



At the Crossroads of Multiculturalism and Violence:

Community Policing and Grassroots Education in Guerrero, Mexico

Merel de Buck

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**At the Crossroads of Multiculturalism and Violence:
Community Policing and Grassroots Education in Guerrero,
Mexico**

En la Encrucijada del Multiculturalismo y Violencia: Policía Comunitaria y
Educación Intercultural en Guerrero, México
(con un resumen en castellano)

Op het Kruispunt van Multiculturalisme en Geweld: Veiligheid en Onderwijs
Activisme in Guerrero, Mexico
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACG	Asociación Cívica Guerrerense (<i>Guerrerense Civic Association</i>)
ACNR	Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria (<i>National Revolutionary Civic Association</i>)
AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador
ANIPA	Asamblea Nacional Indígena Plural Por La Autonomía (<i>Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy</i>)
ANP	Asamblea Nacional Popular (<i>National People's Assembly</i>)
AOCAG	Alianza de Organizaciones Campesinas Autónomas de Guerrero (<i>Alliance of Autonomous Peasant Organizations Guerrero</i>)
BCA	Brigada Campesina de Ajusticiamiento (<i>Peasants' Justice Enforcement Brigade</i>)
CAI	Comisión de Asuntos Indígenas (<i>Commission of Indigenous Affairs</i>)
CAIN	Consejo de Autoridades Indígenas (<i>Council of Indigenous Authorities</i>)
CDI	Comisión Nacional Para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (<i>National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples</i>)
CECOP	Consejo de Ejidos y Comunidades Opositores a la Presa la Parota (<i>Council of Ejidos and Communities Opposed to the Parota Dam</i>)
CETEG	Coordinadora Estatal de los Trabajadores de la Educación de Guerrero (<i>Guerrero State Coordinating Committee of Education Workers</i>)
CFE	Comisión Federal de Electricidad (<i>Federal Commission of Electricity</i>)
CG500	Consejo Guerrerense de 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular (<i>Guerrero Council 500 Years of Indigenous, Popular and Black Resistance</i>)
CGEIB	Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (<i>General Coordination of Intercultural and Bilingual Education</i>)
CIESAS	Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (<i>Center for Research and Studies of Social Anthropology</i>)
CNDH	Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (<i>National Commission of Human Rights</i>)
CNI	Congreso Nacional Indígena (<i>National Indigenous Congress</i>)
CNTE	Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (<i>National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers</i>)
Codehum	Comisión de Defensa de los derechos Humanos de Guerrero (<i>Commission for the Defense of Human Rights Guerrero</i>)
CRAADT	Consejo Regional de Autoridades Agrarias en Defensa del Territorio y contra la Minería (<i>Regional Council of Agrarian Authorities in Defense of Territory against Mining</i>)

CRAC-PC	Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias-Policía Comunitaria (<i>Regional Coordination of Community Authorities-Community Police</i>)
CRSJ-PCP	Coordinadora Regional de Seguridad y Justicia-Policía Ciudadana y Popular (<i>Regional Security and Justice Coordination-Citizen and People's Police</i>)
Cuaji	Cuajinicuilapa
DFS	Dirección Federal de Seguridad (<i>Federal Security Directorate</i>)
DINEIB	Dirección Nacional de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (<i>National Directorate for Bilingual Intercultural Education</i>)
EIB	Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (<i>Intercultural Bilingual Education</i>)
EPR	Ejército Popular Revolucionario (<i>Popular Revolutionary Army</i>)
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (<i>Zapatista National Army of Liberation</i>)
Frente Popular	Frente Popular para el Desarrollo del Estado (<i>Popular Front for State Development</i>)
FUSDEG	Frente Unido para la Seguridad y el Desarrollo del Estado de Guerrero (<i>United Front for the Security and Development of the State of Guerrero</i>)
Gro.	Guerrero
IDN	Izquierda Democrática Nacional (<i>National Democratic Left</i>)
IEEG	Instituto Electoral del Estado de Guerrero (<i>Electoral Institute of the State of Guerrero</i>)
IEPC	Instituto Electoral y de Participación Ciudadana del Estado de Guerrero (<i>Institute of Elections and Citizen Participation Guerrero</i>)
ILO	International Labor Organization
INE	Instituto Nacional Electoral (<i>National Electoral Institute</i>)
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (<i>National Institute of Statistics and Geography</i>)
INI	Instituto Nacional Indigenista (<i>National Indigenous Institute</i>)
MORENA	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (<i>National Regeneration Movement</i>)
OIT	Organización Independiente de Totanoca (<i>Independent Organization Totanoca</i>)
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (<i>National Action Party</i>)
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PDLP	Partido de los Pobres (<i>Party of the Poor</i>)
POA	Partido Obrero de Acapulco (<i>Workers Party of Acapulco</i>)
PRD	Partido Revolucionario Democrático (<i>Democratic Revolution Party</i>)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (<i>Institutional Revolutionary Party</i>)

