each of the *ethnic groups* existing in the country (Medina, A. 1983a y b). In the case of Puebla, these Councils did not have any impact at all.

These policies attempted to control the demands, but had no real support in the population. The Supreme Councils ended up being ghost organizations. However, as on other occasions, these actions encouraged the creation of sectors of intermediaries who characterized themselves by their verbal radicalism oriented towards restricted demands of the cultural type. This group was closely linked to the apparatus of the State (Barre, M 1985; Medina A. 1983b).

On the other hand, as part of international events in world economy in the eighties, especially those related to recession in central countries and debt crises in Latin America, the Mexican State introduced a series of economic measures. These actions included privatization of State enterprises, elimination of subsidies, decreasing of social expenditure, and opening of national market. Economic reforms took place in the framework of the discussion of the reorganization of the General Agreement on Tariffs

and Trade (GATT) in the so-called Uruguay Round in 1986 and culminated with the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 (Harvey 1994; Ritchie 1998).

These policies had a direct impact on Mexican agriculture. A great number of small peasant producers (especially those producing maize) found themselves in a very difficult economic situation, aggravated by changes in price supports and other subsidies to basic grains. Additionally, the Mexican State developed new agrarian policies that included reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution and approval of a new Agrarian Code in 1992. The core of these reforms was the modification of the *ejido* structure. *Ejido*, a form of collective land possession that could not been sold, had been regarded a peasant gain (Harvey *op. cit.*).

As a result of these actions, in addition to a continued diminution of State credibility led to the development of a multitude of agrarian organizations with diverse ethnic-social composition. Some of these organizations that have been taken up by the national press are the *Federación Independiente de Comunidades Indígenas Mayo* (Sonora), the *Comité de Defensa y de Desarrollo de los Recursos Naturales de la Región Mixe* (Oaxaca), the *Confederación Obrero, Estudiantil del Itsmo* (Oaxaca), the *Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala* (several states), the *Consejo de Pueblos Indios de la Montaña de Tlapa* (Guerrero), the *Consejo de Pueblos Nahuas del Alto Balsas* (Guerrero), the *Frente Cívico de Amatán* (Chiapas), the *Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui* (Oaxaca), the *Comité de defensa por la Libertad Indígena* (Chiapas), and the *Unión de Comunidades Indígenas de la Selva de Chiapas* (Chiapas).

An important issue about these movements is that their demands, in contrast to those set forth by the official organizations, alluded to the ethnic and the cultural in implicit form. Ethnicity appears in the organizational forms or in the *manner* in which the principal claims are presented, which are agrarian, political, commercial or referring to social development. (Medina, A. 1983a y b.) This is sewn trough the copious journalistic information published since the decade of the sixties to date in the newspapers ***Excelsior***, ***Uno más Uno*** and ***La Jornada***).

Another significant element has been the great geographical dispersion of conflicts. However, there are concentrations in certain areas, among them Chiapas. This state has witnessed the most important indigenous movement of the last decades: the movement instigated by the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (*EZLN*). This movement started with the uprising in January of 1994 and is the culmination of the whole of all the fights that were going on in the region.

What distinguishes the *Zapatista* movement from others has been its ability to pass from an armed stage to a more political stage, in which it was able to call national and international attention to its demands, showing that these to a large extent represent national interests. The difference between the two stages may be traced by means of the comparison between the *First Declaration of the Lacandon Forest* and the *Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Forest*. The comparison shows a transformation from a call to an armed uprising to a more political strategy. This last stage culminated in the formation of a national front, the *Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (*FZLN*). FZLN has operated through a series of national quests on different topics; one of these quests was programmed for March 21, 1999 and focused on indigenous rights and the

protest against the war of extermination (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional 1995 and 1998).

The *Zapatista* movement has achieved great advances, although the final result of its actions is still completely uncertain. It was capable of stopping the generalized military action of the State. Although militarization and selective aggression in the region continued *Zapatistas* were also capable of establishing negotiations whose most important achievements were the so-called *Agreements of San Andrés*, named after the town of San Andrés Larrainzar where they were signed (Hernández and Vera 1987). The points of coincidence between the *Zapatistas* and the government were collected by an official body of mediation, composed of legislators of different parties, the *Comisión para la Concordia y la Pacificación* (*COCOPA*), by means of a document which contains the proposals for the amendments of the text of the Constitution. This document was completely accepted by EZLN after having consulted its bases.

Even though the agreements did not take into consideration all of the aspects the EZLN considers essential (like the amendment of Article 27 of the Constitution dealing with land reform, the discussion on regional and local political autonomy, and the acknowledgment of the indigenous legal systems), they have represented significant advances for indigenous demands. However (perhaps because of their importance) the government later refused to subscribe to them as they were, arguing that they violated national sovereignty and attempted to impose an adulterated version.

Given the fact that a large-scale military intervention would bring national and international condemnation for the State, this has opted for a policy to wear down, isolation, and intimidation. The *Zapatistas*, in the face of this strategy, can only try to get

out of this restricted environment in which the government intends to place them by means of the discussion of topics that are taken up by the broadest sectors of Mexican society.

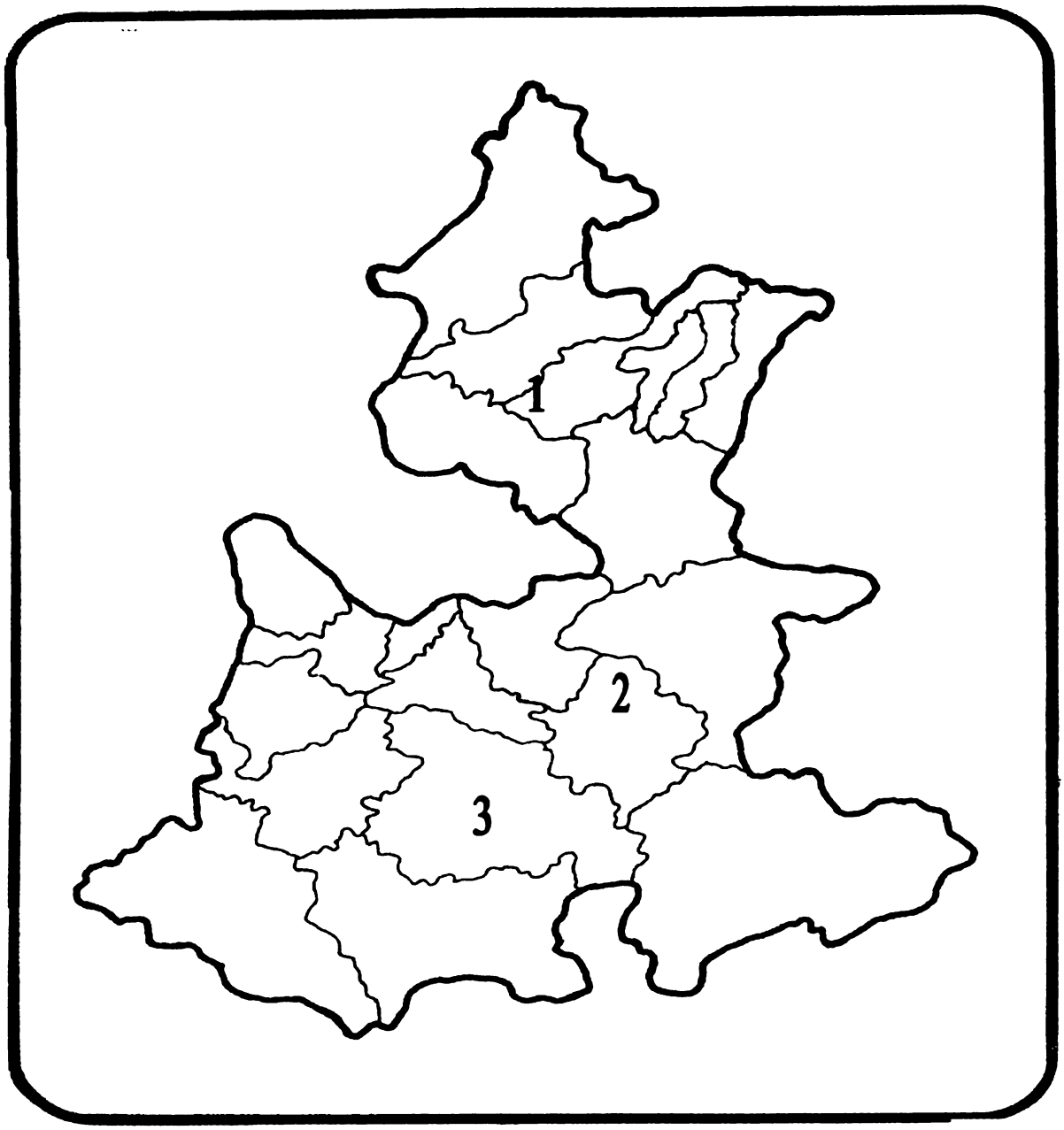
Thus, in spite of all the obstacles it encountered EZLN succeeded in creating new political alternatives not only of the indigenous people, but also of a series of social sectors that see the imperious need to introduce changes in a clearly deteriorated economic and political system. On the level of the indigenous populations the movement rendered obsolete the indigenist approach, which in any case had entered a state of *laissez faire*. It is clear that the influence EZLN has had on Mexican society has been decisive, for because of their popularity and diffusion, their exposition has had an extenuating impact on many sectors (even the more popular ones).

The movement leaded by the EZLN is the most important in Mexico. Other mobilizations, probably influenced by the example of *Zapatistas* (they have explicitly denied any link with other armed groups), have been made by the *Ejército Popular Revolucionario* (Popular Revolutionary Army), ERP. This group appeared in June 28th, 1996 in Aguas Blancas, in the state of Guerrero. ERP chose the date of commemoration of the assassination of a group of peasants linked to the *Unión de Organizaciones de la Sierra del Sur* (UOSS), an influential independent organization that has been active in Guerrero since 1995. ERP seems to have branches in Oaxaca and in northern Puebla. In any event, the government has declared that ERP has been successfully dismantled with the capture of some of its leaders (Mendoza 1999).

Conditions in Puebla

This complex national context acquires particular nuances in the Puebla region. This state occupies the fifth place in the country as far as indigenous population is concerned (cf. figures on Table 2, page 43), although in relation to the total population of the state, the indigenous people represents 11.60 percent. Puebla, demographically speaking, shows an important indigenous presence. As in the rest of Mexico, the indigenous populations are unequally distributed in the territory, and are basically concentrated in *three zones*. This can be seen in Figure 4. These zones are the Northern Sierra with a predominant population of Nahuas and Totonacs (1); the region of Tehuacán to the Southest of the state, where there are mainly Nahuas y Popolocas (2), and the central-southern region of the state with a basically Mixtec population (3).

Figure 4 Areas of concentration of indigenous population in Puebla



Note: the State is divided by Municipalities.

1. Northern Region.
2. Tehuacan Region.
3. Mixtec Region.

On the other hand, indigenous population in the state has undergone changes across time. The following tables show part of the evolution of indigenous population in recent years.

Table 6 Indigenous population in the state of Puebla in 1970

Language	Total population	%
Náhuatl	266 181	77.2
Totonac	52 806	15.3
Mixtec	8 124	2.4
Popoloca	6 7 97	2.0
Otomí	5 533	1.6
Mazatec	2 931	0.9
Zapotec	629	0.2
Other languages	2 010	0.6
Total indigenous	**345 011**	**100**
Total population in the state	**2 507 437**	**13.8**

Sources: Barbosa 1980; Olivera et al. 1982.

Table 7 Indigenous population in the state of Puebla in 1999

Language	Total population	%
Náhuatl	428 131	74.47
Totonac	114 384	19.90
Popoloca	11 805	2.05
Otomí	6 895	1.20
Mixtec	6 880	1.20
Mazatec	4 727	0.82
Tepehua	1 976	0.34
Other languages	104	0.02
Total indigenous	**574 902**	**100**
Total population in the state	**4 955 409**	**11.60**

Source: Section of statistics of Indigenous Education of the Department of Elementary Education, SEP 1999.

These tables show some facts. First of all, a change in importance of *Popoloca, Otomí* and *Mixtec* groups. In 1970 *Mixtecs* occupied the third place in the state with a total of 8,124 persons and in 1999 they occupy the fifth place with 6,895 individuals. This shift is remarkable and there are two possible reasons explaining it. First, there could be a mistake in data employed; second, that data can reflect the impact of migration: *mixtecos* are one of the most important migrants groups. In 1995 there were around 372,000 migrant *mixtecos* from Puebla, 126,000 in different Mexican cities and 246,000 in the United States: 156,000 in New York City, 30,000 in Los Angeles, 12,000 in New Jersey and 18,000 in other cities. (Cortés 1995; Nagengast and Kearney 1990). I shall return to this point later. Another difference is the inclusion of Zapotecs in 1970 data, but they are not mentioned in 1999 anymore. Additionally, figures show that although indigenous population has increased its absolute numbers, in relative terms it has been decreasing in the state, a trend similar to the national tendency.

In general, in spite of the differences, it is possible to distinguish in the state five significant groups, two major groups, *Nahua* and *Totonac*, and three minor ones, *Popoloca*, *Otomí*, and *Mixtec*.

On the other hand, beyond the demographics, in Puebla indigenous population has not reached the levels of social organization as in other states, for instance Chiapas. Probably this is the result of a combination of several factors. Among the most important the following can be pointed out. First, a regional development that combines a scattered rural *hinterland* (where Indian communities are located) with a modern sector with one of the most important cities in the country (Puebla). This creates a more complex social structure that reduces the political presence of indigenous population and conflict

generally involves other social actors such as industrial workers, middle classes and urban settlers.

Secondly, migration: in the north, people are involved mostly in national migration, and in the Mixtec area in international migration. Migration modifies the focus on communal conflict; frequently, migrants begin to struggle for communal power and majors of municipalities are elected abroad (Cortés 1995). This political conflict does not follow ethnic lines, in the extent that is an intra-ethnic situation.

As indigenous teachers become more acculturated, they tend to play a greater role in the teachers' union. Indigenous teachers in Puebla, have become more integrated to the educational system. Even though many of them have developed an ethnic awareness, this consciousness is linked to governmental positions. In other states, some sections of the national teachers' union have become more radicalized and sometimes this has room for ethnic demands. This happened in Chiapas in 1993: indigenous teachers demanded to increase the number of teachers enrolled at the *Universidad Pedagógica* (Rodríguez 1993). Additionally, among teachers migration is an important phenomenon: it was reported that in 1992, more than 2,000 schoolteachers from the Mixtec and *Sierra Negra* areas were working in the United States. Probably the figure is higher because the report only included those schoolteachers with official permits (Santin 1992). Indigenous teachers then, are less involved in ethnic oriented activities than in other places. Electoral behavior coincides with this pattern too. Analysis of 1991-1997 elections shows that Puebla displays a great deal of quiescence in Indian municipalities. There is not a great presence of any of the major political parties among indigenous communities (Ruíz 2000).

INI also had not an important presence in Puebla probably because the institution began its activities by the time that *indigenismo* was becoming less important, in 1969 (INI n.d.).

Additional data on *San Miguel Jujupango*, and *Santa María Xoyatla*, two communities where teachers from my case study worked, can help to complete this view on the situation of indigenous population in Puebla. Jojupango, as I said, is a Totonac community located in the humid, semi-tropical highlands of the Sierra Norte, close to Zacatlán. In spite of its size, Jojupango shows a complex social differentiation resulting from the existence of a *mestizo* group (*los blanquitos*) in the community who occupy the higher position in the local structure.

The initial line that divides the population is based on ethnicity: on one side are *la gente de razón* (non-indigenous), on the other, *la gente de calzón* (indigenous people). Joined to this, but with a certain degree of independence, is class position: in general *la gente de razón* are in a better economic position. Also they are the owners of the best land and the means of production, but it is possible to find poor *blanquitos* who nevertheless, in terms of status are in a better position than their indigenous counterparts.

Among indigenous people, tradition is also a factor of differentiation. More traditional individuals can have more prestige, but also can be situated in worse economic positions. Migratory experience also has an effect in the population, especially if this is connected with age: as in other rural communities, young people with this experience tend to be more separated from the community, becoming a kind of marginal individuals that can develop antisocial behavior (in Jojupango it was not infrequent that these young men vandalize the school) and also display a different attire and musical tastes.

Gender is another line that runs along a different direction but directly related to the local social differentiation. Thus, women occupy subordinate positions in the community but both ethnicity and class influence their final situation. Non-indigenous women, especially those related to *blanquitos* at the upper positions in the community, have better status than indigenous women.

The fact that a segment of the local population is not indigenous seems to be the main factor giving the community its main features. Non-local individuals, such as schoolteachers, engineers, and medical doctors, tend to be associated with local non-indigenous people. They also occupy higher paying jobs and more prestigious jobs. In summary, ethnic lines not only guide daily interactions but also fundamentally establish the mechanisms for the distribution of communal wealth and the reproduction of local social structure. Then, Jojupango is a good example in which rural communities in Mexico never have been isolated settlements, but on the contrary, *open scenarios* have been built through the interplay of the different levels of social organization.

Santa María Xoyatla (population 1,780 at the time of fieldwork), on the other hand, lies in a dry environment in the Atlixco Valley in the south of the state. Xoyatla is a Nahua community highly homogeneous in cultural terms: practically all the population is nahua the non-indigenous people are the teachers, the nurse and the medical doctor in charge of the communal clinic. Yet Xoyatla is not an isolated community, but quite the contrary. It has a high rate of international migration, mainly to New York.

The fact that there is not a *mestizo* nucleus seems to be the main reason for a higher communal control over its affairs, especially the internal government for external institutions. A couple of examples illustrate this better: the community built the clinical

center and later the inhabitants went to Puebla city to get the doctor and the nurse. This is not a common situation among rural communities that usually wait for the government to fulfill their needs. The doctor said to me that sometimes people of the Health Committee (in charge of feeding the doctor and the nurse and cleaning of the building) want to stay during the doctor's examination until he asks them to leave.

The second example has to do with the school. In Xoyatla the people have a lot of control over the different schools existing in the town; in preschool for instance, by the time I was doing fieldwork, everyday I saw a lot of women in the school yard, outside of classrooms. The principal said to me that it was common, especially in the first days of classes to help children to get used to the school, but some women stay all year long. I saw some of them going frequently into the classrooms to "help" their children, another infrequent situation in Mexican schools: usually teachers have the command of the institutions and keep parents out.

A teacher of the secondary school, that is not part of the indigenous system, complained how in her opinion teachers do not teach what is directed by the *Secretaría de Educación* but what "they" (the community) want: English courses and other practical knowledge that can be useful in migration. Again this example shows a strategy that is possible because the community keeps an important control over external institutions.

Divisions within the community complicate this. At that time there was a struggle between two groups (one faction included the preschool principal, and the other faction was led by the mayor of Municipal government). The dispute was over the control of Municipal offices and the use of community resources. However, these conflicts were not inter-ethnic in nature, all parties were Nahuas. Also the economic differences, although

present, are not extremely acute and an important part of the income coming from the migrants is used for communal and familial festivities.

Obviously, neither Jojupango nor Xoyatla can be pointed out as representative of indigenous communities in Puebla, but both inform processes that link groups, regions and activities. To this extent, the description allows a better understanding of the nature of ethnicity in the state.

Another important element in this picture of the region is the city of Puebla. As in other areas where ethnic boundaries keep their significance, this city exemplifies the racist thought of non-indigenous centers proud of their supposedly Spanish heritage.

One example of this was given in 1998 with the election for governor and major in the state and the capital city. The candidates of the ruling party for the two offices that were elected display indigenous features and for this fact they were nicknamed "Huarachín and Huarachón", the name of two well-known comedians in Mexico who parody indigenous speech and attires.

Puebla has served as the colonial center par excellence, where the state powers are installed and the colonial image is concentrated to maintain a clear-cut separation from its indigenous *hinterland,* traditionally represented by Cholula[29] and Tlaxcala. Part of this ideology is embodied in the new and the old celebrations (for instance the procession on Good Friday which was just recently *invented* –in the sense Hobsbawm gives the term–in this metropolis, as well as the bullfights). These rites indicate and *enact* the economic and ethnic differences between the social classes (Florescano 1996: 232-238).

[29] Even though Cholula, because of its development, may today be characterized as a *community of ethnic roots* in the terms mentioned above.

Under the administration of governor Bartlett (1993-1999) this cultural policy was strongly supported through the office of cultural affairs and its director at that time, the archaeologist Eduardo Merlo, who encouraged several activities linked to these cultural inventions such as food exhibits and cultural contests.

In Puebla this ideology is part of a hegemonic view that goes beyond the dominant classes and is shared by other social sectors, including the working class which ends up frequently sharing discriminatory attitudes with *criollos poblanos*, even though they share many features, physical and cultural, with the indigenous people.

Daily speech has plenty of examples of this. Derogatory expressions used by *mestizos* identifying supposedly indigenous features such as the one "*pareces indio*" [you behave like an Indian] to criticize any behavior regarded incorrect[30]. The disrespectful treatment of *tú* [thou] instead the *usted* [you] given by *mestizos* to indigenous persons in almost all interactions between them. The pejorative terms *naco* or *meco*, that scholars identified with *totonaco* and *chichimeco*, to describe a rude person (Manrique, 1994; Medina, 1983a). The popular saying that *no tiene la culpa el indio sino el que lo hace compadre* [it is not the fault of the Indian person but of who trusts him]. All of these are examples of discriminatory practices widely scattered among all social groups.

This situation shows that discrimination is a very complex process that goes far beyond an imposition by élites of their views over the society. It is more a process where several sectors get different advantages from an unfair situation, although these advantages could be minor or immaterial (the feeling of being part of superior groups, or that there are others in worse situations than one's own).

[30] I actually saw a working class man, who easily could be identified with an indigenous person, saying that expression to his son who did not put money in his pants' pockets.

Summary

This overall view puts in context the situation and the action of the indigenous teachers: in Mexico ethnicity, represented by indigenous populations that are to a great extent a product of a long process (and not a simple reminiscence of Prehispanic past) and highly heterogeneous. In Mexico, the ethnic factor has been a crucial part in the nation building process. The modern Mexican State has actively and constantly used indigenous symbols and images in order to create the idea of a united country linked by our common past. However, this process is only discursive. In reality, indigenous people as a whole face everyday discrimination at all levels. In some regions Indian movements have began to defend a series of claims.

Indigenous teachers are a good example of the complexity that ethnicity has in Mexico. They are part of a population differentiated but, homogeneous at the same time; with a high self-perception of themselves, their situation and trapped in social clichés. In so doing, the dynamic relationship between the mosaic of different groups is an important fabric of Mexican society.

CHAPTER 3

STATE POLITICS AND THE CONFORMATION OF SOCIAL SUBJECTS

"the only thing they had was their will"
S.C.M.

This chapter analyzes the processes that led to the creation of the group of indigenous teachers, which must be mainly identified with State actions. Additionally, programs of the *Universidad Pedagógica* will be described in order to find their contribution to the same phenomenon. Finally, I shall see the additional significance of this group on the microsocial level of the case under study, using some of the ethnographical information provided by teachers.

Indigenism, indigenous education and teachers in Mexico

The indigenous teachers represent today a distinctive group within the indigenous population in Mexico, and this is one of the results of contemporary politics developed by the State and directed towards this population sector, in which education occupies a privileged position. On their part, these politics form part of the process of creation of the modern Mexican State, which arose in the wake of the revolutionary process of the second decade of this century. One important element in this was the acknowledgment of education as a function and task of the State, that is to say the creation of the concept of public education. The foundation of the federal *Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)* [Department of Public Education] in 1921 was a key factor in this process. At the same time, to speak of public education and educational policies during these years was in

large measure to speak of rural education and *indigenismo* [State's policies towards indigenous population]. It must be remembered that a large part of the Mexican population in those years was rural, and within this sector the indigenous population was significant.

In the same year of the foundation of SEP the *Departamento de Educación y Cultura para la Raza Indígena* [Department of Education and Culture for the Indigenous Race] was created, one of the forerunners of the modern institutions dedicated to indigenous education (Barre 1985). This concern for indigenous education can be understood when it is remembered that the post-revolutionary Mexican State was trying to consolidate national unity, and the indigenous population was considered as one of the principal obstacles to the achievement of this objective. Part of this view was the result of the lack of the Spanish language, its parochial affiliations and local loyalties, as well as its relative geographical and social isolation. It must also be taken into account that apart from the political intention of contributing to national unity, it was at the same time necessary to support national economic development, to create efficient agriculture and to develop an *ad hoc* work force. Several years would have to pass before these economical aspects would be realized. Therefore, following a common practice of the 19th century, people were still talking of an *indigenous problem*.

Anthropology and anthropologists contributed significantly to the performance of these tasks. Manuel Gamio, who in fact is considered as the first professional anthropologist in Mexico, was Undersecretary of Education from 1921 to 1925, during the period in which José Vasconcelos served as Secretary of Education. It was under his administration that the so-called *Casas del Pueblo* were founded, which were part of a

modern concept of rural schools as spaces of total education. They attempted to influence the communities in which the schools were situated in holistic fashion, and this included the idea of the teacher as guide and missionary for the community (Medina 1988; Noyola 1987).

Another crucial figure in rural education was Moisés Sáenz, who replaced Gamio as Undersecretary of Education in 1925. Sáenz perfected the model of the Mexican rural school. In 1932 he founded in Carapan, in the state of Michoacán, an *Estación experimental de incorporación del indio* [Experimental Station for the Incorporation of the Indian] with the support of an important group of anthropologists and other professionals.

Under these circumstances, two political strategies were used to attack the *problem*: *incorporation* and *integration* (Loyo 1978). The former, which was predominant in the period of Gamio, considered that the best strategy to achieve national unity would be to strip the natives of their distinctive features; i.e., to wipe out ethnic culture and to impose national culture. As may be expected, this strategy encountered strong resistance in the indigenous regions and failed. On the basis of Sáenz's experiences the concept of *integration* was created, which was a less aggressive form that sought to amalgamate Western culture with those aspects of indigenous culture that were deemed positive, such as communal work and handicrafts. It was, of course, the State that determined what was positive and what was not.

In both schemes education was the most favored instrument to achieve the objectives of national unity, since it pretended to homogenize the population culturally

and socially, and because the educational promoters and the teachers were the favored agents for this homogenization.

During the era of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) the *Departamento Autónomo de Asuntos Indígenas* [Autonomous Department of Indigenous Affairs] was created, which remained operational until 1947. Into this department were incorporated in 1938 the *Departamento de Educación Indígena* [Department of Indigenous Education] and the *Departamento de Misiones Culturales* [Department of Cultural Missions] in a movement to centralize functions, culminating in 1948 with the foundation of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI)* [National Indigenist Institute]. INI has been the most important instance of government policies directed towards the indigenous population. This institute developed the strategies of nationalization of indigenous communities even further by means of the creation of a more refined theory and methodology, developed mainly by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. Aguirre Beltrán designed a strategy in which education, among other media, was considered a key factor for change (España 1987; Medina 1988; Téllez 1987).

During the sixties, *indigenismo* received its strongest critique as part of the student movement, and it was marked by a profound polemic that went into the following decade. By the seventies, indigenist policies experienced a shift within the framework of a process of social and political reform that was brought about to deal with the situation inherited from the social unrest of the previous decade. The concept that was set in motion was called *indigenism of participation*, which basically implied the incorporation of individuals of indigenous origin into intermediate jobs in some of the institutions

dedicated to the indigenous population, especially those related to education[1]. Although this *policy of participation* was severely criticized from its beginning (*Frente Independiente de Pueblos Indios* 1990), it was a milestone that initiated a new era, and one of its results was the amendment of Article 4 of the Constitution, acknowledging the plural ethnicity of the country.

It is precisely this policy of indigenism of participation that brought forth the so-called *bilingual and bicultural education.* As a consequence of this, an independent office dedicated to indigenous education was established in 1973, the *Dirección General de Educación Extraescolar en el Medio Indígena* [General Department of Out-of-School Education in the Indigenous Medium]. This office was ultimately transformed in 1978 into what is now the *Dirección General de Educación Indígena DGEI* [General Department of Indigenous Education], located within the *Subsecretaría de Educación Básica* [Undersecretary of Basic Education]. This is the central organ for everything concerning indigenous education on the national level, and its functions were outlined as follows: 1) to propose educational contents and methods, as well as the technical-pedagogical standards for education provided to natives who do not speak Spanish. 2) To organize, develop, operate, supervise and evaluate the programs for the teaching of the Spanish language in the indigenous communities; and 3) To attend to those programs and services of basic education, particularly in predominantly monolingual indigenous communities where no Spanish is spoken (Pineda 1993:134).

Through this institution the following programs for primary and pre-school education were created, always with the view of providing formal education in diverse

[1] It is important to point out that so far no native has been director of the main institution dedicated to the indigenous population, the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista;* however, two of them have been in charge of the

indigenous languages, and with the final purpose of offering an education that would comply with and cover the national standards: Pre-school Education, Bilingual/Bicultural Primary Education, Boarding Schools, Medical Assistance and Health Education in Boarding Schools and Centers for Social Integration, Training for Bilingual Personnel, Production of Bilingual and Support Materials, Educational Programs for the Indigenous Woman, Bilingual Radio Support, Supervision and Evaluation of the System of Indigenous Education, Training for Bilingual Promoters in Indigenous Language, and Special Programs (*Ibid.*).

Recently, in the decade of the nineties, the *Zapatista* uprising in Chiapas in the beginning of 1994 has affected the panorama of indigenism and educational policies towards the indigenous population, like other sectors of Mexican society as well. As a matter of fact, this uprising of a series of Indian communities in the highlands and the Lacandon Forest of Chiapas has made Mexican *indigenismo* even more invalid. One of the effects of this movement has been the radicalization of the demands made by indigenous peoples, as well as their polarization among themselves. At the same time this has led in some places to the development of more progressive postures within the State in an effort to avoid being overtaken by the indigenous peoples. One example is the *Ley de Derechos de los Pueblos y Comunidades Indígenas del Estado de Oaxaca* of 1998 [Law of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the state of Oaxaca], which is a rather advanced proposal in the matter of policy towards the indigenous people.

The effects of these policies on the indigenous population have been quite contradictory. On the one hand there can be no doubt that many of the objectives set forth

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General Department of Indigenous Education, and others have occupied intermediate posts.

by the strategy of the State, which identified national unity with ethnic homogeneity, have been achieved. When considered as a whole, as it was shown in the former chapter, indigenous languages have diminished in relative terms over the course of this century, and some of them have even disappeared.[2] A large part of the Indian population has acquired *mestizo* conduct and features. Yet on the other hand the presence of the ethnic aspect in many parts of the country is heightened and, most importantly, the goal of a reduction of poverty within the Indian population has never been reached. It is safe to say that a good part of these results cannot be considered as having had the desired effect of State policies, but rather as the outcome of "spontaneous" processes derived from the social and economic development of the country. And, finally, there were a series of effects that were not foreseen, or at least not explicitly. First, there was the creation of an immense bureaucracy that ultimately came to absorb most of the budgets destined to the sector. Figures given by an important INI administrator and anthropologist ilustrate this for the years between 1962 and 1970 in the following table.

Table 8 Percentage of INI's budget devoted to personnel 1962-1970

Year	Percentage of the budget devoted to salaries of INI personnel
1962	41.0
1963	45.4
1968	42.0
1969	48.0
1970	51.0

Source: Marroquín 1977, adapted from Table 8: 104.

[2] However, historical data are not entirely reliable because, as Leonardo Manrique mentions, the criteria used in the censuses have been variable.

Another effect of *indigenista* programs was social differentiation, contradictions and interior conflicts within the indigenous communities (Medina 1983; Pineda *op. cit.*)

All these policies, with their distinct nuances, involved individuals of indigenous origin who have been incorporated since the beginning of the different official government programs. These individuals developed different technical and administrative activities and skills related to education. Nevertheless, their final destiny was varied: some went back to their communities after the disappearance of the programs. Some went to the cities to work in different jobs. Finally, there were others who were absorbed into the indigenist apparatus on different levels, where most of them perform jobs related to educational areas: cultural promoters and teachers as well as *support workers* (cooks, superintendents, secretaries etc.). According to Mexican census of 1990, 50, 213 of the total of individuals identified as indigenous (1,807,350), i.e. 2.8% of this population, indicated *educational workers* as their main occupation. This amount includes the aforementioned support personnel (Manrique 1994: 85, Table 7).

These State policies have consequently been decisive in the creation of the new social group of indigenous teachers. This has been done by means of the selection, training, and in good measure also through the indoctrination of a number of individuals. These individuals when joining the educational service develop and reproduce common characteristics, which distinguish them both from the indigenous population and from the main set of teachers in other systems. At the same time, this group is also heterogeneous.

The distinctive characteristics of the group are both products of the *objective conditions* under which they develop, and of elements that are actively induced by the State. Among the objective conditions, labor conditions play an important role, since they

provide a salary that might not be outstanding in quantitative terms when compared with the incomes of migrant workers or other subjects in the rural environment.[3] These earnings are still important because they are a reliable source of income that also provides a medical insurance program and retirement benefits.

Part of the job involves educational and administrative tasks, which are basically routine activities, but are at the same time sources of a differentiated culture. These elements are reinforced by practices, instruments and an ideology developed by the State. The main characteristic of the State's ideology is a positive but abstract, if not demagogical, recovery of the indigenous, and which are transmitted and maintained by the distinct components of the educational system to which the teachers have ties in different moments of their professional career.

There are important differences within this group. Above all are those which denote social and economic differentiation. It is possible to find among indigenous teachers both workers of scarce incomes (the majority) and others who become a privileged sector by means of control of administrative posts in government offices, the economic and political control in their native communities, or a combination of both[4]. This differentiation has greater effects on the regional level. In the Highlands of Chiapas, for instance, one of the most extensively studied zones, it has been reported that the teachers often started using the knowledge acquired in official institutions for their own benefit (the Spanish language, administrative procedures, and contacts). Thus turning into cultural *brokers*, if not into *caciques* in their communities by means of controlling

[3] Nowadays various processes have modified the appearance of the rural areas of Mexico, most importantly migration and drug trafficking, which have introduced a new set of income strategies for an important sector of the rural population. Together with the continuing deterioration of all workers' salaries, the figure of the teacher, in terms of prestige and income, has lost many of the advantages it formerly had.

posts in the local administrations, especially as secretaries and mayors, and in this way obtaining power over land and resources (Pineda *op. cit.*).

In other instances, the teachers actually acted as critical elements and transformers of their cultures of origin in a sense planned by the theorists and indigenist functionaries, as mentioned in the case of the Chinantecs of Oaxaca (Acevedo 1984). In other cases, acculturation served as an element of resistance, as happened among the Mazatecs and Zapotecs of the Sierra of Oaxaca, or it has allowed them to combine national and native aspects, as in the case of the Zapotecs of the Isthmus of Oaxaca (*Ibid.*).

In the state of Puebla everything seems to indicate that the teachers will not turn into those who control the resources of their communities. Probably this is the result of a different social structure where there are other sectors involved in controlling rural resources, even though some of them came to occupy jobs of a certain level in the administration of indigenous education in their respective communities. This control, which could be called *administrative caciquism*, has been relatively fragile if not tied to other, more permanent, elements like the economical aspect, and when political-administrative changes took place in SEP, they lost their influence. During the six years of former governor Manuel Bartlett's administration (1993-1999), the Department of Indigenous Education at the state level disappeared from the Board of Education, and this contributed conclusively to the loss of control.[5] It is interesting to see, though, that this

[4] Unfortunately there are no concrete data available on the topic of social differentiation for the entire country.

[5] During this six-year period the tasks of the former Department of Indigenous Education were absorbed by the *Dirección de Planeación* and the *Coordinación de Proyectos de Educación Indígena* belonging to the *Dirección de Educación Elemental* [Department of Planning and Project Coordination of Indigenous Education of the Department of Elementary Education].

differentiation also took place along ethnic lines: the teachers who occupied these posts are of Nahua origin.

Another element, which contributes to regional and local fragmentation of the group, is the absence of organizations acting on a nation-wide level. This seems to be the result of great incorporation of indigenous teachers to official structures. As indicated above, only in the seventies was such an organism founded, the *Asociación Nacional de Profesionales Indígenas Bilingües A.C. (ANPIBAC)* [Professional Bilingual Indigenous National Association], which was really neither representative nor able to have any decisive influence among the teachers. ANPIBAC slowly disappeared. Besides, recent educational policies have emphasized the so-called federalization of educational services, i.e. the higher control of educational processes by the states, which has led to a major regional segmentation of the teachers.

Other factors must be considered in order to characterize this group and which come to bear in a more local sphere. It is especially important to take into account the concrete actions of the institutions charged with the training of the teachers. What stands out in this study is the description of the programs of the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional,* with their special emphasis on the manner in which they were put into practice in the city of Puebla during the years the teachers were studying there.

Teachers' training at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional

The *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* (*UPN*) is one of the institutions with a direct influence on the formation of indigenous teachers through its *licenciatura* programs in indigenous education. The program at UPN has its immediate antecedents in the policies

of the seventies. A study course of ethnolinguistics was created in 1979 at the *Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social* (*CIESAS*) [Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology]. Also in 1982 a program of indigenous education was established at UPN, for which groups of teachers were selected to study for a *licenciatura* degree at the central campus of the UPN in Mexico City.[6]

In 1990 two other programs in indigenous education were initiated: the study course in pre-school education and primary education, conceived as *courses of professional standardization*, i.e. as a strategy of pedagogical formation for those individuals who were working as teachers without having previously gone through a teaching program. Since these teachers are in active service, these courses were designed with a special modality in that the teachers only attended university on Saturdays. This also gave the program a semi-open character. It is assumed that the teacher-students must study autonomously on their workdays. Teaching material is designed for this purpose, with considerably detailed lessons and activities which must be studied during the week, whereas the Saturday sessions are consulting opportunities to clear up doubts (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional 1991a). Formally there are two different programs with two different degrees, one in pre-school education and the other in primary education. Actually, teachers of both levels work in the same spaces, with the same subject matters and the same materials.

Both study courses consist of eight semesters, divided into two great blocks called *basic areas* from the first through the fifth semesters and a *terminal area*

[6] UPN was conceived as an alternative to higher education for the teaching profession of the country, and with this idea in mind it offers various *licenciaturas* and Master's programs as well as specializations. These programs are offered at the central campus in Mexico City and in the different campuses situated in

comprising the sixth throughout the eighth semesters. In the basic area the courses are organized into four curricular subjects: psychopedagogics, social history, anthropology/linguistics, and methodology. In the terminal area subject matters are organized into four so-called fields of knowledge: nature, social matters, language, and mathematics; the idea is that in this last area the teachers develop a pedagogical proposal for teaching in one of these areas. This proposal is a requirement that serves them to obtain the *licenciatura* degree (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional 1991b and 1993).

The basic criterion to be admitted to this program is to be a teacher in the service of the Subsystem of Indigenous Education of *Secretaría de Educación Pública*. It is also assumed that the teachers working in this area must have a sufficiently adequate fluency in the indigenous language of their group of origin. Ideally, this mother tongue is the same of the region where they will work. The linguistic criterion has been the principal element that was used in Mexican society to identify indigenous populations. Therefore, it is also implicitly assumed that the teachers who study these *licenciaturas* are indigenous, or are at least working in areas of indigenous settlement where a minimum of one native language is spoken.

Although the formal proposal is evidently attractive and addresses an existent deficiency, there are many problems that have not yet been adequately solved.

Perhaps the first and most significant of these problems is the result of the history of indigenous education in Mexico itself, which has largely been a political and not so much a pedagogical project. As indicated above, indigenous education has from the beginning been part of the policies of national integration of the Mexican State.

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various states of the Republic. Recently the university has opened courses for students of preparatory schools. The aim is to train professionals in the field of educational sciences.

Educational projects developed in such a manner were essentially determined by political interests and by interests of the groups that formed around them. Thus the major part of the educational programs created for indigenous populations put political before educational aspects, and in many cases even replaced them.

This problem was also reflected in the study courses at UPN. However, it must be underlined that the obstacles faced by these study courses are diverse and are not only a product of institutional matters, but also include much more comprehensive problems. Here I shall mention the conflicts the Puebla campus of UPN was faced with, but it must be added that they are not presented as a representative sample. However, it may be assumed that in general terms there are probably no significant variations, since the institution functions according to a general model that is applied in the entire Republic.[7]

These problems may be classified into two major categories: a) those related to the proper characteristics of the teachers; and b) those of the institution.

The cultural antecedents of the teachers fall in the first category, their culture of origin and in particular their academic preparation. As far as their cultural antecedents are concerned, they become an obstacle to university learning when they are not adequately taken into account in the university training programs. One example for this is the linguistic ability of the teachers. Spanish has a significant presence among the teachers; however, the Spanish they use may be called *popular Spanish*. This language is distinct from *academic Spanish* as used in scholarly interactions and which has its clearest expression in the materials used in the study courses and the standards demanded by the

[7] Perhaps the exceptions come from those regions where indigenous communities have proposed educational alternatives, like in Chiapas and some parts of Oaxaca.

advisors of the university. University Spanish is highly specialized and not easy to use, even in the case of the Spanish-speaking *mestizo* teachers.

Because of the existing social conditions in Mexico, Spanish has acquired a status of *language of power* with respect to the indigenous languages. Under the conditions for the formation of this country, the knowledge and employment of the Spanish language has been an element that showed the affiliation with a dominant group, contrasting, especially in certain regions, with the discriminated populations. Therefore, its use, compared to the indigenous languages, has never been a neutral fact, nor was it used under equal conditions, which points to one of the criteria of social inequality in Mexico.

A large part of the indigenous teachers, regardless if their native language was indigenous or Spanish, are not only incapable of managing adequately the academic Spanish required by the university, but often even speak what may be called *indigenous Spanish;* i.e. they have a double disadvantage in scholarly interaction. It must be pointed out that the data obtained from the total of Group one and 64.2 percent of Group two show that a great number of them had learned Spanish in the context of the family.[8] This should actually account for a better fluency than has been indicated here. However, according to the narratives of teaching experiences and other recollections of everyday life, it is possible to conclude that the family teaching of the Spanish language, in the case of those teachers who may be identified as indigenous, must have been deficient. This is the result of a rather precarious mastery of Spanish of teachers' parents and the use of the indigenous Spanish referred to above. The following tables show these contexts of Spanish learning in the two groups under study:

Table 9 Context of Spanish learning Class 1990

Context	No.	%
Family	12	38.7
School	9	29.0
No data	10	32.3
Total	31	100.0

Source: teachers' narratives.

Table 10 Context of Spanish learning Class 1992

Context	No.	%
Family	12	66.7
School	6	33.3
Total	18	100.0

Source: teachers' narratives

This learning in the context of the family, of a version of Spanish that is not the dominant one, becomes evident in the recollections of some of the teachers:

> "The second language [Spanish] I learned at home from my relatives, and little by little I was learning it from other persons, because my father took us to sell things at markets, and... it was there where I heard how they communicated among themselves [the Spanish speakers].
> When I was six I entered primary school, where some of the words... I already understood them... but for me it was difficult, because my parents spoke to us in Náhuatl..." F.C.H.

> "Even though my parents speak Spanish, ... they don't speak it with perfection, and I learned to understand them since I was a little girl... When I entered into other schools I was forced to speak with more precision, and when I made mistakes I was laughed at and I felt bad, and the only thing I did was listen..." D.A.M.

[8] It must be remembered that these data also include the Spanish-speaking mestizos.

Based on previous quotes by teachers who learned Spanish at school, there are still major problems because of the hostile context they were generally exposed to, especially if they weren't fluent in the national language. One example, though perhaps extreme, of the problems the teachers faced linguistically, is pinpointed by one-woman teacher who speaks about a "halfway" situation between the loss of an indigenous language and a deficient acquisition of the second language:

> "I learned Spanish in the family... from my dad. Since we were little he spoke to us in both ways, Spanish-Náhuatl or vice versa. For all my brothers and sisters and... for me it is difficult to speak Spanish; maybe because of the lack of practice, many words in Náhuatl we can't pronounce... clearly. For me, personally, in Spanish it was a little difficult to know exactly how things are pronounced." L.J.P.