PVEM	Partido Verde Ecologista de México (<i>Ecological Green Party of Mexico</i>)
SAI(CA)	Secretaría de Asuntos Indígenas y Comunidades Afromexicanas (<i>State Department of Indigenous Affairs and Afromexican Communities</i>)
SEG	Secretaría de Educación Guerrero (<i>Department of Education Guerrero</i>)
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (<i>Ministry of Public Education</i>)
SNTE	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (<i>National Union of Education Workers</i>)
SSJC	Sistema de Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana (<i>Citizen Security and Justice System</i>)
TEE	Tribunal Electoral del Estado de Guerrero (<i>Electoral Tribunal of Guerrero</i>)
Trife	Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación (<i>Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary</i>)
UACM	Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (<i>Autonomous University of Mexico City</i>)
UAG	Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (<i>Autonomous University of Guerrero</i>)
UAM	Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (<i>Metropolitan Autonomous University</i>)
UIEG	Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero (<i>Intercultural University of the State of Guerrero</i>)
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (<i>National Autonomous University of Mexico</i>)
UNORCA	Union Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas (<i>National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations</i>)
UPN	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (<i>National University of Education Sciences</i>)
UVI	Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (<i>Intercultural University of Veracruz</i>)

Glossary

<i>ayuntamiento</i>	Municipal government
<i>bronco</i>	Rough, conflictive
<i>cabecera</i>	Town where the municipal government is seated
<i>cabildos</i>	Councils
<i>cancha</i>	Ball court, in rural villages often used as place to hold community assemblies
<i>cargos</i>	Rotating community responsibilities
<i>cierre de módulo</i>	Cultural-academic event to celebrate the ending of an academic term at Unisur
<i>cívicos</i>	Activists associated with the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense (ACG)
<i>comisario/a</i>	Elected leader of a community, also referred to as submunicipal leader
<i>convivencia</i>	Being and living together, bonding, or used in reference to informal get-togethers
<i>Cuajileños</i>	Inhabitants of Cuajinicuilapa
<i>desfiles</i>	Parades, or voting system using lines of people standing together
<i>fajina</i>	Collective community work
<i>feminicidios</i>	Intentional killing of females because they are females
<i>gestionar proyectos</i>	Managing development projects
<i>jovenicidio</i>	Targeted killing of youth
<i>lengua suelta</i>	Having a loose tongue, being outspoken, someone with a big mouth
<i>narcos</i>	Drug traffickers and persons related to drug trafficking organizations
<i>normalistas</i>	Students from the teacher-training schools Escuelas Normales Rurales
<i>perredistas</i>	Supporters or members of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD)
<i>priístas</i>	Supporters or members of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)
<i>promotor/a</i>	Persons who takes the lead and mobilize to advance a social or political agenda
<i>redonda</i>	Type of round house made of wattle and daub based on the buildings constructed by people of African descent during and after the colonial period in Guerrero
<i>tequio</i>	Collective community work

<i>tocar puertas</i>	Knocking on the doors of institutions and agencies that can support one's cause
<i>tronco común</i>	Obligatory courses of Unisur's academic program
<i>Unisureños</i>	Unisur students and staff
<i>vinculación comunitaria</i>	Relationships and links to communities; in a university context it often refers to the way academia serves the community

Maps

Map 1: State of Guerrero



Map 2: Guerrero's regions and municipalities



Municipios

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Acapulco de Juárez | 26. Cocula | |
| 2. San Marcos | 27. Tepecoacuilco de Trujano | |
| 3. Tecoaapa | 28. Huitzuc de los Figueroa | |
| 4. Ayutla de los Libres | 29. Atenango del Río | |
| 5. Florencio Villarreal | 30. Copalillo | |
| 6. Cuautepec | | |
| 7. Copala | 31. General Heliodoro Castillo | |
| 8. San Luis Acatlán | 32. Eduardo Neri | |
| 9. Azoyú | 33. Mártir de Cuilapan | |
| 10. Iguala | 34. Zitlala | |
| 11. Tlacoachistlahuaca | 35. Chilapa de Álvarez | |
| 12. Xochistlahuaca | 36. Tixtla de Guerrero | 49. Alcozauca de Guerrero |
| 13. Ometepec | 37. Leonardo Bravo | 50. Tlapa de Comonfort |
| 14. Cuajinicuilapa | 38. Chilpancingo de los Bravo | 51. Olinálá |
| | 39. Mochitlán | 52. Atlixac |
| 15. General Canuto A. Neri | 40. Quechultenango | 53. Copanatoyac |
| 16. Pedro Ascencio Alquisiras | 41. Juan R. Escudero | 54. Xalpatláhuac |
| 17. Tetipac | 42. Ahuacuotzingo | 55. Metlatónoc |
| 18. Pilcaya | 43. José Joaquín de Herrera | 56. Atlamajalcingo del Monte |
| 19. Taxco de Alarcón | | 57. Malinaltepec |
| 20. Ixcateopan de Cuauhtémoc | 44. Xochihuehuetlán | 58. Tlacoapa |
| 21. Teloloapan | 45. Huamuxtitlán | 59. Acatepec |
| 22. Apaxtla | 46. Cualác | 60. Zapotitlán Tablas |
| 23. Iguala de la Independencia | 47. Alpoyeca | 61. Cochoapa el Grande |
| 24. Buenavista de Cuéllar | 48. Tlaxiataquilla de Maldonado | 62. Iliatenco |
| 25. Cuetzala del Progreso | | |