Thus, it becomes evident that it is not exceptional to find teachers who had a deficient initial introduction to Spanish, even though it may have taken place within the family context. Besides, this deficient learning was maintained during their school years, all of which has repercussions in their university performance. In the university not only fluidity in academic Spanish is required, but also a certain ability for the use of academic materials, which are, moreover, extracted from texts for specialists in social and educational sciences.

Another cultural antecedent that affects the academic performance of the teachers negatively is the aspect of the concepts of person, time and space. These concepts are the basis for the ethnic differences that remain beyond the change of other cultural characteristics that can be more volatile and may lead one to believe that the individuals have been *homogenized.*

My data on this topic is limited, but the issue remains as an important line of investigation. It is possible to make some observations, which point in that direction. One example is the difficulty faced by many teachers with respect to concept of time; for many of them the identification of centuries and their own situation in the progress of time is extremely difficult. In other words, conceiving historical events in a large time frame is an abstract and highly difficult operation for them.

It might be concluded that this is part of a series of deficiencies shared by all those students who have received a deficient education in history, but there are also different historical concepts, in which the past is associated with concrete facts, and tied to personal experience.

In this fashion we would find a somewhat paradoxical fact: a university study course that presents a planned and organized program, taking into account the ethnic differences of the students; in fact, it ignores them.

As far as the problems arising from the institution proper are concerned, the following five must be mentioned as the most important: a) format, b) didactic materials, c) study plans and programs, d) academic personnel, and e) organizational structure.

Regarding format, it must be remembered that this is a partially distance-learning program, with strong emphasis on self-study. A system of this kind needs for its successful realization various requisites: first of all, a student who has assimilated certain academic characteristics, such as habits and strategies of study and reading. In this case the students have to work on their own during the week, reading and performing the activities indicated by the texts, and only come to the Saturday sessions in order to resolve their doubts. After mentioning some of the teachers' characteristics it is difficult

to assume that these conditions will be fulfilled. This becomes obvious observing the forms of work, because in the best case the Saturday sessions have been transformed into regular classes, where the professors present their topics. The teacher-students, on the other hand, read very little and also do not perform all the activities marked in the workbooks.

The materials used show what is probably the greatest deficiency of the study course. They basically consist of a series of anthologies, complemented by workbooks that direct the readings and describe the objectives and activities of each course, as well as the units into which they are divided. Most of the selected readings, as mentioned above, are taken from specialized books and journals on the social and educational sciences, and were not written for readers like these teachers. It must be emphasized that this is not an underestimation of the teachers' ability, but the acknowledgment that many of them had to face acute problems in their preparation, and it is therefore evident that this kind of reading is not very helpful in their training. This shows the need for textbooks written for the type of reader at hand.

In some curricular subjects, the problems become obvious, for example in the anthropological-linguistics, which supposedly should provide the difference of the teachers' program through a cross-cultural perspective. A brief survey of each of the courses, their objectives, contents and readings, shows one of the reasons why the teachers face so many problems in their formation at the university, and why many of them leave during the first few semesters.

These anthropological-linguistics courses show that there is more interest in providing a political discourse than in strong fundamentals to confront the cultural

differences in the processes of teaching/learning. This can be seen when the general objectives of this group are reviewed: "... *responds to the acknowledgment of cultural diversity in the indigenous zones of our country, the valuation of the variety of its manifestation, and the importance of its conservation*" (UPN 1992a: 9).

When an adequate pedagogical training does not complement these intentions, then they are no more than just that: good intentions. Some scholars have already pointed out that cross-cultural training for teachers focused on "humanism" frequently fails to educate them adequately for an actual cross-cultural school teaching (Jordán 1994). In our case we find the same needs, only this time the lack of attention to the pragmatic/social perspective is fundamentally the product of the institution in charge of the training of the teachers.

All of this is related to the *ethnicist*[9] discourse and romanticism the teachers develop in the course of their university studies. Returning to the line of analysis, it should be pointed out that the courses that are part of the program[10] show problems in their objectives, contents, or in the lack of bonds between each other. For instance, the course on *Culture and Education* mentions as its general objective: "*To present a space of reflection on the forms in which the cultural aspect is present in the teaching practice and in the specific manifestations culture has in the indigenous communities*" (UPN, 1992a: 21). This objective is correct, but the problems arise when the specific contents of the units are reviewed.

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[9] *Ethnicist* is the term that is used in Mexican anthropology to describe the positions that see the ethnic aspect from an essentialist viewpoint, i.e. as a nature which remains invariable in spite of historical changes that affect the groups and their contexts.

[10] Culture and education; the ethnic-historical question in schools and communities; language, ethnic groups and national society; interethnic relationships and indigenous education and ethnic identity; and ethnic identity and indigenous education.

Thus *Unit 1* proposes to "acknowledge the different conceptions of culture and some of their theoretical and social implications." Upon close inspection of the readings, however, it becomes obvious that this concept remains in the abstract, since there are no exercises at all to demonstrate how in terms of teaching practice culture may be an obstacle or support for teaching. Besides, these readings are quite obsolete (they include texts by Kluckhon and Herskovits), or rather meant for students of the social sciences (Giménez), and are replete with terms of difficult access for the teachers who take this study course. The teachers mentioned as an example that they did not understand the following concepts found in the readings: *unconscious, supraorganic, reification, evolutionary line, endoreproduction, natural selection, extrabiological, genetic endowment, determinism, imponderable, paleoanthropology, material culture, assertion, the universals, categories, secular, cultural dynamics, agraphic, and continuum.* Teachers literally have to fight for comprehension of a text full of new terms, and finally the understanding of the text consumes all their time, energy, and desire to read, and they drastically discover that there is no easy way to tie all this to their everyday teaching problems. One of them summarized this as follows:

> "Here they've only taught me *rollo* [rhetoric, words without real content] and nothing to really solve the problems I face with the children in the classroom." M. R.P.

The work guides, on the other hand, although especially designed for this study course, are narrowly tied to the anthologies, and are elements that try to adjust the series of readings to the context of the teachers and their work.

As far as the teaching staff is concerned, it does not comply with the profile a program of these characteristics should have: on the one hand, the assessors generally do

not have any training in intercultural education, nor any knowledge at all of the educational difficulties in indigenous contexts. On the other hand, they also lack knowledge on remote or weekend education. The only thing we had during the years of field research were regional meetings with the intention of following up and evaluating the plans and programs of the study course. However, they did not contribute to any effective modifications of the program. In the reality of the university, the assessors applied the programs mechanically and without any real sensitivity for the cultural differences of the teachers.

Finally, the problems derived from the organizational structure are due to the form in which the university is organized. Until 1992, the institution was coordinated by the central campus, where plans and programs were established and materials prepared and distributed. In 1992 the so-called *Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica* (*ANMEB*) [National Resolution for Modernization of Basic Education] was adopted, which formally sought the decentralization of the national educational system. This meant, in effect, that all educational systems, without losing their national character, would operationally remain in the hands of the state governments. Behind this stated intention, various other elements came into play, for instance the attempt to neutralize the traditionally influential *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* (*SNTE*) [National Union of Educational Workers].

As far as UPN is concerned, this resolution led to a rift in the internal structure of the university: on the one hand, since that time the labor aspects have been in the hands of the state governments, and the academic aspects were maintained in the central campus. This did not improve conditions, at least as far as the study courses in

indigenous education are concerned: the central unit is still not considering regional conditions and needs in a program that has its bases in local and regional differences. During all this time the strong centralization of processes was responsible for the fact that traditionally any aspect, for instance even the distribution of materials, was extremely slow and full of problems.

An additional problem directly related to this lack of sensitivity to local and regional differences, ironically present in Mexico City, is the issue of indigenous education in the urban context. In the case of Puebla, various schools of the subsystem are located in urban or suburban areas, where local indigenous groups settle or used to settle, only to be surrounded by urbanization or migrants. In 1999 it was reported that in the city of Puebla there is one institution for initial education, 23 for pre-school education, and 9 for primary education pertaining to the Subsystem of Indigenous Education and those considered Nahua by default. (*Secretaría de Educación Pública, Sección de Estadística de Educación Indígena de la Dirección de Educación Elemental*, manuscript, 1999).

The university's programs simply have ignored this fact and continue to pretend that the only education is that which is imparted in the traditional regions, where social and cultural conditions are clearly different.

Thus the training of the teachers at UPN suffers from a series of problems, and is more directed towards political than educational objectives. In this case it can be said that the university has had more effect on the indigenous teachers in the local and regional sphere, due to their actions of cultural reproduction. This permits the transmission of images generated by State ideology, and reinforces concepts they already have. Didactic

materials used in the study are the most important mechanisms of this process. This becomes obvious, for example, when the teachers talk about their lives.

In search of the group

State policies have led into an intensification of the social differentiation of the Indian population. This may have been explicit or not, nevertheless policies and politics intensified the contradictions inside the communities. As a part of this process government actions encouraged the creation of a group that, due to its ties with State institutions, decided to try to acquire knowledge and advantages that would distinguish them, sometimes more, sometimes less, from the rest of the Indian population. At the same time they acquired a distinctive ideology, characterized by the exaltation of the ethnic elements. The group has been reinforced by a series of images and institutions that operate in society. Among the former are those, which exalt the indigenous past, and its cultural values (to which the anthropologists have actively contributed), beginning with the creation of the modern Mexican State as part of its nationalist ideology. The latter are headed by all the institutions related to education and to which the teachers are tied by means of their profession (institutions where they were formed, and institutions on which their jobs depend). These institutions allow teachers to develop certain identification among them and create and spread common languages, ideas and practices.

At the same time the group is characterized by a regional and local differentiation, reflecting both the diversity of the indigenous population of the country (I shall return to this issue in the following chapter) and the dynamics of institutional and social development. The characteristics teachers of the different regions present (for

example the degree of cultural and personal separation with respect to their native communities, their internal social and economic differentiation or their political attitude) depend on different elements. Among these factors are ethnicity (the vitality the communities have), the social and economic structure (the other social groups with whom they interact, existing resources and their distribution), institutional context (administrative and work divisions of the Department of Education) and the political conditions that exist in these areas.

According to data provided by the Department of Public Education for the 1997-1998 school year, there were 3,741 teachers in the Subsystem of Indigenous Education in the state of Puebla, placed in the different levels of basic education[11] (initial education, pre-school education, and primary education).[12] These teachers represented 10.6 percent of the total number of teachers in the state.[13] Additionally, there are nine sector managers and 104 zone supervisors, while other teachers are working in administrative tasks in the offices of the Department (Socorro Betancourt, member of Basic Education Direction, personal communication). On the other hand, not all the teachers who are working for the Subsystem are of indigenous origin; there are also mestizos, though probably not in very large numbers. However, there are no data available in this respect. The indigenous teachers belong to the indigenous groups existing in the state, but are predominantly Nahuas, Popolocas, Mixtecs, and Totonacs. As mentioned before, they also have different

[11] Indigenous education in Mexico only covers initial educational levels like pre-school and primary school, whereas university education has only been designed for the formation of teachers.

[12] As in other cases, information on teachers is contradictory. According to the document, the number of teachers in each of these levels is as follows: 41 in initial education, 1,527 in pre-school education, and 2,173 in primary education. Other data from the same source indicate that there are 3,460 or 3,486 indigenous teachers. *Estadísticas de inicio y fin de cursos*. Typescript. Department of Public Education of the State of Puebla.

degrees of acculturation and have reached different social positions, without really distinguishing themselves in the accumulation of financial power. Some of them have obtained a certain amount of political control, which has diminished over the last few years.

Thus we find within the group of teachers some variety of ethnic origin, degree of acculturation, and social and administrative position. In addition, the teachers who attended the Puebla campus of the university (i.e. the subjects of this study) worked mainly in the city of Puebla, its surroundings, or in nearby cities, and hardly any of them lived in the city, but rather in outlying working class neighborhoods. In general terms they did not distinguish themselves from the working class *mestizo* population in their appearance. They normally used Spanish as their everyday language and did not live in any of the *ethnic enclaves* of the city. However, at the same time they maintain the common *underlying* elements that have been mentioned above and which are *activated* in decisive contexts (such as their workplaces, the university, and their groups of origin), or when they are specifically asked about this issue. There are also institutions, especially the schools, where a certain *teachers' culture* is encouraged and reproduced which allows interaction between the subjects.

There are other dimensions in the process of creation and reproduction of this group that emerge in the recollections. In the family environment, for instance, the weight of cultural traits, such as native language and particularly the attitudes of the family regarding indigenous heritage (negative, positive, or ambivalent), influences decisively the way in which the subjects develop this feeling of affiliation to or rejection by a group.

[13] The data of the Department of Public Education show that during the 1997-1998 school year there were 35,426 teachers in the Basic Education levels, where the Subsystem of Indigenous Education operates as

The manner in which they use the resources to manipulate these affiliations is decisive in the formation of ethnic identity. However, the weight of the context where the teachers grow and continue their development appears with all its force to modify and reinforce these trends.

Below are the life narratives of three teachers. All three are Nahuas, belong to Class 1990 and are exceptionally lucid and reflexive. Each story shows these additional facets of group formation.

S.C.M.

S.C.M. is a primary school teacher who has always been a classroom teacher with a group, although he was the principal of a school at one time. During his career he has worked in different places until he came to work in a semi-urban part of the city of Puebla where he currently lives with his wife (who is also a teacher in the subsystem) and their three children. He was one of the best students of his class, although he didn't finish his thesis. In his group he had a certain degree of influence, especially among the men, whereas some of the women teachers viewed his leadership with displeasure. What follows is a rather extended narrative of his life, which shows both personal and social factors that play a role in the formation of ethnic identity:

> "I was born on a little farm where only my parents lived, that is to say my family, my dad's family, my mother, and... among my siblings I am the fifth of six brothers and sisters as well as two outside my father's marriage. I entered school when I was about four years old, into pre-school, what they used to call castilianization. I received classes from a bilingual teacher, one of the first in indigenous education. But when I was five, we moved to the village; a village my father took us to... one of his

well. *Ibid.*

ideas were that we shouldn't live among the natives. My grandmother spoke a lot to us in Náhuatl, that is she only speaks Náhuatl... and, well, we all had this way of speaking, the typical way of speaking bilingual, where you confuse "o's" and "u's" and all that, and that's what he didn't want, and partly also because of his business, and so he took us to the village. There he put me into primary school, practically starting when I was five years old. I wasn't even six yet, and even though they don't admit you before six, and I wasn't six yet, and they put me into school because I had a year of castilianization and, well, I was more or less apt for primary school.

I stayed there through fifth grade and they took me back once more to the farm, but when I came back there was a change, but totally. I was out of place there at school with the kids, because there were only classmates who spoke Náhuatl. I did speak in Spanish with the teacher, but Náhuatl was *their* language, and I remember, there I do remember details. How I began to suffer because of my classmates who spoke Náhuatl: they despised me, they discriminated against me like when an indigenous person is among the mestizos; but there it was the other way around, and I felt real bad, I mean I started to hate the natives because they despised, criticized and discriminated against me like that.

Once they made us work in the corn fields, to loosen up the earth around the plants, I didn't know how to do that, with the hoe you have to clean out the weeds, and there are the little corn plants, but since I had no practice I chopped down a plant; well, there goes the little snitch and denounces me. The teacher didn't say anything, we continued and I chopped down another one, and they go and tell on me again, and here comes the teacher, mad as hell: 'But how can that be possible! I know you've been in the village, but that's not normal for a boy!' I mean, he declared me stupid and that hurt like mad. He didn't admit that it was for... for lack of practice I committed this kind of error, and I felt like a kicked dog.

So I finished fifth and sixth grade and they wanted to send me to a boarding school, which was a boarding school for primary, secondary, and teachers' training. That was in Tantoyuca, in Alseseca, but since I was very young, that is I had entered primary school very young, well obviously I left very young, too, even before I was eleven, and they didn't accept me. At the same time one of my brothers also entered, my half-brother, and my dad said: 'No, well, then do sixth grade over again,' and he puts me in, but this time into a boarding school, one of these boarding schools, and there things were even worse; you had to be together with the others day and night, and I still had that problem with Náhuatl. I didn't master it, I mean I spoke it but with *cuatros* [errors].

I've told some anecdotes in the group of errors that I made. Once we went to school–we went on Sundays and came back on Friday–and this one, I only understood very recently that it was me who said it, because my schoolmates thought it was really funny; there were four of us, the other three laughed a lot. There was a man on horseback, and I said to him, '*plai*', which means 'haunches'; literally, '*flai*' is used as an adjective, a noun for 'mister'; in Náhuatl that means 'uncle', but it is used for 'mister'; '*asñi plai*' is a term like 'listen, man,' 'listen, brother', something like that, but in Náhuatl. Literally I was telling him, 'Mister, take me behind you on the horse,' but what I was really saying was that he should push me at the haunches, from behind... imagine the laugh they had on me, and I never dared to tell this to anyone, not even my brothers, because my brothers all speak better Náhuatl than me, even my sister who is younger than me, because when we got to the farm, while I went to primary school, my sister spent a lot of time with my grandmother, who lives there, and during this time she learned everything, nearly all of Náhuatl and how it should be expressed, and I didn't...

So I got out of the boarding school pretty frustrated, I mean, I still thought that my world was the mestizo world, that I didn't have anything to do with the indigenous, it absolutely did not pass through my mind that I should be a native, and my dad placed me into a boarding school for secondary school where there was also a group from my region from Chicón [Chicontepec, Veracruz] *and there as well the manner of expressing ourselves, I mean the way of speaking distinguished us from the others.* The 'nacos', they called us 'nacos', 'chicones', and how I hated that. I began to run around with the guys from there, those that were the tougher ones, the little leaders, and I wasn't dumb in my classes... ah!, but before entering boarding school, excuse me, I studied one year in a commercial secondary school, that was a technical private school, and well, logically when I came to the boarding school I had an advantage over the others, and the same thing happened at the boarding school, when I repeated sixth grade.

After that, in the boarding school, I repeated the first year of secondary, and then I had this advantage in knowledge, and this gave me a certain leadership in the group, because of the advantage. Besides, my behavior was somewhat mestizo, I wasn't so indigenous, and my way of expressing myself as well, I mean... in a certain way it was distinct, and they always asked me where I came from, I was trying to say that I was from... from Chicón, and above all, to pronounce the word Chicón, *because speaking of Chicontepec is speaking of natives.* What I told them was 'no, well, I'm from Chapopote [a nearby *mestizo* town], because on my birth certificate it says that I was born there... I was born on the farm, but since my dad brought us when we were little; I believe he intended to bring us here because he registered me in sixty-three, no... he registered me in sixty-

four, and we came to the village in sixty-nine, but he had already registered me because I was born in the village, and on my birth certificate it says that I was born there. And then I stubbornly said that I was born in the village and that I wasn't born in Chicón; I was from the village and more or less knew places next to the city of Alamos, the nearby places, and therefore I could then, as you say, *lie and say that I was from there*, in reality I wasn't from there, but I knew more of that place than I knew of Chicón.

At the bottom of things, what I was trying to hide is that I was indigenous, that's what worried me most because I sometimes took part in what they did to the indigenous, to our indigenous schoolmates. I mean, since I ran with the crowd of boys from that village there where the boarding school was, well, we even discriminated against them, and I partly tried to get even for how they had made me suffer when I was on the farm, because they really made me suffer, even the teachers, and I think that was a... I don't know what difference it would have made in the physical development, but sometimes I talked about that with my sister, and she told me the same. When I was eleven or twelve years old, they took us to collect firewood, for instance, and the other guys, I saw them, they carried a third of a roll of wood, but really big, and I just couldn't, man. Sometimes the teachers wanted to make me do it, but no, I definitely didn't carry that, and if I did I threw it down and I simply couldn't do it... I even cried from rage, and then they considered me very weak, and physically I was very skinny, because I don't know if they were older, I was one of the smallest boys there... *molonche* [small one] they called me there and all that; in secondary school we played pranks on them and all, no? of the natives, I got even for what I had suffered.

I leaved secondary school and I went on to preparatory school in Tampico, and I'm still with the same group of schoolmates, but there in preparatory school there were no indigenous students, so I practically forgot that stuff about being indigenous, if I was or wasn't indigenous, because for me that was a world apart, because one classmate with whom I had a friendship, I took him to the farm and he told me that indeed *my life was somewhat double, when I came to the farm, my behavior changed, because in the city I appeared to be very much up-to-date, very a la mode, or at least I tried to... and on the farm I behaved like I should have, naturally,* and he said 'Well yes, what happens is that you change your way of being, and when you get to the farm, that's another thing.' By then I spoke Náhuatl well, I could communicate with all the adults, above all with the adults, no, not with the children, they were...

But I kept thinking that the indigenous did not, for me I had nothing to do with it, but since some of my sisters were already working in the subsystem, when I couldn't find work in my profession, I signed up for

indigenous education, and there I began to... I don't know, re-evaluate my... my identity as an indigenous, I mean when you go to the Sierras and you work there with the natives and you begin to realize that *they*, that there is not much difference between *them and yourself.* When a child that is monolingual indigenous, or bilingual and has practically no Spanish, well, if they study and progress, then maybe their conduct will be equally great, and they will hate the indigenous. So it makes no sense, on the contrary, you accept it, revalue it and take the best of it, no? I mean, it's a kind of pride, therefore I have the photos here of my sister, because she thinks it is in bad taste, yes, because she says, 'It's alright that you are a native, but you don't have to show it' and sometimes I intend to demonstrate it because of all I have lived through, for all I have suffered. I've had colleagues in indigenous education who've told me that they've experienced situations similar to mine... I haven't told them mine, but they've told me this, that because of their physical appearance they don't feel themselves to be indigenous, and that they've been mistaken for mestizos, but that all of a sudden they are indigenous again and don't know their role and all that, what decision to take, to make themselves noted as real Indians or simply forget that, and then I begin to analyze, no? There's no sense in that, if you are indigenous, you don't have to deny or hide it.

I have some friends today, now, who are joking about the natives, but that doesn't offend or anger me, I mean, for me, joking about an Indian is making fun of any kind of person, *mestizos* or Indians, I mean, no? Before it was like this, anyone indigenous was someone to make fun of; anything I did as a *mestizo* among natives they used to make fun of me because I was a little different, and now that's not so... Now it appears to me that we're all equal, that to be an Indian is... it has advantages and disadvantages, it has qualities and deficiencies in this sense; and for the rest... revalue it, teacher, feel proud about it. I wouldn't want, for example, for my son to feel one day ashamed of his grandmother, my mother, because that would make me very sad, no? So it's to instil that into him from now on... because that's how I feel about that.

To be in indigenous education, now that was crazy, buddy... my ideas have always been reactionary [sic] of... about changing things that sometimes couldn't be changed, but it bothers me a lot that there are people who... very aligned, what we call very bent-over. You know there are times when they're not... you don't agree with what your boss says, but in order to keep yourself in the grace and because you know what's right for you financially, you accept it... That bothered us like hell, from the very beginning, and I've had to deal with various supervisors; some of them explained, some told me: 'Look, it's not about... it's not like that; there are things that you can't change.'

> I've had some that tried to suck up to me, trying to pull me, to win me over: 'You can go a long way, you can do something... you can be someone here, indigenous education, but you have to line up with someone, you can't go it alone.' For them it's anarchism, it's... my position is totally anarchic, because I'm neither with God nor with the devil; but in reality what bothers me is that there's... that someone would abuse his power to put down the others, although they don't agree; that's what I don't like. In politics, for example, in all the elections in which I've participated for union questions, they've always talked to me in order to tell me that it'll be so-and-so... no, I've never liked that, they even invited me to participate: 'It'll be so-and-so, and we want you to be such-and-such,' and I don't like that... I don't give a damn, there may be things that I can't change, but I won't try to change sides, and it's not like they've told me sometimes, that I like the side of the weaker ones, of the assholes, of the losers, that's not true. I like the side of the weaker ones, because since I was little, when my dad mistreated my mom a lot, beat her and above all insulted her a lot; he offended her saying we were a bunch of Indian assholes, that we would never change because... that's why we would never change, because we were a bunch of Indian assholes, and he lamented sometimes, drunk, he lamented and said: 'I'll be damned, I don't accept, I don't know why I married your mother who was an Indian; I didn't deserve to marry her.' So I think that my inclination to... take the side of the weak was born back then, those that have no way of defending themselves, because the only thing they had was their will. And finally it was my mom who saved my dad from everything, from... morally and financially things could be done because she worked, he was an alcoholic. The only thing he'd given my sisters was secondary school, for two of them; so my mom, working and baking bread and sewing and all that, she made it possible for them to go to the course for bilingual teachers, and later they helped, they were the ones who supported my dad. But if it hadn't been for my mother's willpower, who had the willpower to do it, she wouldn't have been able to do it." Emphasis added.

T.M.B.

T.M.B. is primary school teacher who has held various jobs as principal and supervisor in the Department of Indigenous Education, which came under his charge. He has great experience in various educational and administrative tasks. While he was studying at the university, he appeared in his group as an important figure, but isolated from the so-called *philosophy of indigenous education*, probably because he held on to his executive

role, and many of the teachers remembered him in this role. The fact that he was the oldest among them may also have contributed to this. After his retirement he apparently returned to his native community in the Northern Sierras. A man well-versed in educational questions, he performed well in the study course, but did not finish his thesis.

> "I was born on December 28th of 1937, in the indigenous village of Tzinacapan, which belongs to the municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso, state of Puebla. The name Tzinacapan comes from two words of Náhuatl origin: 'tzinaca', bat, and 'pan', place; which etymologically makes it 'place of the bats.' My parents were M.M.F. and M. P. B. D. When I was nine years old I entered the rural secondary school 'Ignacio Zaragoza', established in the community. This school changed its name after some time, and when I graduated, it was called 'Profesor Raúl Isidro Burgos'.
>
> On my first day of classes I went to school with enthusiasm, surely because I wanted to know what they did there, but this spirit, this enthusiasm only lasted a few minutes, then I wanted to go back home as soon as possible. However, I had to endure my first day, but the next one and the following days I refused to attend. When I had to go back it was because my tutor forced me; the motive of my resistance was the fear it caused me to hear an unknown language, of which I learned after some time that it was called Spanish. At my age I had never heard this language, that's why I was so afraid, although I was also impressed hearing the bitter weeping of children who attended against their will, these were the only motives why I had no wish to attend spontaneously; I must point out that because of the fact that I was forced to attend school, I suffered irreversible traumas that I don't want to remember.
>
> In the midst of psychological problems and after seven years I finished primary school and went back to my family, which consisted of my mother, M.P.B.D., and my brother, H.M.B.; all of them now deceased. My family, like most indigenous families poor in the extreme, made me at the age of twelve work in the field like a peasant at the side of my older brother P.M.B. He was my tutor and as such taught me and guided me at work. I remember that my pay or my salary when I started to work was 50 percent of what an adult made. Unfortunately my brother to whom I am referring, died in a water accident when I started sixth grade of primary school, and this situation stopped my going through the last grade of my primary education, because this situation obliged me to assume the place my brother had occupied in the bosom of the family.

My mother, understanding my difficult situation to continue with my schooling, spoke with the principal of the primary school and arranged with him that in order to continue attending school and finish my primary studies, I had to work Thursday and Friday of each week, of course including Saturday and Sunday; only in this manner was it possible to finish my primary education one day. This education which I received along the entire process of primary school was in every sense insane and traumatic, with damages which are still present.

It was in the year of 1955 when I graduated from primary school and had to go back full time to agricultural activities, now in my character as tutor to support my brother H.M.B. and my mother, because my older brother, as I indicated, had died, and a brother by the name of L.M.M.B. had died as well, when he was more or less one year and one month old, which I forgot to mention.

When I was completely involved in my agricultural occupations, in the month of May of the year 1957, a commission of parents from the ranching hamlet of Tepetzintan, belonging to the same municipality of Cuetzalan, situated to the east of my community, presented itself unexpectedly at my private home in order to extend me the invitation to work as a private teacher of the newly created school of said hamlet. After contemplating the content of the invitation with my mother, with the school inspector and with some persons of my confidence, upon the third visit of the representatives I gave them my answer in affirmative form, arranging at this moment the date of my presentation.

I had a time margin of some forty days to make my preparations. The first thing I did was to consult with my sixth-grade teacher N.D.H., who was employed by the municipality. He unconditionally did me the favor of advising me by means of an intensive course during two days of every week. With this superficial training I presented myself on the first of July of the year 1957 at the mentioned hamlet of Tepetzintan, with my appointment as private teacher, issued by the school inspector no. 27 with its official seat in Cuetzalan, Puebla, where 35 school-age children were awaiting me, as well as a goodly number of parents. After two months I was integrated into the Technical State Council of Literacy Campaigns with a monthly compensation of $200 pesos.

The aforementioned ranching hamlet of Tepetzintan is at a distance of approximately six kilometers from my village, and the people were monolingual in the indigenous Náhuatl language. At a distance of 37 years, the people are bilingual, although communication in the native language still predominates.

> Due to the monolingualism, and taking into account my experience as a speaker of the ethnic language because of my passing through primary school, I did not hesitate to utilize our maternal language in the process of teaching-learning of my pupils. The school year at that time was determined by the calendar A and B, and the state of Puebla belonged to A, which began in February and ended in November. Therefore I started in the middle of the school year and somehow had to finish in the month of November, and therefore I only worked exactly half of the school year. I believe the native language had much to do with it, for I remember with satisfaction that most of my pupils came away reading and interpreting satisfactorily the Spanish language during this period.
>
> During the time I worked as a teacher in front of a group of students, I always used the maternal language of my students, Náhuatl, whose dialectal variation is what I speak; of course this was possible thanks to the fact that I was working in said variant."

M.R.P.

M.R.P. is primary school teacher. Apart from being a teacher in front of a group, he has held various supervising jobs. Currently he is a zone supervisor. As with the teacher immediately before him, he also was a representative of the philosophy of indigenous education in his group, holding, however, a position somewhat more emphatic and romantic, sometimes even rhetorical. Very acute, he was able to use the approaches of many of the texts to adapt them to his discourses. Often the discussions in class in which he participated turned into a political statement on the principles on which the practice of indigenous education should be based. In his discussions with female mestizo teachers he was frequently disqualified by them because it had been years that he had not led a group as a teacher. He left the program without finishing it.

"I still remember very clearly how my parents and my grandparents were when I was a child; I have it all in my mind as if it were yesterday. I remember how my father took us to live in a new house that he and his friends, colleagues from the community, had built. The house was made of wood, composed of trunks called *huilotes,* of forks of brazilwood

and *chijol* [a local tree]. The roof was all made of a leaf called *hoja de casa*, it smells nice and when it dries, it takes on a very beautiful walnut color. My father put on his white, white clothes. His pants and shirt all made of raw number 90 cotton. His *huaraches* of rubber soles, rubber from car tires. His palm straw hat of the *huasteco* style. My father talked with his friends from the ranch in pure Mexican, but he also liked to speak in Spanish. The people from other villages respected him, and they liked him because he could always begin a dialog in Mexican or in Spanish, he never failed. He was also a very good bone-setter, they called him the *sobador de huesos* [bone fondler]. Many people came from far away, and sometimes he would cure them, and the funny thing is he never charged them for his services. He accepted what they gave him as a tip, because he rested his faith on a dream in which the Virgin had given him the powers or the talent to cure those who had hurt their bones. It is something incredible, but all the people he caressed, all of them got well. I was barely between five and seven years old, but I remember everything well.

My mother was always more discreet, she dedicated herself to looking after us, because we were seven older brothers, plus three that were younger than me. My *rancho* [hamlet] is called El Tizal, because close by there are some rocks of white earth they call *tizal*, that is a very smelly and fine earth, they say it is good to make pottery and for medicine. In honor of this white earth the village where I was born is called El Tizal; it is a *rancho*, that's the name for small villages.

They say that in times of the Revolution my grandfather's father came to take refuge there, and later my grandfather; together with three other friends they began to build their little houses and to work the fields which in those times were without owners. That's how the hamlet began, and as time passed on it became bigger, until it had a population of 240 inhabitants of children and adults. My grandfather, son of a family of Spaniards, as they say, nearly always spoke Spanish, though he also spoke Náhuatl. Over time he became the greatest *cacique* [chief] of the region. He exploited the peasants of the community and of the surrounding communities. He took possession of many hectares of land; he worked them in exchange for a few coins per day, four to five pesos a day. He had many cattle, and therefore he filled most of the fields with hay.

My grandmother, on the other hand, came from a village called Palma Real and was the daughter of very respectable people in that place. My grandmother was one hundred per cent Indian, from her features to her language and attire. Everything represented with dignity the genuine culture of those times. I remember her white underclothes with their embroidered edges; she always walked barefoot, never spoke Spanish, she understood it well but never spoke it. She conversed with her grandchildren, in this case with me; I spoke to her in Spanish, and she answered me in pure Mexican. But the two of us understood each other very well.

Those were beautiful times, everything was joy. There was much vegetation and plenty of water. In my *rancho* there is a large brook with an abundance of fish of all varieties, the mountains are full of deer, jaguars, and even tigers and lions. I remember that my grandfather, my father and other men went hunting, among them my uncles; we little

ones and the women stayed home, we hurried with the preparation of the firewood, the *tenamastles*, stones to make fire, because we were sure that they would come back at least with a very large buck. Oftentimes that was what happened, and we knew that on arrival my father or grandfather would order to bleed the deer in a jar and they would force us to drink the blood raw and still warm, because in this manner we would learn how to run like deer, and besides it was medicinal so that we wouldn't run around all *poposacos*, that is pale, because of the constant intestinal infections and the mosquito bites.

How nice were those days. Perhaps that's why I still haven't forgotten this custom, because each time when there are vacations and I go to my *rancho*, the first thing that I do is take my rifle and I go looking for birds or rabbits because now there are no deer left. During the rainy season I go looking for fish; if the creek is wide, I fish with a hook, or I put traps, *achiquihuita,* in the rapids. I set them up in the afternoon and leave them there all night, and in the morning I check them, and for sure there are many *mojarras*, *guabinas*, *cosoles*, *acamayas*, *xiles*, *charales* and occasionally even snakes. When it is the dry season, between April and May, a whole bunch of us go fishing with the *redecilla*, that's how we call a net made of *pitas* [a type of fiber], so the fish don't get away; we make a bow and we stand in the water and start to fish. That's all a lot of fun, although in these last years there is hardly any more fishing because the water has been polluted with insecticides and other pollutants, and the fish have died and it has been very difficult to recover the abundance of fish. All these experiences, these memories have left important traces in my life.

I do not want to let all my learning as a child go unnoticed; therefore I want to comment on my recollections of the activities in the fields, I mean agriculture that we children performed, approximately between the ages of nine and twelve years. My parents and older brothers dedicated themselves to the cultivation of corn and beans, the cultivation and cutting of sugar cane, as well as the preparation of *pilón* or brown sugar. What we liked best was the time of the *chapoleo* or to work in the corn fields, cleaning the ground in preparation for the sowing of the new corn in the month of June. In the village we were about twenty children who imitated our parents and older brothers and sisters, and while they went to work cutting and cleaning big trees, we also got together doing the same, but on smaller plots, called *milcahuales*. We worked every day in what was called *mano vuelta* [a system of reciprocal help], and the interest of each of us was to get to the highest number of days of *mano vuelta*. So when it came my turn to work my land, and I had fifteen peons helping me, I had the duty to go and give them their day back when it was their turn to work their fields. This activity supplemented *la milpa* [corn field] of the adult people.

Talking about the fishing, not about work, I won't even mention the tasty special dishes my mother prepared for us with the famous *techiches*, with the *chiquintes*, with the *pemuches*, with the wrapped *poxtas* and *charales* called *tlapictles*. And what can I say about the traditional festivities of All Saints' Day, where they prepare food in abundance, the *tamales* wrapped in *papatla* or banana leafs; the violin and *jarana* [a small guitar] music playing the famous *huapangos*, from house to house, visiting friends and relatives.

The nice and valuable thing about this is that the family of the visited home is very grateful and accepts the gift of food and the moment of music with *huasteca* songs. Carnival is something similar. But what I appreciate most of all and what makes me nostalgic sometimes is the time of the *posadas* [traditional celebrations before Christmas], Christmas and New Year. In my childhood there was no church, even now they don't have one, but in those times (1958-1960) prayers were held in a humble house specially built for that, which was known as the 'chapel', with some statues of saints; people got together, women and men, sometimes a whole family. The house filled with people who brought their candles with great faith. They knelt down to pray, and I imitated them, although for me this was like a game. I remember that with joy because there many *sones* were danced to the music of violins and guitars; these *sones* are components of a very nice dance in worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe. I remember they formed lines of two, between ten and fifteen people per line, and all the little ones like myself 'tagged on' in the back, and we kept the same rhythm as the adults. The dance is composed of a *cuatlile,* who is a man that leads the dance holding a blank machete over his head in the sign of protection and attack, gives off a cry in a very special tone, like an invitation to the dance, and then he begins to dance. The head-dress consists of crowns made of reeds, ribbons and mirrors on the sides; a machete in its sheath, a carrying bag, and everybody with white cotton clothes, a red kerchief around their necks; they dance in front of the chapel or in front of the image until the wee hours of the morning.

It makes me nostalgic to remember that, because when I went to boarding school with a scholarship, I had only very few opportunities to come back to my rancho to participate, and since my teachers put other ideas in my head, so instead of liking the environment of my rancho, I began to feel ashamed, because they pointed me out as an *indio*, and back then I didn't want to appear among my schoolmates as an *indio*... However, today as an adult and after many years of rarely going back to my rancho, though not with the same intensity as before, I keep feeling inside me this force that calls me to acknowledge my village, my parents, my brothers and sisters, my family and, above all, my own culture. Among the values that I still conserve is the Náhuatl language. *I feel that in everything else I'm not an Indian anymore* [emphasis added], because this time of my childhood has stayed far behind; but what I always carry with me is my native tongue. The Náhuatl I learned from my grandmother, from my parents, from my older brothers and sisters, from the inhabitants of my rancho, and from my fellow pupils at the time, and even though the teacher tried to destroy it by forbidding us to speak Mexican in school, we did it secretly or in the cornfields, on the way and on all occasions of social gatherings, we kept practicing the Náhuatl language together with Spanish, which in those days began to be accepted in my rancho, and for all of us it was a motive of pride to speak Spanish well, because according to the teacher that was the official language and the language of those with 'reason'. Therefore we all committed ourselves to speak good Spanish, and little by little they took away my interest in the Náhuatl language and the cultural values of the inhabitants of my *rancho*.

As I continued studying outside my rancho I moved away from my social and cultural environment. When I finished primary school at the boarding school of Colatlán,

Veracruz, I had a mentality I didn't share with my countrymen from the community. My estrangement became complete when I received a scholarship to go to the teacher's school at Perote, Veracruz. I moved away completely from my land, with all the classes of my teachers in secondary school, filled with capitalist trends and ideas of integration, extermination of the ethnic cultures, my pride of my identity as an Indian, as a provincial person, of *ranchero*, *huasteco* etc. had ended. I preferred not to visit my parents, and in consequence I stayed away from all participation in the events that took place at the rancho. The little identification I had was leaving me, it was slowly extinguished until nothing remained. As time went by and as I studied, I developed a different worldview, of life and the world and its cultural and social spheres. With the influence of the capitalist system and its bombardment of consumers, my village lost its attire, its string music, its proper customs. Everything became very different, the string and band music had no success anymore, modern bands began to gain popularity; the raw cotton clothes were replaced by trousers, shirts and dresses for the women; *huaraches* were replaced by shoes, plastic (rubber) boots. Even the fields were fertilized by chemical fertilizers. Many people from my village began to emigrate to other places in search of better jobs or to continue studying; young people like myself, who went away to study, never came back to live in the community and are perfect strangers today, just like myself, *we are some rather uprooted indios* [emphasis added], we are, like Guillermo Bonfil Batalla would say, 'strangers in our own land,' or we are indios, we want to continue being indios, or we feel better when those who observe us call us 'Spanish-speaking indios,' or as the inhabitants of my rancho say to differentiate among people, 'you are *coyomej*, from the Spanish word *coyotes*. The non-indios, those who are not *masehuli*, are seen as related to *los de razón* [those of reason, an expression used to name non-Indian people as opposed to *los de calzón*], the *mestizos* or *coyotes* (*coyomej*), because they are persons who only stalk the indio to exploit him, to use him, to steal his work, and so forth.

As an adult I never again participated full time in the festivities, the field work, sports events or activities of the community for social, economic and cultural improvement; for all these reasons I am today rejected by the members of my community. They don't tell me that, but I feel it, I can nearly see it, or rather I sense it with my intuition. However, it's not all my fault; today I realize that it is a consequence of the political system of the government and, above all, of educational policies that has always implicitly carried the poison of disintegration of ethnic groups and the integration into the Westernizing ideology of the capitalist system in order to convert us into unconscious consumers and human beings without proper identity.

My cultural contribution as a bilingual indigenous teacher with twenty-four years of service may be considered as insufficient if one takes into account the multiple problems which exist today and which everybody must face when searching for solutions, waiting for proposals, actions, initiatives, innovations and, above all, waiting for conscious and total participation. If I consider my participation from the political point of view, as a government employee, as one more teacher, perhaps my attitude and my actions may be considered as sufficient, because giving service to the government during twenty-four years is to give a whole life, an entire youth, all the energy to comply with an established program, to comply with the task of being an agent of change, being a 'cultural

transmitter', but of which culture? The one that is convenient to the system: capitalism, the Westernizing trend, the educational policy of integration into national society. Therefore they know me in my social circle as an 'indigenous bilingual teacher,' or should they instead know me simply as a 'teacher of rural primary education?' Here is the key to the problem... so it's not the same being simply called a teacher of pre-school education or primary school than being consciously called an 'indigenous teacher.' The common teacher is the one that complies with his duty to develop the learning contents of a pre-established program, without reflection, without criticism and, above all, without favoring the cultural revaluation of the population he serves. The indigenous bilingual teacher is consequently the professional who is aware of his identity as a member of an ethnic group, aside from possessing cultural experiences and values proper of the community, such as the native (indigenous) language, customs, traditions, music, dress etc. that make him different from the rest of the others that are considered 'national identity'."

These three stories as a whole contribute yet another series of elements for the understanding of the group of indigenous teachers. Indeed, each of the stories contributes additional data to get a better vision of the panorama of the indigenous teachers. To begin with, the indigenous cultural substratum that is latent in these teachers again becomes manifest: tastes, recollections, and the more or less detailed or more or less intact knowledge of practices associated with indigenous societies. This permits the creation of implicit ties from these rescued memories.

There is also the evident shock at discrimination, as I mentioned before, that generally produces a sensation of rejection of one's own group and therefore the attempt to cross over to the mestizo group. Placed in this position, it is frequently the case that the teachers are seen by their own original indigenous group as *hispanicized* natives, i.e. as indigenous turned *mestizos* or *ladinos*, and subject to an *inverted discrimination* by the indigenous people. This is sometimes just as strong as the *other* discrimination. At times there may also be stronger forms of *mimicry*: in their attempt to escape from discrimination, the teachers adopt not only the cultural features of the mestizos, but also

their discriminatory conducts, and the price is very high: what follows are internal conflicts and the need to rationalize their actions, even though this leads to new contradictions.

All of this shows that the building of identity, far from being a linear process, is generally a very rough path, and the subjects may create, undo and recreate affiliations and interests, depending on the experiences they make and the resources they have.

One significant characteristic is the sensation of contradiction they acquire as a part of these processes and the fact that many of them find in the principles of indigenous education the possibility to reflect their situation in a more critical fashion. However, the available data indicate that the teachers frequently, and in spite of their desires and statements, end up not totally *mesticized*, but differentiated from their group of origin, and in this intermediate state that characterizes the group: two of these three teachers, for example, live in the city and have come to form part of this sector of the working class population that has indubitable ethnic roots, but acquires a more flexible spectrum than that of a clearly distinctive sector.

The indigenous teachers: round trip

Thus the group we are studying could be called *flexible*. Created on the basis of phenomena of great importance, such as the foundation of the modern Mexican State, they can be distinguished on any trail: they are not peasants anymore, but they are also different from other professionals that live and work in the rural world (physicians, engineers, nurses). Sometimes they reach the top and form part of the local elite. When

they come to the city, they are little different from other working class sectors of indigenous heritage.

However, when seen within certain contexts or through their personal experiences and acts, they appear sharp and defined, with all their contradictions and with the long and painful processes that brought them to form this intermediate group that continues to be there: looking first to one and then to the other side of the societies that have made them, with the institutions and practices that maintain their peculiar situation.

CHAPTER 4

RECOMPOSING MEMORIES: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

"that's all, in a nutshell that has been my life,
from hidden there among the coffee trees on the farm,
until now... well, turned into a professional..."
J. H.C.

This chapter presents an analysis of the teachers' narratives. These are, as may be remembered, basically of two types: firstly, *memories of their lives*, and secondly what may be called *rationalized elaborations* on their work and their personal and social situations. Occasionally, both types are joined in a single narrative, but on other occasions a clearer distinction may be made. In any case, these narratives are a privileged way of accessing the processes of identity formation, insofar as these memories and rationalizations are elaborations matched by group situations, even in the case of personal experiences. As will be shown, the material shows *two fundamental types of memories and experiences,* associated with the identity among the teachers, which correspond, in large part, to *two types of teachers.*

On the one hand we have those teachers who were less acculturated in their childhood, whose native language was indigenous and who did not have much contact with mestizo society. These teachers have relatively negative memories of the formation of their own identities, which are associated with early discovery of racial discrimination. This discovery is almost always associated with their entrance into school, this institution that represents, in the community itself, the other social and cultural world of *mestizo* society and is, at the same time, the beginning of a process of *uprooting* of their reference

groups, frequently complemented, however, by other bonding tendencies. These early experiences left strong marks on those teachers who, when entering into the teaching profession, even increased their contradictions and did not always resolve them satisfactorily.

There is, however, also another group of teachers *from more acculturated families, who did have Spanish as a native language or grew up in a bilingual setting.* In spite of everything it is possible to detect ethnic affiliation among them. This is because the family groups of whom they are members maintain a series of collective practices that are characteristic of those of indigenous populations (as such those related to the life and annual cycle: *mayordomías*, religious celebrations), but with a certain contact to national language and culture. It must be pointed out that this group includes some individuals who can be identified as mestizos, but who present themselves as natives[1].

In this second group of teachers, the narratives show that the social and cultural shock does not appear in their memories of early life, as happens in the first group, which is precisely because of this contact mentioned above. In the case of the *mestizos* there is a constant emphasis on ethnic association, but associated with the ideas offered by the State by means of the educational institution: those links to the Indian forefathers all of us Mexicans supposedly have.

To give a better idea of the materials presented in this chapter, I first intend to point out the ethnic origin and native language of the two groups with whom I worked: Class 1990 and Class 1992.

[1] The main reason for this is the fact that formally only natives who are fluent in an indigenous language may work within the subsystem of indigenous education and study these courses at the university.

Table 11 Ethnic origin of the teachers from Class 1990

Origin	Number	%
Náhuatl	19	61.3
Mixteco	3	9.7
Popoloca	2	6.5
Mestizo	3	9.7
Undefined[2]	4	12.9
Total	31	100.1

Source: Interviews and teachers' writings

Table 12 Native language of the teachers from Class 190

Native language	Number	%
Náhuatl	13	41.9
Mixteco	0	0
Popoloca	0	0
Spanish	9	29.0
Bilingual	3	9.7
Undefined	6	19.4
Total	31	100.0

Source: Interviews and teachers' writings

Table 13 Ethnic origin of the teachers from Class 1992

Origin	Number	%
Náhuatl	12	42.9
Mixteco	2	7.1
Popoloca	4	14.3
Mestizo	6	21.4
Undefined	4	14.3
Total	28	100.0

Source: Interviews and teachers' writings

[2] Reliable information on ethnic origin and mother tongue of teachers is not available in University records because it is assumed that every teacher working in the *Subsistema* is of indigenous descent and for the

Table 14 Native language of the teachers from Class 1992

Native language	Number	%
Náhuatl	7	25.0
Mixteco	1	3.6
Popoloca	0	0
Spanish	13	46.4
Bilingual	6	21.4
Undefined	1	3.6
Total	28	100.0

Source: Interviews and teachers' writings

Several things come to our attention in these tables. First, although it is true that the number of *mestizos* is a minority in both tables, (9.7% and 21.4%, respectively), in group 2 it is twice as high as in group 1. This is probably due to the fact that Generation 1990 was the first generation in Indigenous Education at the Puebla campus of the university. Besides, on this occasion there were greater restrictions for the entrance of non-indigenous teachers, whereas this criterion was relaxed much later. Some of the comments heard among the teachers pointed out that the study course was seen as a triumph of the indigenous teachers, long awaited by many of them, which may have contributed to this more selective admission process.

It is also interesting to see that although Spanish as the mother tongue is important in both cases, it is more important in Class 1992. In Class 1992 it is native to 67.8 percent of the teachers (if the Spanish speakers are added to the bilingual speakers), whereas for Class 1990 it is the native language of 38.7 percent (also adding Spanish to bilingual speakers). This may certainly be explained by the progress of Spanish in some regions of Mexico where it has replaced the indigenous languages. This is reflected here, since the

University this is the only fact that counts. The only possibility to know this information is through direct questioning of teachers. Unfortunately I did not always get clear answers if any at all.

second one is a much younger group[3] and would therefore have been more exposed to this advance of the Spanish language, although other cultural traits may have been preserved.

In the analysis of the narratives I will begin with those of the first group of teachers, namely those who faced greater problems in the transit to this other world, which was initially represented by school, and who exemplify with much more drama the formation of a group characterized by contradiction.

Identity as travel: the departure

I assume that identity is the effect of the actions performed by subjects in their context. Thus identity would always be the outcome of a *negotiation*, because even though the subjects can control only very little of the process or accept, voluntarily or by force, images or stereotypes that have been assigned them, there is always a part where they must act, and acceptance is anyway almost always the effect of a previous process that involved actions through which concepts were negotiated that were favorable only to certain groups.

A good example for this are those teachers whose native language is indigenous. Through their memories and everyday actions (at the university, in their work and in their daily lives) they showed how they were building what they are: members of a particular group that appears to be situated in an eternal transition between two margins they cannot completely grasp: the indigenous society where they come from, and the *mestizo* society into which they were thrown.

[3] In class 1990 the average age was 34.5 years with a mode of 32; in Generation 1992 the average was 30.2 years with a mode of 26. *Archivo escolar, Universidad Pedagógica Nacional.*

Let us first consider the recomposition of the stories they told about their lives, in order to attempt to reconstruct the identities they have been creating.

Memories of "lived" life

What is remembering? Paul Connerton (1989: 36-37), in reference to Maurice Halbwachs, points out that remembering is a complex social act because it is only through membership in a certain group that individuals are able to acquire, identify and recover their personal memories. He also says that any memory of facts or thoughts, even the most intimate and private ones, only exists in relation to the whole of notions also held by many others, and therefore the idea of an individual memory, absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction that does not make any sense. This is certainly true, and the nature of the collective becomes obvious in each of the personal experiences remembered by the teachers.

Teachers show, through their narratives many peculiarities and individual facts: their idiosyncrasy and the special concatenation of facts that appear in any individual human life. However, at the same time their histories disclose common topics and similar experiences that delineate the contours of a group of people made of commonalties and of the interactions with others.

Perhaps the most conspicuous characteristic that stands out in the narratives is *learning,* starting at a very early age, that there are important differences between themselves and *others*, in this case associated with stigmatization. Other authors have already explained the meanings of acknowledgment and internalization of stigmatization by the subjects (Foley 1990; Goffman 1986). Among some of the most remarkable

features of this process is the existence of a set of attributes tied to a negative content. These attributes are socially created. In the concrete case of indigenous teachers, stigmatization is related to a set of ethnic attributes that go from "immediate" and "evident" features to others more hidden or unclear. These attributes include among others, physical appearance, attire, language, speech, food and musical tastes, place of birth, family names, body management, and stereotypes. Individuals who possess these attributes are part of groups located in subordinate positions in the social structure.

Two features of this process of stigmatization are worth mentioning. First, that the process is not univocal, namely, that it has room for an amount of negotiation among actors who can manage ethnic attributes in the extent that these are not essential but relational ones. Second, that stigmatization is part of a system of institutionalized inequality: the process that locates groups of individuals in social positions is neither a random or contingent one. It serves to reproduce a particular social structure.

Stigmatization linked to ethnic attributes implies, by indigenous teachers, *discovery* of stigmata, and *learning* of a system of behavior associated with these stigmata, how to manage situations, how to negotiate inside the limits provided by situations.

To be different, *an ethnic person*, a fact that was not evident within the families, appeared, one is tempted to say, as a sudden realization on the first visit to school. This happened frequently in grade school, because in those years, in the middle sixties and early seventies, the concept of pre-school was not yet very widely used in indigenous

communities. This difference materialized, in the beginning, as the *difference from others,* unknown individuals and languages, often causing terror[4]:

> "On the first day of classes, I went to school with enthusiasm, to be certain because I wanted to know what they were doing there, but my good mood only lasted some minutes, because I wanted to go back home as soon as possible. However, I had to endure not only my first day, but the next and all the others as well ... I resisted. ... When I went back to school it was because my tutor forced me. The reason for my resistance was the terror I felt when hearing an unknown language. With the passing of time I learned that it was Spanish." T.M.B.

> "On my first day of classes, everything was new to me. When I saw the teacher I felt fear, and even more so when he began speaking Spanish to us. I didn't understand a word, because my only language was Náhuatl..." B.A.B.C.

> "During my first year of school I didn't want to go because I was so embarrassed. I remember that my mother beat me so hard with a *casahuate* [a local tree] stick that I couldn't even walk, but as time passed on I began to like school... When I was in second grade, some bearded and long-haired men came to supervise, but they were so ugly that the bigger kids said they were thieves who stole children, so we brought out all our things secretly and without the teachers' knowledge, and when they became aware of it there was no one left because we had all gone home and told our parents that some hairy men had come who wanted to steal us. Our parents went running to the school to find out what was going on, but the teachers informed them that these were people from *SEP* [*Secretaría de Educación Pública.* Department of Public Education] who had come to see how they worked, but I could see that they were threatening them, and therefore I didn't want to go back to school..." F.G.R.

> "At the age of five I attended the Center for Indigenous Preschool Education, where ... I heard the Spanish language for the first time, but I was very much afraid, because I didn't understand it and didn't understand or know how some of the words were pronounced." M.B.M.

[4] From here on all quotes are the teachers, and in order to facilitate reading, there is only a minimum of editing, always respecting the sense of their words.

> "In my first year of entrance to grade school I was afraid the teacher might ask me questions, because I only knew my name, the names of my parents and brothers and sisters; I understood everything my fellow students were talking about, but I couldn't pronounce the words in Spanish. This problem caused my fellow students to humiliate me, just because I couldn't talk with them. Although my uncles and my cousins spoke in Spanish, I only learned the meaning of what they were saying, because my mother wouldn't let me play with them; ever since I was a little girl I had to help her with the household chores." L.V.J.

After this first experience, however, a sense is acquired that the different ones are not those others, but they themselves. Attending school (this place that, in spite of being an accustomed landscape, physically and culturally, of the rural communities of Mexico, is still so foreign to many of them, a topic I shall pick up again further on), many of these children quickly learned this different status of culture and language, and came to know how to recognize it in themselves and in their families:

> "In our community there were two little huts that served as the schoolhouse, and there came the time when I had to go there. Basically this wasn't much of a problem, because finally we all were children of the same village, and the only outsiders were the teachers who, though they belonged to the indigenous subsystem, taught us in Spanish, but with a lot of sacrifice and the idea that learning comes with "blood, sweat and tears" and the combined efforts of the teacher at school and my dad at home I went on and stayed in that school until third grade.
> The real problem began when I had to go to another school with a social group that was totally different from mine ... non-indigenous, and *I became aware that being indigenous was nearly equivalent to a sin,* and I suffered an internal conflict because of the contrast between indigenous culture and Western culture.
> This school is only two kilometers from the municipal center, and most of my fellow students were monolingual Spanish speakers. *Thus the outsiders in this group were we, who came from the indigenous community,* and we were classified as *inditos* [little indios], *compadritos* [little godfathers], *nacos* [half-wits] and with countless other pejorative epithets." Emphasis added. J.H.C.

"When I went to grade school ethnic languages were not taken into account; on the contrary, we had a teacher who sometimes would imitate or pronounce a word in Náhuatl, and he did it as a joke, to make fun of us. Our village would each year celebrate the local fair, where they organized the Dance of the Moors, and when the teacher saw one of them go by, he would say: *Look, children, there go the devils.*" Emphasis added. A.L.M.

"In the past, my parents didn't speak Spanish very well. *I became aware of this when I went to school...* in second grade, when the teacher corrected me... During grade school I learned to speak better, clearer, and I came home and I told my parents how to say some of the words they couldn't pronounce; they told me that was the reason I was going to school, to learn how to say things correctly, because these were other times." Emphasis added. E.P.H.

"My parents are Popoloca Indians, and they speak both their own language and Spanish, but my grandparents only have Popoloca, and therefore I learned both languages since I was a little girl. In grade school they obligated us to understand and speak only Spanish. Although my parents speak Spanish, but not perfectly... I observed how the teachers tried to eradicate this language with severe punishments of the students who were hearing others speak in Popoloca, and we were forced to speak in Spanish... although now I understand that we say everything wrong; we change all the phonemes, from feminine to masculine, from plural to singular and vice versa..." D.A.M.

"As children in the family we had no right to participate in any of the adults' conversation, family affairs or not, because my parents had been educated this way. Thus they passed their culture on to us in the same manner. It is for this reason that all my brothers and sisters have problems in language comprehension and speak Spanish all mixed up." M.E.A.

Together with this sense of difference, and in spite of still being situated in the familiar context of the village, school appears as the starting point of a process of *uprooting* that for many would be present in other experiences lived in other places. In the community, school is already part of this process, since it establishes rules that often appear strange and incomprehensible to the children. One of these rules, as has been

mentioned by the teachers in their narratives, is the prohibition of the use of indigenous languages. Although there are teachers who do not have memories as traumatic of their introduction to castilianization, this is definitely the exception. Additionally, there are many memories of physical or verbal punishment associated with ethnic discrimination:

> "The teacher's class remained a void, because I did not understand or comprehend... the explanation she gave me, and not only for that reason, but because he forbade me to speak my language." J.F.C.B.

> "The first language in which I began to communicate... was Náhuatl. The change began to exist when they signed me up for first grade of the local grade school, where it cost me a lot of work to learn Spanish, since I continued to communicate in my native language, and I was really embarrassed ... to pronounce words in Spanish like "Good morning, teacher." Instead I said *piali tlamachtiketl*, but when the teacher heard that he began to scold me, he slapped me and punished me by saying "So you won't learn Spanish?" That really struck fear into me and I gradually forced myself to learn a few words. Besides, I didn't learn anything at school; everything the teacher taught... was in Spanish, and since I didn't understand, how was I to learn? I repeat that it wasn't until second grade that I learned the second language little by little." B.D.M.

> "When my teacher caught me speaking in Náhuatl with my fellow students, he rewarded me with strong physical punishment, trying to get me to understand that this language wasn't good for anything and that I should not continue to speak it. There were so many punishments they gave me for trying to speak Náhuatl in class and for not learning Spanish, and even less being able to express myself in it, that the marks the physical punishment left on me disappeared as time passed on, but the psychological marks will remain all my life and manifest themselves in many traumas and frustrations." T.M.B.

> "During my childhood, when I entered the federal grade school of my village, the only language I knew was Náhuatl, but then in school I needed to learn Spanish, because the teachers who worked in this institution punished us... if they heard us speak in our native tongue. Another thing was that most of us girls had our *rebozos* [a wrap to cover the head and to carry objects, children, etc.] during the first days... to protect us against the

cold, but our teachers didn't like that and they took them away from us abruptly without giving us any explanation for this attitude." L.E.H.A.

"... since I was a little girl I was spoken to in Náhuatl, but from the time I was five years old I attended grade school. I felt rejected by the other children, although I was sociable with all of them... this was because my parents spoke to me in Náhuatl, and all of them only spoke Spanish." E.P.H.

These memories of the prohibition to speak the native language are also shared by some of the Spanish speaking teachers who attended school together with indigenous fellow students, from whom they learned the indigenous language, ironically and contrary to the intentions of the school:

"When I began to go to school, I felt very glad, because this way I didn't have to go with my father to do field work. I had a lot of fun being with my fellow students, children of the same age. Since... the teacher did not like us to speak in our native language, we all spoke Spanish, but some of the other girls did speak it; sometimes we played tricks on the teacher: when she went out or didn't pay attention, we answered each other in Náhuatl. I didn't know any Náhuatl, but at school and at play with my girl friends, we began to pronounce the words to say the names of things, and we also had fun with that, because during recess and sometimes after school we asked our friends to teach us how to speak Náhuatl." S.V.I.V.

"My first grade teacher was a man named José Osorio. Everything went well, but when I communicated with my fellow students in the Náhuatl language, he became very angry and started giving us cuffs on the head and slaps with the eraser, because he didn't like us to speak in that language, he believed his mission was to castilianize this community..." B.R.S.

The separation from home and community life is often more profound when students had to go to boarding schools, they were obligated to stay all week. This

happened when their villages did not have primary schools with all grades. Additionally some families, who sought a more successful acculturation in a non-indigenous medium, sent children away to school. Some of the memories which are most associated with the school years are those long hikes to school under difficult climatic conditions:

> "During my childhood I went to school in the village where I lived, studying here my first and second year; afterwards my parents sent me to study in a nearby community where another teacher for the third grade existed." A.M.G.L.

> "When I set foot for the first time in a school I had to face many problems... I didn't learn anything... I went for four years to the same school; in my last year I failed to pass again... my father was very disappointed in me, and therefore he sent me to a boarding school in the northern part of the state, Comaltepec, Zacapoaxtla... I had a hard time to adapt to the climate of the place, and also to the type of education they used there..." A.L.M.

> "...when I finished fifth grade... I was forced to request a scholarship for sixth grade in another community close by, where there was a boarding school named Pita Ixhuatlán de Madero in the state of Veracruz. I went to present my exam, which I passed, and in this school I finished my primary education. In the first days I couldn't get used to it because of the food; the tortillas were made of *Minsa* [industrialized corn flour], and I wasn't accustomed to eat that, I wanted the tortillas from my home which are made of corn... ground on the *metate* [a mortar made of stone used for grinding maize], but I had to subject myself... to the rules established by the administration of this institution: on Sunday we had to be ready at three o'clock sharp to go and collect firewood. Those of us who brought firewood from home did not have to go, and could leave on Friday. We had to take the bed sheets home with us to wash and bring them back clean on Sunday. They gave us the soap, though..." H.M.B.

> "... my dad came and so I left, and from there... he took me to my grandparents' house... and on the next day my grandmother went... to see a lady teacher from there, at a private school, and so the teacher accepted me. There I stayed for one, I mean to say, I finished the school year... and yes, there the teacher was more or less patient when she taught me,

although she always beat us, too. She beat us with a stick that had like thorns; she beat us, well... because she said that we would only learn by force..." A.M.G.L.

"... I repeat that I was born in Tlaxiloco and the grade school is Vicente Suárez, where I only had opportunity to attend three years, because they only had up to third grade there, and afterwards I went to the municipality, which was a walk of two and a half hours. In order to enter at nine, I had to leave at seven fifteen to get to my school at nine; there was a lot of suffering in those winters, it rains every day and the roads, they are like paths, pure mud. We had to cross the ravines with mud and all, and I had to get up a little earlier when I went to secondary school, because secondary school began at eight. I had to get up... at five in the morning every day to get to my school a little before eight, because if not they turned us away." F.C.B.

"I went to school barefoot, it was about a half hour's walk or three quarters of an hour, but in those days it was normal to walk barefoot." M.E.J.G.O.

"as I said before, I grew up walking barefoot, and so I went through two years of grade school, walking one hour to get to school, under rainstorms, thunder, lightning, I'm so afraid of them..." L.V.J.

"... one of the problems was also the inclemency of the weather, since there in the Sierras the change of seasons is very notorious; there were weeks in winter when the rain closed in, the drizzle, the fog, the cold, and we had... to get up at six in the morning, ah... have breakfast and so, between water and mud and cold we had to walk two hours to school, to the school where we studied. I say we studied, I'm talking in plural because it was my sisters and I who walked. And after that, when the rain closed in, in the afternoon we had to walk again two hours back home in the same conditions: walking between mud, cold, water and ah... it was always the same situation until, for example, the winter season ended. When spring began, another season began... the heat. There was so much heat, and, truth be told, my parents were or are of very low income, and sometimes they don't even have enough for a soda... and my sisters and I... we had to walk, and with those dry lips; sometimes there were springs, and we had to drink water there because there wasn't enough money for a soda. After that the heat stops and there comes... spring is over and summer begins, the downpours begin... between lightning and thunder... the same situation. When we were walking, for instance, if it started raining while we were in class, we knew exactly that there was a river that

we couldn't cross... we wouldn't be able to cross that stream and we would have to wait until our parents came to pass us over on an improvised bridge made of a tree trunk, looking for the narrowest part of the river and building bridges, bridges made of trunks, and in this way we crossed over..." J.H.C.

"When I was eleven years old, I was still interested in getting on with my studies, and therefore I decided to leave my village to continue studying, because only teachers with little interest came to my village... to teach; therefore I went to the state primary school Narciso Mendoza, which is in the community of Limontitla, municipality of Chicontepec, Veracruz, and I had to walk approximately eight kilometers to get there every day, and the walk was difficult, and I had to carry my *tortillas* to eat along the way in order to be able to make it." M.B.M.

"From the village of Tzinacapan to the municipality of Cuetzalan... it is a walk of one hour and a half. There are times when the downpours and lightnings are very strong... but I had to walk like this, in all this water, and I put on a pair of *huaraches* [indian sandals made of a heavy tire rubber sole with leather thongs attached] for the walk. That was when I was thirteen years old, and for my second year of secondary school it was the same, I had to walk this distance." F.C.F.

"The month of inscriptions for secondary school came... From where I live to the place where I studied secondary school it is a three hours' walk. There was no transportation, I had to cross a river, and when it rained I couldn't get across, because there was no bridge." C.G.P.H.

"At the beginning of August my father registered me in secondary school... in the municipality of Cuetzalan... I had to walk... approximately one and a half hours... There were times when the rainstorms were very strong, with lightning... but I had to walk anyway in the rainy season..." F.C.F.

"When the first year of secondary school came, my shyness grew again because I would meet new fellow students in the group, but what encouraged me was that I found three friends there from primary school, among them my cousin, and thus I came to meet the other friends, and little by little my shyness disappeared.
In this year my suffering began, because in this place it rains most of the year, and I had to walk each day one and a half hours from school to my

> home, and the public buses didn't run every day because of the bad state of the road, on the one hand, and on the other I didn't get money for the fare, which was a *peso* and fifty *centavos* back then, and my dad only gave me a *peso* to buy something to drink at school..." B.A.B.C.

When these teachers left their communities, at any stage of their education, the process of uprooting and stigmatization was sped up, above all by ethnic discrimination, which at that moment was practiced mainly by their school mates, who were sometimes in the same economic circumstances, but were nearly always *mestizos*:

> "I finally managed to finish the first year and went on to second and third, but since the school isn't fully organized, one could only finish third and that was it, starting fourth year and until the end of grade school, one had to look for other schools... far away, the truth is they are a long way from my home village... the school I went to was a general primary school or federal school one, as it is known today. There were more children of *mestizo* origin, Spanish speaking children, and the few who attended like me from indigenous communities were the minority, and we were really marginalized by the people from the village administration... during the time I attended that school, and I have already told you about those kids, for example, the *mestizo* kids who treated us badly or called us *compadritos*, ignorant, *indios*, well, countless pejorative concepts, and we always were the ugly ducks, and because of this very situation maybe one loses this safety little by little, one has this fear of... of speaking with or in the presence of other people, which is called to express one's thoughts or feelings." J.H.C.

> "During all this time there I was living with my grandparents and playing with the other girls, well... but always, I don't know, the girls from there, well, they had like their noses in the air, like they knew more, because in that village my language is not spoken. We speak Mixteco in our village, it is still spoken there now... some said that we were indios, that we were *nacos* [a pejorative term for a working class person] and all that, they said we were *mecos* [a pejorative term for indio], but I didn't really know what they meant by these words, and since the girls there were all older, whenever we were carrying something they took it away from us and they beat us... sometimes I was distracted when I felt the rock that was thrown, well, it appeared they didn't like me , because they said we were *indios*, because we couldn't speak... so they always beat me, then, and they shouted that I was an *india*." A.M.G.L.

"Although they my schoolmates were also from the country, the kids made fun of us because we were unable to pronounce some of the words, and *when we answered the questions as to where we were from*, they started calling us *indios* and *mecos*, always belittling us, saying that we couldn't talk right and that we were indios because we spoke Mixteco." Emphasis added. M.G.C.

"When I finished primary school, my uncle sent me to study in Huachinango, Puebla, where I entered secondary school... when I finished the first year, my parents didn't like that place and they sent me to Mexico City, but *when I came in touch with the other students I felt strange, like rejected, because they have other physical characteristics, or rather... their culture is higher*." Emphasis added. F.C.H.

"... but the situation repeated itself, we as indigenous people were despised in that school, because the outsiders, from Campeche, I remember a schoolmate from Campeche, from Veracruz, from the state of Puebla, Hidalgo, from Mexico state, from all parts of the Republic there were schoolmates who came to study there... the thing is I entered to study in that school, and again this rejection that they made us feel, ah... also from the teachers and from the other students as well, and that put us on the side, or I myself went to the sideline and caused that I didn't participate much in class, on the one hand because of the... because of the poor Spanish that I spoke, maybe I still do, although I knew how to express myself in Spanish and knew how to communicate and everything was okay with the people in Spanish, but there were always words that were wrong, and I said words that were not very adequate, and then even the English teacher, I remember he once told me, being in an English class the teacher told me, "I heard that some of you entered presenting an exam of knowledge and others entered presenting an exam in native language; I don't know," he said, "why the authorities do this, this kind of situations, because here what good does the native language do them, on the contrary, here you come to learn English and not the native language." And that was something I remembered forever, and apparently he was right then, because there really was no reason there to speak in an indigenous language, only Spanish, and I ended speaking that... I learned a few words in English..." J.H.C.

This process frequently results in an internalization and the acceptance of subordination:

"I get nostalgic remembering that, because when I went to boarding school I rarely had the opportunity to go home to our place and participate and because my teachers put other ideas in my head, and instead of liking the environment of the countryside I began to feel ashamed, because they pointed me out as an *indio* and in those times I didn't want to stand out among my schoolmates as an *indio*." M.R.P.

On other occasions, this discrimination was faced in other ways. There were those who tried to *camouflage* the differences, albeit without much success:

"The most difficult stage I went through in this aspect was when I went to secondary school, because I had this "personality" conflict inside of me, because I didn't want to accept that I belonged to an ethnic group and tried to behave like my *mestizo* classmates; however, everybody was aware of my situation, and some of my classmates I spent time with called us *los Chicones* because we are natives of the region of Chicontepec, Veracruz; they also called us *los nacos*.
Later, when I entered preparatory school, I continued trying to appear in my behavior like my schoolmates, trying to break down this barrier that I felt existed between them and me." S.C.M.

A minority of others tried confrontation and rebellion through a conscious reevaluation of the ethnic difference:

"I finished secondary school and continued my studies... In order to go on, I entered a private school where most of the students were from families with good incomes and were from the same town, well, that's what they said, but from what I observed... some of those students only pretended to be from the city, because *it was clear from their features that they came from a village*. Maybe they concealed that out of embarrassment; well, in this class only six of us were from villages, but from different parts, and we always looked for each other to be together in recess. Inside the classroom the assessor also always put us together for teamwork or any kind of activity, because the other classmates always isolated us. The assessor understood the reason for this situation, he spent time with us, but couldn't do anything so the others would include us in all of their activities. So the six of us were always working together, and we identified with each other for many reasons: our way of dressing,

> speaking, because we always spoke... Náhuatl, which we did to annoy the others. Besides, they wouldn't understand us even if they were listening; we felt proud and important because we knew two languages. That's how we spent three years together, but of course each of us went home to our villages on the weekends..." Emphasis added. L.M.L.T.

Although the mestizo schoolmates were not always prejudiced, the feeling of isolation persisted:

> "During my first year of secondary school I was a shy student, I didn't like to be with others because there wasn't any other student from my home village... In the beginning I didn't want to go; I had to go because of my father's insistence, and one of the problems was that I couldn't understand the teachers... some of my classmates took pity on me and gave me a sandwich or a soda from time to time." J.J.P.

It becomes obvious that the step from primary to preparatory school represents for these teachers the process of getting to know the ethnic difference and when they get out to know and dominate the other culture as much as possible. It also is the stage when the social "markers" are learned, which distinguish the region (and in good part the entire country as well) the populations with ethnic differences: their language and ways of speaking, their features, their customs, their dress, economic differences, and their place of origin. The narratives show that sometimes it was enough to know that an individual belonged to a certain town or region to be identified as an *indio*. One part of the assimilation of the terms use to designate Indians, starting with the most derogatory, which at the same time carries the whole charge of what is negative and backward: *indio*. Other derogatory terms were "monkeys", *compadritos*, *nacos* and *mecos*, all those epithets that separate and denigrate the individuals identified as natives.

Within this process of uprooting, school sometimes also contributed to another separation, one that is more internal, namely the distancing of the teachers from their places of birth. Such things as clothing, one of the most visible diacritic aspects and a point that holds great emotional force, symbolized this:

> "When I finished primary school, I had a godfather who gave me a *calzón de manta* [a pair of pants worn as traditional Indian attire, made of raw cotton and bound with string at the waist and the ankles]; since my dad used them, he wanted me to be like him, but after I entered secondary school, I always used normal pants, because before entering secondary level I used pants... and sometimes *calzón de manta*." F.C.F.

> "Afterwards I went to secondary school, and there everything made me... like ashamed still; I couldn't quite place myself, and I showed up in my *huaraches*, and some of them had shoes, sneakers, and were more or less well dressed, and then I became sort of ashamed, like I was afraid, but over time, during those three years, it became clear to me that we were all alike, but there we were different, because of our clothes and resources." S.A.F.

> "When I grew up, my mom dressed me in long dresses, a *rebozo*, I went barefoot and had my hair in two braids, always with colored ribbons in them... but one day the teacher... picked me for a dance, and to this day I remember how I was supposed to be dressed: they asked me to wear a white dress, white shoes, bows, and white socks; *maybe it seems to be ridiculous when I write this, but that was really my greatest joy*; I was thinking of a nice hairdo, elegant shoes and dress, *but everything went wrong, because my mother was so used to do what her neighbors told her.* This was in second grade, and later, in third or fourth grade, my mother was completely different, because she *noticed that I was very much affected at school by feeling inferior to the others*; I only worked in silence, and when I was asked to come to the blackboard I refused; nevertheless my work was good." Emphasis added. L.V.J.

This process of uprooting, which may be called a *centrifugal tendency*, is complemented by another one that would be *centripetal*, preventing the teachers, at least

in a large number of cases, from losing contact with their native villages. This tendency also appears in their narratives, as we shall see further on. The initial insertion in an educational institution represents the first moment of separation of the teachers from their groups of origin. In the same vein, incorporation into the teaching service, which for some of them was a fortuitous circumstance, marks the following stage, because from this moment on our future teachers would leave their regions and go first to the places where they would take their preparatory courses, and then on to their assigned places of work, which nearly always put them far away from their native communities. It must be pointed out that at the same time this seems to be a kind of apprenticeship, accepted a priori, and a move of institutional politics to separate all rookie teachers from their places of origin:

> "So those from the commission come looking for me at prep school... to see if I wanted to enter as a promoter [a governmental agent devoted to development and educational projects] –because back then the promoters were bilingual– and to say the truth, I was really out of my depth. I said, "How am I going to accept this? I don't know anything about teaching." Then I started talking with my fellow students about what we wanted to do, and so we decided to take another course before we entered into service. This course lasted half a year and was held in a place named Eloxochitlán, in the state of Oaxaca. And there the course ended in the month of June of 1980, yes, it was 79-80. So it can be said that I started working a year in 1980 on a contract basis. And in 1982 I had my tenure and everything..." S.A.F.

> "Later I was offered the opportunity to present a selection exam for teaching candidates in the indigenous medium; I passed the exam and went happily to the course which was held in Huehuetlán el Chico, Puebla. This course had a duration of six months, but it was a very pleasant experience, because we were various fellow students of different ethnic origin, and we shared our experiences. We all had one single object in mind: to give everything we had to serve our indigenous peoples..." A.L.M.

"I finished preparatory school, there was a course... I also always thought in entering the teaching profession, I saw many teachers and I had this mentality that the teacher was the best-paid person, ah... with a high prestige in society, that he had an impeccable image in society, and so I got this idea of wanting to be a teacher, maybe also because I didn't have a more comprehensive vision and didn't receive a more adequate vocational orientation of which profession to go into, or what course I could study. When I finished preparatory school I was offered an opportunity to go to a course in the state of Oaxaca, in Eloxochitlán, to a course for bilingual promoters... to work in preschool education. I went to this course that lasted six months. When the course was over they gave us the opportunity to enter as promoters, but with a contract, right here in the region of Atlixco. Later... after the end of the contract, the Department of Public Education gave us... posts to continue working on this preschool level. My first community was Santa María Xoyatla, near... Tepeojuma, behind Atlixco. After this post, where I stayed for three years, I went from one community to the other to get to know as many of them as possible..." J.H.C.

"When I finally was a teacher, I had to go and take a course to enable me to enter into the service; that was in San Antonio Eloxochitlán de Flores Magón, Oaxaca, where I again met new fellow students I hadn't known before, from different states, and consequently the languages they spoke were different as well: Mixtec, Mazatec and Totonac... When I arrived in the community where I had been assigned, I found out that it was a great responsibility to work with these children..." B.A.B.C.

"In the community of San Martín Zacatempa, Tochimilco, Puebla I had my first experiences in teaching practice... This community is about 25 kilometers away. People from this village travel in cargo trucks, the road is a dirt road; there are days when they have to walk all the way to the municipality; and to get to the city of Atlixco they have to take the bus from the municipality, which is Tochimilco, to Atlixco. That's what I didn't like about it, because you have to walk a lot. I lasted two school periods and then asked for a change to another center that was closer to the city of Atlixco." L.J.P.

"A few days later I was sent to my first community, a large and beautiful village that had all the indispensable services. I was lucky there, because normally they send the new teachers to the smallest and farthest villages in the region, but 1981 was a lucky year for me." G.M.B.

"I presented my bilingual exam and passed it with 8.7; afterwards I was sent to a three-month course in Oaxaca, and then we came back from the course in October and they gave us our posting to start working with the little ones, and I was sent to the region of Tepexi de Rodríguez. I was lucky, because they didn't send me very far away from the community, to San Felipe Otlaltepec... Later I requested a change and they sent me to a community that was closer and where there is transportation." E.H.N.

"When I was finished with the course they sent me to the sierra, to the farthest place... where I walked three hours, but fast, because I walk that way, because when you go slowly it's four hours, and there I worked in four different communities until I came to Matamoros; from Matamoros I was sent to Los Reyes; from Los Reyes, here I am working in Xoyatla and I have very little experience, just five years I've been working here..." F.C.H.

This moment of entering into the service represents yet another type of socialization: the socialization of the teaching culture that provides different images of the indigenous, and is sometimes an alternative to those negative images with which they grew up:

"When I entered the Indigenous Education service, a part of those prejudices disappeared, and the decision to become an indigenous promoter was, in a certain way, an acceptance of my reality as a native, always trying in front of my colleagues, and even in front of some *mestizo* relations, to demonstrate that I wasn't ashamed to belong to an ethnic group, and that I was satisfied to be one, and even more than that, to accept it.
Nowadays I owe a large part of that to the "reflections" we practice here at the university, and to the concepts I was able to form regarding what it means to "be indigenous" and everything that represents, and I feel proud of my customs and my profession..." S.C.M.

"I began to know and differentiate my identity as an indigenous teacher from the national identity from the moment I started working within the subsystem of primary education, even though... before I knew my native

language and all kinds of daily life in my community, and even so I didn't identify myself as indigenous." C.M.L.

However, the negative stereotypes of the indigenous did not disappear, but they survived within the official ideology. This ideology keeps at the same time a demagogic perspective about ethnic heritage. School is one of most important vehicles of this twofold vision. Despite the entire official ideology there is discrimination inside the teaching profession:

"In my profession I also had to face discrimination, but gradually I've overcome that, and now this criticism doesn't affect me anymore, neither professionally nor personally.
Now I'm more worried about the course our service is taking, since many colleagues only take this as a stepping stone to enter into other systems once they are better prepared." S.C.M.

"Well, as a teacher in the indigenous medium I have analyzed and reflected upon everything I have lived through, my experiences and the way other colleagues from the other subsystem look at us. They say that because of being teachers of indigenous education we are not sufficiently prepared to cover the role of teachers, and because of speaking an indigenous language... we are not on a level to compete with them..." M.R.H.

"As I said at the beginning, I maybe still had my doubts about this job. I said, "Am I or am I not?" because I saw that among us, as teachers, as educators. Because I am not a teacher. In indigenous education maybe many of our colleagues are working for the Department of Public Education, but perhaps we can't classify ourselves, or as *they think that those of indigenous education are not really capable of teaching indigenous education; or they point at us and say, "Look, there are those from indigenista education..."* That's when I explain to them politely, without denying, for example,... my roots, because *indigenista* and working in the indigenous medium, it's different for me. Because there are two, or maybe various, indigenist departments that have, like, everything: a director and different branches. Because before our generation these posts were paid by INI [The *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (National

> Indigenist Institute) has been the official body that directs the state's politics towards the country's indigenous populations.]... but now that is not so anymore... And that's when I explain to them that indigenist is different from indigenous education." Emphasis added. S.A.F.

> "To be an indigenous teacher is equivalent to be classified... within a group with standards and guidelines... that are different from the rest of the teaching professions, *like... being tagged just as a product of second-class quality, and since these standards and guidelines are not given in a clear and precise manner, this provokes an ambiguous identity in me.*" Emphasis added. J.H.C.

> "Once a teacher from the rural system [which does not belong to the indigenous educational system] asked a fellow teacher with regards to the festivities of May 15 [Teachers' Day]: 'Does the union give you the same opportunities? I don't think so, because you are from the indigenous system: You won't be given the day off and they won't celebrate you.'
> By that he meant that the indigenous system is of less value." A.L.M.

Thus teachers are facing an ambiguous situation that almost always causes personal anguish. Frequently, and ironically, the teachers themselves and the actions they undertake to confront discrimination, only contribute to increasing it. It is very interesting to observe that some of them have a great clarity, a great *penetration,* as Paul Willis puts it, regarding the situation and the conditions that provoke it:

> "To begin with, the General Department for Indigenous Education was created to 'rescue' and 'protect' indigenous culture, apart from offering indigenous children an education in their own language a formal education, that is; perhaps this was respected during the first few years after its creation, but today these characteristics of indigenous education are not... as manifest, because there simply aren't any educational programs structured especially for the indigenous medium; also there are no supporting resources like books or primers edited in indigenous languages, maybe due to existing dialect differences within certain indigenous languages. Besides, many of us are placed in non-indigenous communities close to the city, which makes it more difficult for us to live in the community.

> *This situation, as I mentioned in the beginning, provokes an internal conflict in me, because I now realize that I am neither one nor the other*; nor am I from there, because my social group doesn't let me participate in religious festivities anymore, like making collections; what I mean is they don't let me do what they do anymore, like sowing corn, harvest coffee, collaborate in activities of mutual help, or... in even in making fun, because they say that I belong to a different category now, but on the other hand I haven't been able to adapt a hundred percent... to Western culture, and therefore my identity as an indigenous teacher is at best shaky right now." Emphasis added. J.H.C.

It must be pointed out that this case is exceptional, both because of the clarity with which the situation is expressed and also because not always is there a rupture this radical with the community practices and the reference groups, as will be demonstrated below. However, it must be noted that this is part of the processes of uprooting and contradiction that are in the hearts of the indigenous teachers. Although there have been several intents of removing negative connotations of the term *indio*, they have been unsuccessful. The term is part of Mexican society and is part of a system of social classification that uses physical appearance in combination with economic elements. Some teachers seem to have accepted these negative images:

"One of the experiences I had when I spoke with a colleague teacher was that when I asked her why she didn't teach Náhuatl to her children... she answered: 'No, why would we want more indios, as if I weren't enough. My children aren't *indios*, and therefore I don't think it is important that they speak the language I speak."

Identity as travel: the return

As I mentioned above, together with the forces that separate the teachers, there are also tendencies that promote their taking roots. In this sense the narratives also reflect their connections, community practices, and reencounters; in short, unbroken links with a past

that survives in and with them and which shows some of the meanings of ethnicity in Mexico. This becomes evident in some of the celebrations of the annual cycle which keeps them bound to their communities. The condition is that the community maintains a strong nucleus of collective practices. Therefore some of the teachers continue considering their place of origin as their *home*, the place where they feel *at ease*, as they say, and where they become themselves once again:

> "When I come *home*, well, I say it like that because it's the place where I lived a long time, and above all because my dad lives there alone, for my mother went away and never comes back [she died] the first thing I do is to greet my father and the people who are with him. And my father, the first thing he does is offer me something to drink, as is the custom among us... offering me a beer because of the intense heat, or simply because of the habit among us, *and of course something to eat.* At nightfall we get together in the dining room, my sister-in-law, my brother..., my husband and I.... to make plans about how we are going to organize things for the chili sowing, or simply to talk about how we've been and how things are in the community and, above all, at home.
> At first light we get up at around six in the morning to prepare breakfast, which consists of a cup of coffee with milk and bread or cookies; around eight o'clock we all have breakfast together, and *later we have lunch when... we get hungry, because we don't always eat at the same hour, rather when we feel like it.*
> ... even though I am far away, now that we have a phone, I call my family and ask them who is going to be *mayordomo* this year, and if it is one of my brothers, I somehow send him some money, because that's the only way to help him so he can perform this activity in the community." Emphasis added. A.E.V.

> "After I finished my studies, I returned to my village where I could be together with my family and my friends... where I returned after a long time to do and remember what I had done back then, like speaking in Náhuatl, *using my former hairdo, footwear, and dress like I used to*, to be together with the people from my village, *to feel at ease*, to participate in different activities in the field, social and cultural activities, participate in the festivities of my village; I continued to identify myself with the people from there... today I am working in another community, near the city of Atlixco... and during the holidays the whole family comes together in the

village. I personally go there every thirty days, because I participate in the agricultural activities, and I also participate in the festivities; occasionally I contribute financially, because I can't accept the commissions that I normally would have to take, since I work. The festivity in which I take part is the 21st of September, that's when they have a special dinner for all who take part in the basketball tournament; we make the financial contribution and the other people contribute their work, but we all work together, and if there is an opportunity, we request a special permit in order to be in this festivity which is so important..." Emphasis added. L.M.L.T.

"I think I haven't completely detached myself from my roots, since the authorities of my community make a list of the persons who are living outside of the village, in order to ask us for financial help for the school, the church and the village fair, where they fix a cooperation. If we can give more, that's all the better; in case we don't come to the village regularly, they inform us through a relative or the commission visits us where we live." M.P.T.

"Although in my community most of the inhabitants are outside of the village, the identity of the community is being maintained by way of the traditions and customs, because the *mayordomías* [the obligations to take care of certain tasks in honor of certain saints] are celebrated by the citizens of the community who live outside... and... they themselves offer the celebration of a feast without asking them in writing if they accept... On the other hand, what is nearly lost is the language, because only the people of sixty years and older speak it anymore, but even so there are characteristics... because of which it can be said that there is social and individual identity, because when we return to the village to celebrate one of the *mayordomías,* we feel the unity with the other people..." C.M.L.

And it is acknowledged that there is *something*, memories, *habitus* in Bourdieus' words, that marks them forever, regardless of the place where they live or work (Bentley 1987). These structures are related to the customs they acquired during the first stages of their life in the presence of family and community groups. This sometimes separates them from others, in spite of their similarities, or it identifies with others, in spite of their differences:

"My husband is from San Gabriel Chilac. The people from that village have their own customs; I personally have been able to adapt to them nearly in all aspects: in their manner of speaking, their behavior, their way of doing some activities, in... the preparation of food; I've tried to do everything like they do. What I haven't been able to accept is that they are very religious, and I'm not. I do have a certain faith, which I have obtained from my parents, but I can't be like them. They accept me, they integrate me in their group, I live with them in every respect, but to say the truth, without them knowing it... I don't feel part of their group, I don't feel comfortable in this type of religious ceremonies. I do participate in their get-togethers, but in other celebrations I don't, because I don't share those ideas. They believe that because of living with them I changed my origin, but I can't, I think I won't be able to..." M.L.P.

"Now I will talk about my identity with my husband's family. I sometimes feel strange in this group, because they have activities to which I am not accustomed. For instance, when one of my children became suddenly ill, the first thing my mother-in-law did was take the child to a woman who cures the evil eye. In the beginning I didn't believe that because I wasn't accustomed to these things. Now I do it myself and... I think that its effect may have to do with the faith one has. Another thing is that here they eat three meals, and that is something I cannot get used to, and besides they eat at a certain hour of the day and, the truth is, those are the customs that make me feel like an outsider in this group, but I always try to make everything go right in this group to which I belong and in which my children are growing up. Another thing: in this family they eat grasshoppers, the *cuetlas* [an edible ant], and I don't, but when I go to the market with my husband, I buy them so that my family can eat them, because they like that. In a certain way I am sharing their traditions, although I don't eat that. Back in my village we eat the ants that come out on the 24th... of San Juan, and... in my husband's family they don't, but when they come out of the ground here, they collect them and I eat them myself, because even my children don't eat them. Although we don't share the same taste in food, well, in some anyway, I do consider myself a part of this group because I share so many other things with them.
In my work I don't have, or I feel I don't have, any identity, because I don't share the traditions and customs of the community. For instance, last year I was invited to become a godmother of two children who finished kindergarten... in this community they have the custom that the godparent buys the clothes for the ceremony, and I didn't do that like that and... their parents didn't say anything to me, but when the ceremony was only a few days away it occurred to me to ask my colleague who lives in the village what was the custom... regarding this date; she told me what is usually done and I really felt bad, but anyway; she told me that I had an excuse, that I didn't know and that I shouldn't feel bad, and when the whole thing

was over I had no other choice but to ask these people to forgive me, and so I got out of this pinch. *For all these reasons I feel that my identity is not there, because people only identify me as the kindergarten teacher, and not because we have things in common. I do identify with my colleague at work, above all because we do have things in common...but only with one of them because... with my director I don't find any identity... at any moment...*" Emphasis added. A.E.V.

"During my first years I worked in an indigenous community, and it was really very nice, because the community felt identified with me because I ate what I was offered, and they have the custom to eat... *alaches* [a local vegetable], beans, potatoes, chili, eggs etc. and I would sit down on a mat on the floor like they do, something the state teachers [who do not belong to the subsystem of indigenous education], who work in this community wouldn't do, because they considered these acts as degrading; to share and like *ranchera* or *norteña* music instead of other kinds of music, like the modern type." J.H.C.

"As far as the communities where I have worked are concerned, I have tried to develop the roles the people of the village have assigned me, and to form in this manner a more pleasant environment with the population in general; apart from that, most of them aren't so strange to me because they are similar to those of my native village, and *I came to the conclusion that I identify with these people even though I don't dominate the language they speak.*" Emphasis added. M.C.G.N.J.

Here we have these teachers: remembering their life and thinking about the present, exemplifying a common process of so many natives in this country: stigmatization. The recollections show teachers faced diverse forms of discrimination. We see in all of this, sweet and bitter memories of teachers' families, native communities and villages where they worked, schools where contradictions do not disappear but sometimes they are often even more manifest.

These contradictions are related to the twofold nature indigenous teachers keep inside. On one hand, teachers assimilate part of *mestizo* national ideology that discriminates against indigenous features. On the other hand, they learn from their

professional training, a discourse that exalts Indian roots. As a result teachers become part sympathetic with *mestizo* negative views on Indian culture, part conscious of the importance of their ethnic roots. This process arises in the teachers' narratives, including some elements that include critical opinions regarding traditional beliefs and authoritarian and negative customs. One might think that their professional career gave them the power to maintain a more objective and less romantic position with respect to their familiar past:

> "We are eleven brothers and sisters, and all are working in agriculture, and my five sisters... are homemakers and work in the fields as well, only in this manner they can obtain more commodities, food, dress, and education for... their children; I am the only one who has a profession... Ever since my grandparents induced us into the Catholic religion, they are very fanatic about that, except myself... My father was very sensible about everything, and incomprehensible at the same time; he never created a nice relationship of friendship... with my brothers and sisters, he was always imposing and without explanations; only towards my mother did we have a little confidence regarding some questions about work, but with respect to the sexual relations of a couple, nothing like that. They always kept my sisters and myself in the dark. In this sense, that is to say, one day some people from a literacy campaign... came to the community; so I attended their classes, but one fine day my mother found out that the books we studied contained the schematics of the structure of man and woman, and so she took the books and burned them so they wouldn't educate me wrongly... because according to her it was a sin to see the female organs. The same thing happened with the animals: never could we see when an animal was in heat, because if we saw them mating she said we would get warts in the eyes and we wouldn't be able to see... It was so bad that when I was a young lady of fourteen years I didn't know anything about anything. My ignorance didn't allow me to see reality." V.L.M.E.A.

> "In the Catholic faith, when it rains and thunders, our parents have instilled into us that we mustn't touch our hair, much less take a bath, because we could be struck by a lightning due to the electricity in the hair, and that we must cover the mirrors to avoid any danger, but when we grew up we realized that this wasn't true because in the books it was all explained. Since then I didn't believe anything anymore, and I always said: that's a lie." C.M.H.

However, on several occasions some of the teachers showed something more than only a critical position, as if their insertion in the teaching profession had also included the acquisition of a school ideology that maintains notions of rationalism of the *struggle against ignorance* that continues behind the state's educational activities. Occasionally the words of some of the teachers seem to show how, ironically, they themselves turn into those distant teachers of their childhood recollections, promoting this view of progress and *civilization* represented by school and education. They did not seem aware of this:

> "At the beginning of the 1990-1991 school year the inspector of the school district... posted me to San Miguel Ayala, Atlixco, Puebla... I was very pleased, but I never thought that I would find the kind of people who live there: they are persons who are... *not yet civilized*, these people are so blocked, despite the fact that the city is close by. The population is very negative, even regarding their children, they don't care about education, it's like it doesn't sound right when one speaks to them about education or school, they are content when the child knows how to work well in the field, and that's more than sufficient to create a family..." Emphasis added. L.J.P.

> "As far as some of the observations I made within the group and the community in general, one of the things that stand out most is the lack of socialization of the individual before the others, perhaps because they don't have adequate preparation or because they have never attended an educational institution and only limit themselves to what their families indicate to them..."

Other memories, other experiences

As I have stated earlier, there is another type of memories in these narratives: the memories recorded by the more accultured teachers and the mestizos. Even though there

are also negative memories of school and other media among these recollections, they hardly ever have to do with the ethnic difference, but are rather associated with other issues. It is also more often the case that these teachers had other professional aspirations which were frustrated by different circumstances:

> "My father... brought us to live in this city (Puebla) because, according to him, there wasn't any better way. I was about seven years old. Everything was different, I saw things I never could have imagined existed. The city was very nice, but for us it was worse, because in the village at least we were free, with an enormous amount of open land, and our house was a little bigger; in the city we lived in a tenement that was at the same time a mechanic's shop, in a small room which we couldn't leave to go out and play because cars were constantly going in and coming out, the smell, the smoke and the noise the mechanics made. We only went out to play in the evenings. I went to the primary school *Federica M. Bonilla* which was very far away from my home, at about two kilometers. There I did my studies; I went to school joyfully; walking every day along all these streets, back and forth, it didn't seem at all far to me. When I got tired, I sat down in some place or on some doorstep to rest a while, or I sat down to whittle with a small razorblade that was my pencil sharpener; my shoes had lasted nearly a year, and when I saw that the others got new ones, I wanted some as well, but the bad thing was that they bought me the same kind again.
> Later, and with a lot of sacrifice, my father bought a piece of land, and there it was better, because at least we weren't in this horrible tenement where we had lived for nearly seven years. I went to the federal secondary school number 3, which is in that neighborhood called *La Hacienda*. How nice was this period, without a care, only studying, laughter, and being able to pass all my exams." G.M.B.

> "Since I was born, I passed my childhood in this village, I'm the oldest girl of seven children, three girls and four boys. My mother married again and I passed my childhood in my grandparents' care, since my mother is my grandparents' only daughter, and when she remarried... I stayed with my grandparents, and since then they took care of my education. I was removed from my brothers and sisters, since they live someplace different. I went to grade school in the village and didn't go to secondary school because back then it didn't exist. Although there were three of us, my grandfather dedicated himself only to agriculture, sowing corn and beans on some fields where we had to ride on *burros* for three or four hours to

get to this place, and we stayed there for three months during the sowing, and at harvest time we stayed twenty days to a month..." I.G.V.

"The language in which I started to communicate, in other words my mother tongue, is Spanish. I say that because even though my parents are bilingual in Spanish and Náhuatl, they never spoke with me in Náhuatl; they communicated with me only in Spanish, and therefore I began to speak in Spanish, which was my native language. Now, to have learned to speak Náhuatl, in my father's house we had a great-aunt of mine, that is to say a sister of my grandmother's... who was monolingual in Náhuatl. She communicated with all of us in Náhuatl, and so I gradually learned it from her. Of course that wasn't so difficult, she was speaking in Náhuatl and I paid a lot of attention to what she meant, and by way of signaling and words in Náhuatl I learned. In this period of my life I did things that I could do, and also I didn't neglect my studies in which my parents helped me.

At the age of thirteen I moved to Mexico City in order to go to secondary school with the help of my older brother, who was the only one to help me back then; of course that was a big change from my native village to Mexico City, I observed many things that were different and what I concluded was... that the city was better, one lived better, and there I stayed for eight years, studying and working at the same time... At the age of fifteen, when I was about to conclude my secondary education, well, I thought to go to preparatory school and continue my studies in a higher school of engineering, since that was the course I wanted to take, but that didn't come to pass. I studied first and second semester in a vocational school in Mexico City, but there are always problems that present themselves. My brother, the one who was helping me, well, the factory where he worked went on strike, and since there wasn't any money, I quit. I left school and went to work for my younger brothers and sisters. The job I'm doing right now we got by questions of destiny and need... although I don't feel satisfied, because it really isn't my vocation, although I am making an effort to comply with what I have." B.R.S.

"My brothers and sisters and I were always educated... in the two languages (Náhuatl and Spanish), everybody taught us the native language from the day we spoke our first word; my uncles and aunts on my mother's side always offered us to eat talking in Náhuatl, even when they scolded us. And my uncles and aunts on my father's side rarely spoke Náhuatl with us, nearly always they spoke in Spanish.

In 1974 I went to visit my uncle Fernando who lives in Mexico City. I had a hard time to adapt to his family, because they had different customs, even in their manner of speaking; they were very rude with each other, and they used many bad words. That's what bothered me most, my parents had

educated me differently; those of my brothers who dared speak a bad word didn't get away without a scolding or a slap in the face. There were entire days when I cried, on the one hand because I couldn't get used to being shut in, and on the other because of the kind of environment.

In 1976-1982 I went to primary school in the village, at the school *Nicolás Bravo*, those were six consecutive years. In first grade I was afraid to approach my teacher because all my brothers and sisters had told me that the teacher I had was a grouch who used to hit the children with the meter, which hurt a lot. As time went by I realized that this was only a joke and that the teacher was a great guy.

In second grade some friends from other classes told me that the lady teacher I had was also an old grouch, and of course I didn't believe them, but this time they were right: this teacher was very strict, and to top it off we had her for four long years; when we were late she slapped us with the meter, always according to the day of the week: on Monday one slap, on Tuesday two, on Wednesday three, and so forth, according to the day.

Sixth grade was a very nice year, but at the same time very sad, because it was the last year as a student of grade school. In this year I had a lot of friends, and we got along marvelously, in this grade I decided to study secondary school in the city of Atlixco, but at the same time I didn't really want to because I had to start the trip very early, at five thirty in the morning, coming back at four in the afternoon, and I still had to help my mother with the household chores and do my homework afterwards. Well, it is true, the traveling was very tiring; so I decided to stay in the village and study the *telesecundaria* system [television-supported classes]. Later, when I had finished secondary school, I didn't know... which study course to follow; some told me it was better to study a short course, and other people told me it would be better to go to preparatory school. The truth is I didn't know any of the two systems at all. My brothers told me one thing and my uncles and aunts told me something different.

With the help of my brother I decided to study to become an executive secretary in a commercial academy, I always wanted to work in an office or in a large company, but my dreams never came true because we didn't have the financial resources. I only studied two years, because the monthly fees were really high, plus the cost of office materials, and for me it was really hard to work and study at the same time.

The third year I only went two months, I was really close to concluding my studies, when a bilingual teacher approached me and offered me his post. At that moment I didn't know what to decide, I was between a rock and a hard place. I talked with my family about this to see what they would suggest to me in this respect. My parents suggested that it would be better to accept the teacher's posting, because the secretary's job I would only have as long as I was single, and afterwards who knows.

I accepted to become a bilingual teacher, although my dreams were others, and now I believe I'm better off..." L.J.P.

"I entered grade school in the year 1970 to 1976, and from the first year on I began to feel distrust, because the lady teacher I had always got very mad when we couldn't answer her questions right; she always made me feel like a clumsy girl, and thus she made me feel distrust in myself. When we had doubts we didn't ask her for fear of getting scolded, and I didn't ask her in order to avoid a scolding, because instead of explaining anything she always told us how stupid we were. It seemed that whatever we thought wasn't right because we were... children. In my case, my relationship with this teacher was even worse because my father had had a very serious problem with her husband..." N.M.C.

"In 1974 I went to grade school for the first time; I went with great enthusiasm because there I would meet new friends, because they weren't the same kids with whom I had shared games and mischief in the neighborhood. *This would be a very interesting change because I would have the opportunity to learn, to make up tales, to read, to write.*
It didn't turn out like that, because let's say there was a discontinuity because I also knew Spanish perfectly, and over the course of the years I neglected my native language, replacing it with Spanish, and not because I wanted that but I was obliged by the need to communicate with the others." Emphasis added. E.M.C.

From these memories it is possible to begin to see differences between the teachers. On the one hand are those who come from less acculturated families, with little or no knowledge of the Spanish language; on the other hand are those whose families had more contact with or knowledge of national culture and language. These differences are fundamental, because even though there were no significant economic differences between the families of the teachers, the knowledge about mestizo culture turned into obstacles for some and into advantages for others. A case apart are the mestizo teachers. Here we have a much more profound separation, which moreover is a financial question, since the mestizo families, who live in mestizo communities, have other occupations that

surely allow them to have better incomes. Unfortunately I have no economic data on this subject.

There is a set of data that may provide a better perspective of these distinct memories: the narratives written by teachers as a form of *rationalization* or *explanation* on topics specifically related to their work or their identity.

Rationalizing: controlling the contradictions

I used argumentative narrative to explore the issues in greater detail. Through them the teachers must *give an explanatory account* of a number of questions related to identity. There is, for instance, the question if they consider themselves indigenous and why, or if they speak of experiences they consider important in their teaching practice. In these cases the narratives demonstrate the ability the subjects have to handle some aspects of identity as part of the conditions of action.

This handling can be conditioned, among other things, by the particular characteristics that shape ethnic identification in Mexico. The fact that a good number of markers of the indigenous may be *hidden, minimized or discarded* (language, dress, regional or local origin, musical taste, dietary habits and others), *moderated* (economical conditions) or, *not as specific or unique* (physical features). This offers the possibility, albeit limited, for the actors to manage a certain presentation of their identity. A person can present her/himself as non-indigenous but just to move into the working class sectors that finally are also discriminated by upper classes. However, for indigenous teachers this process often helps to face the contradictions or conflictive facts that appear in the course of their interactions.

The argumentative narratives are in fact reflective elaborations, which demonstrate the ability of the actors to perceive their situation and to act correspondingly, principally through the conscious use of recourses that are generally idealized conceptions of the indigenous. However, the narratives show the limits of the teachers' action, since there are contradictions, such as the discrepancies about the supposed possession of cultural traits, which may not be overcome in the reflective act, as well as affirmations which are beyond the will of the actors.

In this case there may also be found differences in *argumentative form* which are due to the existing characteristics of the teachers. The existing characteristics separating indigenous from *mestizo* teachers are essential here. In fact, there seems to be a gradation of arguments from the most indigenous to the mestizo teachers, with those who are more acculturated but maintain an indigenous family context in the middle. Then, it is possible to find a different type of "proofs" of ethnic roots mentioned by these three groups of teachers. The most distinctive element is a series of arguments that indicate concrete facts that are part of the families' lives. This is intermingled with those positive images that exalt indigenous culture, and sometimes with reflections which permit facing discrimination:

> "My deepest roots... are in the native race, and I do consider myself indigenous because I... dominate the indigenous language well... my place of birth is 90 percent speakers of the native language, in my community, the place where I am from, Tzinacapan, municipality of Cuetzalan, Puebla." FC.F. *Nahua.*

> "I do consider myself indigenous because I have roots... and I identify myself with them.

Since I was born in the community of Xayacatlán de Bravo, Puebla, my people had their own customs, their own Mixtec language; I as another member of the family integrated myself with them and I continue participating in all the work that is done for the good of the community. I learned to appreciate all the customs, to participate directly and indirectly in all the celebrations that take place. Fortunately our traditions are being preserved, what is about to disappear is our language, since only the adults speak the language; those people who emigrated to other states in search of work and a better living continue to keep our customs alive, and there are only very few people who will forget our customs.
Those persons who found opportunities to get a professional formation continue to value their roots and return to the community to participate in all the celebrations that are taking place. Therefore I can affirm that even though we may feel removed from our roots, even though we succeed economically, even though we may be brilliant lawyers, engineers, doctors or stand out in any of the other professions, we have native blood in our veins. Because we are natives." A. L.M. *Mixtec.*

"I consider myself indigenous, because first of all my parents speak an indigenous language, which is Náhuatl, and in this language we all... learned to speak, thanks to our parents who taught us. We learned Spanish, or rather, they taught us Spanish at the age of five when we went to school, and for this reason I speak... two languages. For me, speaking Náhuatl is a pride, since in my village the majority still speaks this language, when I go to visit my grandparents, uncles or friends, I don't speak Spanish with them, rather I prefer to converse with all of them in our native language.
There is another thing that counts for a lot, and that is our dress; my father uses the *calzón de manta* and the *cotón*, that is to say the shirt of the same material, my mother used traditional skirts and the embroidered cotton blouses. The only thing that has changed in women's dress is that nowadays they make the *naguas* [petticoats] of every kind of material and the color they want to wear, but the original is only worn by very few, only the old women, so they are nearly obsolete.
It is also important to me to observe all the customs, because these demonstrations they give, for example on All Saints' Day; each person carries on with his tradition in a different way, but for them it means a lot.
It is for this reason that I consider myself indigenous, because I know that my place of origin is a village that speaks... a Náhuatl language." H.M.B. *Nahua.*

"I consider myself indigenous because I follow the same traditions and customs of our forefathers, I feel indigenous because I speak the native language, which is Náhuatl. On the other hand because I have the blood

and the features of the man that was called *indio*, thanks to our grandparents who spoke of the culture of Mexico; I am not ashamed to consider myself a native or to use my native language spoken by my parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts and the people of the same village, where we continue to converse in our *dialect* Náhuatl.
Thanks to my mother language I have a job as an educator, I think if I didn't speak this language, I wouldn't have a job like this. I hope that the children continue practicing, that they don't give this up, because this is very important for us as Mexicans, above all to defend our country which is Mexico; being a Mexican, if one likes it or not, one is a native, because they conquered us, the Americans.
We are all indigenous people, only there is a problem in Mexico. The city people consider the country people *indios*. Although perhaps they haven't realized yet that we are all living in the same country." L.J.P. *Nahua.*

"I consider myself 'indigenous' because I was born in a small village where the people live, dress and eat like indigenous people, or in fact they are indigenous people, and among them are my parents; ever since I was little they taught me the Náhuatl language, although with the difference in dress, because they didn't dress me in traditional clothes but in different pants and shirts, but in spite of everything I spoke Náhuatl and Spanish which I learned in grade school. My dad and my mom used the traditional dress of the natives; the work in the kitchen, the work in the field, the greetings, the mutual help among neighbors and relatives, and I grew up in this world and therefore I consider myself indigenous, because when I go to visit my village I adapt to the life and customs of the people of my village, of my parents and other relatives..." B.A.B.C. *Nahua.*

There is one case that demonstrates the difficulties faced by the teachers in this attempt to reconcile the negative meanings the indigenous aspect has in Mexico, where the positive elements come from rationalized discourse: one female teacher whose recollections contain a high degree of memories of discrimination wrote an explanation which ends up being a contradiction when she tries to rescue these links:

"I am a descendant of an indigenous race that has its traditions and customs, of course *they* still conserve all these things which I perhaps don't celebrate, but in my mind I have some ideas of my class, which are the natives... on the one hand I say I am indigenous, on the other hand I

> don't, because we've been mixed with Spanish blood, if we were one hundred percent indigenous we would still have the same features; however, there are people who consider themselves indigenous, but they don't seem to show it... they have blond hair, bright eyes, they are white etc., therefore my answer is... we are *mestizos*, even though as a matter of fact we will always be characterized as indigenous, although it is known that since the arrival of the Spaniards the race of our ancestors became mixed, and so we have descended from them... we are *mestizos*." L.V.J. *Nahua*. Emphasis added.

On the other hand, there is a subtle change in argumentation among the teachers who start to shift towards the mestizo culture. They generally recognize the changes they have undergone, and they let ethnic affiliation fall back on ancestry, that is to say on the link to indigenous ancestors, or with characteristics that have traditionally been associated with the indigenous as an economic situation:

> "Yes, because I consider myself autochthonous, and despite the many modifications I don't want to lose my authenticity, even though our personal appearance, both in our personal way of dressing and... in our exchange of dialog must be in Spanish because of the needs demanded by society." N.M.C. *Spanish-speaking Mixtec.*

> "I am indigenous and I consider myself indigenous because I am from a simple, humble family. My parents communicate using the Náhuatl dialect [*sic*]. There are people who don't speak it, and the first thing they say... about us who speak it... is that we are stupid, ignorant, that we don't know how to speak. But when we study our language thoroughly we will realize that our language is original... because the language we speak was imposed on us by the Spaniards." F.J.C. *bilingual Nahua.*

> "I personally consider myself indigenous and I have indigenous roots and will always classify myself like this; for me to belong to an indigenous group is nothing to be ashamed about, on the contrary, it makes me proud. Although today I don't live in my community, I haven't lost the most important customs; my family which is still rooted in the village tell me that now I am a *mestiza* because I live together with those from the city,

> but I believe that as long as I don't lose my customs I shall continue to consider myself as indigenous." A.S.N. *Spanish-speaking Nahua.*

> "I consider myself indigenous because my family comes from an indigenous group where they have very much their own customs and a language which is Popoloca; I was born in a village with its traditions, even though they have been modified in large part by the arrival of the Spaniards: customs, traditions and our native language by the current one, but even with all these changes... they can't take away the indigenous from us." G.M.B. *Spanish-speaking Popoloca.*

The *mestizo* teachers, at least in the more public contexts of the university, all consider themselves as indigenous, regardless of the real circumstances in which they find themselves. This is clearly influenced by the context of interrogation: the university is a place where the indigenous heritage *must* be affirmed, and the subjects may use a set of arguments to *give evidence* of these attachments. These arguments, however, are generally different from those employed by the indigenous teachers: they are resorts to a vague and imprecise past:

> "I consider myself indigenous because as a matter of fact our ancestors have sacrificed themselves so we could live in peace without any problems, and now if I would say thank you and deny my roots would be the worst thing, because the blood that runs through my veins I can't take away and stop being what I am, and I shouldn't be embarrassed of being what I am, because for being indigenous I am not missing anything, on the contrary it is nice that all of us who are natives conserve our traditions, as well as the customs our grandparents had, so that in the years to come we may tell our children how they were before us, and they may believe it." J.C.A. *Spanish-speaking mestiza.*

> "Let's say I'm not one hundred percent indigenous. Why? Because my father tells that his grandfather came from a Frenchman from the time of the revolution, whereas on the other side my mother is of the native race, but for the sole reason that I am of this country which is Mexico, proudly... I say, yes: I am a native." V.L.M.E.A. *Spanish-speaking mestiza.*

"I don't consider myself one hundred percent indigenous because today there is no pure race in our country. More than indigenous, I consider myself a *mestiza* because in our veins runs Spanish blood since the conquest. The fact that we speak an indigenous language does not characterize us as *indios*. It would be an honor for me to be from a pure race to feel more identified... with our country. Above all, to have inherited or acquired this knowledge, ingenuity, abilities and skills with which the works of our Aztec forefathers was developed, their way of thinking and acting, the few diseases they had, their natural foods and their way of dressing. Today we mestizos have managed to recover some rites or customs of our forefathers..." M.E.P. *Spanish-speaking mestiza.*

"I do consider myself as indigenous because I have the blood of my ancestors. Although one may say he or she is not... indigenous,... the truth is that we are indeed indigenous, even though one does not have the customs or the Náhuatl language... Now the people of today say one is not indigenous because one dresses differently, because one doesn't speak Náhuatl, that's why they say they aren't natives. But if you look at it correctly, they *are* indeed indigenous. I do consider myself indigenous because I have the blood of my ancestors and because I work for the system of indigenous education." L.H.M. *Spanish-speaking mestiza.*

In some cases the context of interrogation has so much influence that the teachers *invent* affiliations that do not exist and which can be detected in other narratives about facts of their lives which have a less evident connection with the public presentation of identity and which therefore offer the possibility to uncover the contradictions. Three examples.

One teacher affirms his ethnic association in the following terms:

"I consider myself indigenous because I come from a family with roots in places where my people are called indigenous, and not only because of that, but also for speaking a language which is Náhuatl; *for me personally it is a question of pride... to be able to speak Náhuatl as a native language, and Spanish as a second language.* And it also makes me feel satisfied... to be able to serve, as my countrymen simply say. My personal

aims were to enter the teaching profession in the indigenous medium, first of all... to have been prepared by the *Dirección General de Educación*; once... I was trained, then I was directed... to apply what I had learned; for me it was like feeling a little proud of myself... to have reached the goal I had set for myself; and it is for this reason that I consider myself as indigenous. Why? *I am the son of an indigenous family which speaks Náhuatl* and that is what characterizes a person... one's way of being and beliefs that one comes to have of the family." H.M.S. *Spanish-speaking mestizo* Emphasis added.

However, the same teacher gave the following information about his life in another moment:

"I was born in the community described above on January 8, 1970; my parents are natives of the same community, and by occupation my father is a peasant and my mother a housewife. After I was born and.. with the passing of time I came to distinguish the things that were happening around me and events that took place during my childhood. Later I got to know my parents; I communicated with them first by babbling and *later they taught me to speak Spanish, which is the only language that is spoken...* in *the home* where I am from, *since in that place no indigenous language is spoken...*"

Another teacher, a woman, gave the following statement about her ethnic association:

"I consider myself indigenous because I speak an indigenous language. This is one of our roots that must be rescued and enriched so that in the future the inhabitants may know the different languages that were spoken since antiquity and that they existed in the whole country, since Spanish is only an language imposed on us by the Spaniards since the conquest.
My mother tongue is Náhuatl and... I have tried to conserve it. I also have the customs regarding the traditional celebrations, to this day personally I like it that they be preserved and practiced." C.M.H. *bilingual mestiza.*

However, she mentioned the following with respect to her learning of the Spanish language:

> "*I learned Spanish as a first language because my parents spoke Spanish...* They taught me *and* my brothers and sisters Spanish since we were little. *However, my parents speak Náhuatl as a second language.* I learned Spanish from my parents, my brothers and sisters, and also from the neighbors. When I entered grade school at the age of six, all my classmates spoke Spanish, that's why I've always spoken Spanish.
> However, when I went to first grade of primary school, the teacher, I still remember that I understood her and that I knew a little Náhuatl, and when she felt like it she asked things in Náhuatl, but since I couldn't answer because I didn't understand her, she punished me; she said that we should master the two languages, because that's the way it should be, but when she realized that her teaching technique didn't work she later changed her way of communicating with us and spoke to us in Spanish, and from then on I learned to speak better."

Finally, another woman teacher showed great difficulties in making her ethnic affiliation explicit:

> "For the last five hundred years they have called *us* indigenous, indios, but this shouldn't be so because my social class in the dynasty to which I belong they should call me by my name, by my class, as Mexica, Maya, because thanks to these classes our national territory received the name Mexicans, created of course by the Mexica empire, so this name was born from a great civilization.
> The most correct way would be for them to call *us* indigenous or natives; another name they could call us by is ethnics, but they shouldn't use just one word... just to hear it... because the nations, with the exception of China and Japan, which conserve their ethnic identities as such... the other countries... are mixed... and Mexico is one of the countries formed by multiple ethnicities... of course crossbred because of the great mixture of each of the pluricultural societies of Mexico: Zapotec, Mixtec, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Yaqui, Seri, Paipai, etc. N.I.A.B. *Spanish-speaking mestiza.*

However, this teacher confessed in one class that her family did not consider itself as indigenous, but that she had decided to enter into the Department of Indigenous

Education because she *did acknowledge her roots* and her father had asked her what she wanted to do with *those natives*. It is very probable that these statements are also part of a rationalization and manipulation.

It may be said that the argumentative narratives provide information complementing the recollections and that it is also possible to find in them the traces which indicate the ethnic differences that go across the group of teachers. What can be distinguished here as well are the differences between those teachers whose indigenous heritage is strongest and the more acculturated, as well as the *mestizos*. However, what becomes evident is that even in moments when the subjects have the greatest control over their discourses (in this case over the arguments to present a public image on ethnic affiliation), this control is not total. The most acculturated teachers and the mestizos have to resort to less concrete elements, more ambiguous statements, highlighting the affirmation that we all have indigenous roots, a common image in Mexico. On the other hand, for the most indigenous teachers this ambiguity, although not completely absent, has yet another connotation which permits them to face ethnic discrimination. They make use of the actual fact that ethnicity; cultural practices linked to indigenous groups (as religious beliefs, dietary preferences, and medical activities, among others) are widely spread among different sectors of Mexican society. In this extent, they link their ethnic elements to those analogous existing in Mexican culture.

What also comes to attention is the importance of the State institutions, mainly schools, in this process: all of the teachers resort to in the course of their explanatory discourses images which are essentially provided by education, but also by society in general, on the nature of the indigenous. It is as if the indigenous were a cultural value

that exists socially to be employed in social interaction with distinct purposes, depending on the subjects using it.

There is another group of facts related to this level of the explanatory discourses which will round out this approach to the forms in which certain elements of ethnic identity are used and reproduced among the indigenous teachers: *their actuation*.

Performances

When I refer to performance, I simply mean the way the subjects act in the course of their social life, and how they continuously generate, among other things, through their way of acting, the conditions and elements of their identity. These performances may be controlled and stereotyped or spontaneous. The element found in all cases of performance is the production of a *discourse* (narrative or acted) of the individuals by which they *make affirmations* on what they think they are.

In some instances it is clear that there are affirmations which are contradictory to *objective facts*, as is the case of manipulation of the *mestizo* teachers I presented above. But here the most important aspect is not the attempt at distortion (which is rather limited as there are other elements that permit the involved actors to correctly identify the situation), but the functions of these manipulations. What we have here is something similar to what Richard Avedon (1993) points out with respect to the portrait in the genre of photography. Avedon says that the portrait should not be seen as a genre less genuine than other, more *naturalistic* forms like photojournalism. When one poses for the camera, Avedon argues, one is not pretending to be something one is not, but on the contrary one presents an image that one assumes to be real. Following this analogy, we may say that

the *poses* of the teachers show important affirmations of their identity, regardless of the veracity of these asseverations.

There were various contexts for these performances which permitted the observation of some of these forms of acting. First of all there was the context of the university and, more specifically, the classroom; in second place are the work places of the teachers, and finally some spaces of family and everyday life.

Beginning with the university, here the stereotyped images are predominant: the teachers are extremely formal in their treatment of each other; except when among close friends, they almost always used the formal treatment of *usted* and the title *maestra* or *maestro* when talking to each other, above all in the context of the classroom. With very few exceptions, they never spoke an indigenous language, and almost always communicated in Spanish. One possible reason could have been the different handling of the distinct languages, but even among speakers of the same language, it was always Spanish they employed. In the rare cases when an indigenous language was used, it was Náhuatl (for instance, during some basketball games or in a trip when a *mestizo* female teacher made a speech).

The basketball court was one situation where the indigenous language was used, when it was advantageous for the game to do so. Also in those moments when linguistics was a matter of discussion and when it therefore appeared as something *natural*, or in a number of situations that could be called *declaratory*. These situations had the same characteristics as the declarations of the *mestizo* teachers mentioned before: the proclamation of facts (in this case ethnic affiliation) as part of a public representation. In this latter case the allocutions of a mestizo woman teacher, pronounced in Náhuatl, stood

out on two occasions: one in the classroom as part of a *demonstration* of her *indianness*, and the second in the course of an excursion when she recited a composition well-known among the teachers.

On the other hand it may be said that there were no notable elements evident among the teachers that would distinguish them categorically from the mestizo teachers from the popular sectors; however, a more thorough observation did show some distinctive elements: these teachers *pretended to be* or *appeared* more *rural* than the other teachers attending different study courses at the university, and other *circumstantial data* also identified them as indigenous teachers: their existence and (generally less extrovert) behavior were known and they were pointed out as *the indigenous teachers*.

As part of their interior interactions, one interesting question, above all in the group of Class 1990 (where the teachers with the highest number of service years and two of the most clearly identified teachers with the Department of Indigenous Education were placed) that was brought to our attention, was a certain permanent tension between the teachers most associated with the system of indigenous education and the *mestizos* who often do not speak any indigenous language. Apparently there always had been some animosity between the former and the latter, since it was assumed that there should be a certain commitment on behalf of the system in favor of ethnic affiliation. This confrontation had emerged within the confines of the *Departamento de Educación Indígena* but reappeared under various circumstances in the classroom, for instance in the discussions on the goals of education.

Another area where public identity is important is the work place. Some of the teachers who attended classes at the university worked in rural communities (with a

variety of linguistic, ethnic and social situations), whereas others were posted in suburban schools of the city of Puebla. In all cases the teachers distanced themselves from the context. This was most evident in rural communities where they distinguished themselves from the inhabitants by their way of dressing and their attitudes. This can be seen in Figure 3. There is a way of behaving of these teachers that has to do with the culture instilled by the different institutions with which they have been in contact since they started their professional life. This is even more accentuated by the fact that most of them do not live in the communities where they work, but in nearby *mestizo* villages. Frequently the rural public buses are full of the poorest professionals who work in the countryside: teachers, nurses, and sometimes a doctor who is in his social service year.

In rural communities the indigenous teachers are thus probably closer to the community than "the other teachers" (those who do not belong to the Department of Indigenous Education), like their narratives indicate, but that seems to be all. Apparently a social distance has been created which is a part of the professional structure of this group. Indigenous teachers must maintain a social distance, in part for prestige, in part as a need for getting legitimacy in the community. Additionally there is the variety of linguistic situations in the communities; if Spanish predominates in the village, teachers use the indigenous language rarely or never. It only comes to play if an indigenous a language dominating (obviously in the case the teacher speaks it) but fundamentally as a means of castilianization.

Figure 5 Peasant and teacher in the Sierras

Photograph: Jorge Meneses

In the schools of the urban periphery the teachers are not different from the non-indigenous teachers of analogous areas; here perhaps the only distinct element is the interpretation of the national anthem in Náhuatl during the civic ceremonies on Mondays. The teachers have a great affinity with the locals, although the distance that marks their occupational position still exists. In these places there are no public displays of ethnicity, which appears to remain in limbo: the teachers are *teachers, period.* In the domestic spaces, they still manifest the links that point out their ethnic origin, in spite of all the changes they have gone through: one finds photographs in their homes with friends and relatives in indigenous attire, or *ruralized* houses with domestic animals like turkeys or chicken; other pictures show various celebrations: weddings in rented reception rooms, urban fashion, but with food prepared in the rural style; the

rituals of the celebration are a combination of the same elements (modern games like throwing the bride's bouquet and the traditional advice of the godparents to the newlyweds); or the presence of important religious festivities, such as the Day of the Dead, when one returns to the village or the village comes to town (with *compadres*, relatives or friends who bring part of the offering for exchange).

One example shows this clearly: when one teacher at the university, who always had a *mestiza* appearance, celebrated her civil wedding in her native community, she used various pieces of clothing associated with traditional female dress on top of each other: a wrap, a kerchief around her neck, an apron, and a hairdo with flowers; just as if this would underline a tie between the two worlds in which she moves (cf. Figure 6).

Teachers: narratives of word and deed

Summarizing everything that has been presented in this chapter, it becomes clear that the teachers' narratives show, both in their memories and their actions, a group caught between the *mestizo* and the indigenous world, and at the same time they also show important differences among the teachers. How they act and what they remember shows the conditions in which they have lived and those in which they currently move.

Figure 6 Elena's wedding

Photograph: Javier Téllez.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation examines the relation between action and structure as being part of an integrated domain, focusing on the study of ethnicity. The idea of action and structure as two complementary aspects of social life is originally derived from Anthony Giddens model. I understand that both have a deep link between them: structure as sedimented action and fueled by the intentions and the interests of social agents, and agency as the capability of actors to intervene in social life, although not in any fashion, but following existing conditions. This is not a matter of just theoretical fashion: social life shows daily a real difficulty to transform existing conditions, and profound change, though possible, only happens under exceptional conditions and consuming great amounts of agency.

This can be also applied to ethnicity. Actors can have a certain range of action to manipulate ethnic ascription but this manipulation is not made in a social vacuum. Historical elements, concrete practices, societies, and groups, intervene to influence the limits of social definitions. In this extent, ethnicity does not have a general or abstract value. As Linkon (1999) has mentioned for the working class, ethnicity has diverse meanings depending on the context in which it is found.

For the case of indigenous teachers, narratives and performances show a conscious use of ethnicity that, however is not entirely based on actors' will but quite the contrary, it follows patterns established by teachers' scenarios. Then, we have *mestizo* teachers that in the University and in public or "declarative" spaces stress a nonexistent ethnicity. This process, nevertheless, cannot be entirely controlled and, in this extent,

shows contradictions, especially in those less manipulative and conscious aspects. A teacher who was one of the conspicuous *mestizo* teachers provide an example. She was one of the *mestizo* teachers who all the time tried very hard to pass as indigenous. One day, when I asked her to recall her life, she told me how Indians discriminated against her and her sister, when both of them were children. This was the result of their outfit (they were wearing plastic raincoats) and because they used to go by horse to the school. Indian children pulled their hair and made fun of them, calling them names. Interestingly enough she did not see any contradiction between this experience and her ethnic claims. It seems clear that, in spite of the fact that she all the time pretended to pass as an Indian at the university, her memories tell a very different story, and she was not entirely conscious of this.

In other cases, indigenous teachers tried to "camouflage" their native roots in the urban contexts where they work and live. There, they use Spanish as a daily language and behave as *mestizo* people. However, here too some practices, tastes, and preferences, point to a different direction: to a cultural substratum not entirely controlled by individuals showing those levels of identity that have been identified as practical.

It is possible, then, to talk about of the existence of different levels of the presentation of the *ethnic self*: on the one hand, levels that are more conscious, discursive and manipulative. On other, one finds levels more unconscious, automatic and "rebellious". All of them operate at the same time. And it seems that although individuals can manipulate a great deal of ethnicity in a conscious fashion, the access that they have to processes of ethnic formation has a limit. A social context, or

structure, that is not undifferentiated, gives this limit. On the contrary, it possible to distinguish in this context, institutions (particularly the State) and with specific histories and trajectories. This does not mean, however, that context turns actors into puppets imposing on them a script that must be strictly followed. Structure, must be remembered, and should be understood as a negotiated action or sedimentated action.

In all of this, an active use of ethnicity by actors can be seen, a use that is not entirely free of course, but is more a continuous negotiation that depends on the resources at hand. One of these resources is clearly the knowledge provided by the university program. The impact of the program in the process of identity formation has been different:

although in general the program can be seen as a "storehouse" that provided discourse, symbols, and practices, the use of all of these materials was also distinct. For those involved in administrative duties (and having a prior clear strategic identity) the program provided discursive strategies that allowed them to refine their actions. For *mestizos*, who must "act ethnic", the program also worked as a reservoir of ethnic symbols that can be used in public contexts. Finally, for others, those coming from ethnic backgrounds (where communities retain their importance) or having certain cultural capital (in Bourdieu terms), the program certainly served to make them more aware of the meaning of their ethnic roots and make them reflexive about their ethnic self.

The program has had a positive impact in terms of the process of ethnic formation, giving teachers at least the opportunity to rationalize the contradictions derived from negative connotations attached to ethnicity in Mexico and the positive, but void image existing in official and public discourse. But, ironically, on the other hand, in

the extent that the program remains urban oriented and foreign to teachers, this positive impact cannot be translated into educative actions. This could make its potential really effective in identity awareness, not for specific individuals but for a wider range of people: indigenous or *mestizo* children that have ethnic roots or influences. This shows, in the last extent the limits of a proposal that is not created and managed from the groups, but from above, specifically from the State and its institutions. This also shows a certain dynamic of ethnicity in a country such as Mexico where since the conquest, Indian symbols have been appropriated by non-Indians in the nation-making process.

Indigenous teachers show that social groups are not abstract or essential entities. They show the manifold nature of the indigenous population in Mexico and its dynamic nature. In certain way, they probably could be seen as an intermediary group located between the bulk of the native communities and the *mestizo* fractions of the working class population that share ethnic roots. But in another way, they are not precisely intermediary because they do not mediate, but sometimes they behave as part of the *mestizo* working class and sometimes as Indians. Ethnicity in the dissertation is shown to be a highly, personal, and uneven, spread out within the Mexican population that has a historic meaning attachment. Generally speaking, it serves as a marker, combined with class, used to discriminate against certain working class groups. However it is not equated to class: in interethnic areas, poor *mestizos* have a better social (although not necessarily economic) position than poor Indians do.

This is the concrete context that appears in the action of teachers; these are possibilities for that action, but at the same time they are also their very limits.

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