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50 km

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1

Introduction: Social Contestation, Political Authority, and Multiculturalism in Rural Guerrero

1. Introduction

In December 2014, a festive event was held in the rural community of El Mesón. The basketball court was decorated with a banner that read: “Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur. Roots of Identity. Welcomings. El Mesón. Gro. Dic. 2014.” El Mesón hosts a department of the university called Unisur and, with the holidays nearing, the university was about to finish an academic term. This was celebrated during a weekend in which all six university departments in Guerrero were to come together. Students of various ethnic backgrounds—Naua (Nahua), Me’phaa (Tlapaneco), Na Savi (Mixteco), Na’mncue No’mndaa (Amuzgo), Afromexican, and mestizo—settled for some days in the houses of the inhabitants of El Mesón, who had opened up their humble doors and kitchens to the university students and teachers. Housing all outside visitors was a logistical challenge for the villagers, but also a source of pride. After all, not many rural communities in Guerrero have a university.

The opening ceremony took place in the presence of community authorities, headmasters of village schools, community members, and hordes of children. While waiting for the event to start, some Unisur students whirled their indigenous dresses to the beat of the local music playing from the speakers, while others were finishing their self-made banners. One called for justice for the forty-three students from Ayotzinapa, who had disappeared on the 26th of September that year. During his welcome speech, the university rector also referred to Ayotzinapa as he looked back on a difficult year for Guerrero. However, he also announced some good news. He had scheduled a meeting with the minister of education of the state of Guerrero. It raised the hope of finally obtaining support and state recognition for the university, which it had lacked for seven academic years. In the meantime, the university had mostly depended on the material and moral support of local communities.

The university department in El Mesón was fairly new. It had opened in 2012, around the same time its citizens started organizing to take control over local security. With violence increasing everywhere around them, El Mesón had been a forerunner in setting up the community policing organization Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero (Upoeg). The community hall was converted into a prison, kitchen committees were founded to feed the police, villagers took turns in guarding community entrances and roads, and daily assemblies were held to make decisions about the course to follow.

Ever since, the so-called *policía ciudadana* has operated across the Costa Chica region and beyond. During the university event, one of the young leaders of this organization took to the microphone: “Good afternoon, I would like to give thanks this day for the opportunity to share this moment with you. I thank the *pueblo* [people, community], our *pueblo* here in El Mesón, because if it were not for them, these same projects would not have been granted to us, the Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur, or our project for the Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana either, where El Mesón stands out for its grand participation.” The young police leader called it an honor to welcome students, teachers, and citizens from other municipalities in the community. For him, the university and the security project were “a product of the encounter of our *pueblo* of El Mesón with other communities who have accompanied us.” During the rest of the weekend, the *policía ciudadana* patrolled El Mesón, while students attended classes and took part in cultural events and long assemblies.¹

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The event in El Mesón gives an impression of contemporary expressions of social contestation in rural communities in the Costa Chica region. The region is located along the coast of the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, stretching south of Acapulco toward the border with the state of Oaxaca. The lives of the people living in this rural area are profoundly shaped by a context of poverty, insecurity, institutional marginalization, and political conflict. The participants studied in this dissertation use their creative abilities and organizing skills to acquire more control over the social and political conditions of their lives. By setting up a grassroots university and a community policing organization, communities in the Costa Chica region have become sites of civic interventions and political struggles. This dissertation studies how the people affiliated to Unisur and Upoeg contest and redefine local education and security, and what this means for local communities and political relations.

2. The Research Background

Universities and police forces are mostly institutions controlled and operated by the state. In rural Guerrero, however, many believed that the state was deficient in providing security and access to quality education. The average percentage of schooling in Guerrero is among the lowest in the country.² People in Guerrero spend on average about eight

¹ Fieldnotes and video material, December 5, 2014.

² Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) 2015. “Características educativas de la población.” Accessed April 1, 2019. https://www.inegi.org.mx/temas/educacion/default.html#Informacion_general.

years in school, which is equivalent to the second year in high school, and about thirteen percent of the population is enrolled in higher education.³ Many of those who are able to continue their studies are rejected by universities.⁴ Rural, indigenous and Afromexican adolescents especially encounter difficulties because higher education institutions are located in urban centers such as Acapulco, Chilpancingo, and Iguala. Studying in cities is expensive. In 2006, a group of popular leaders and academics elaborated a detailed study about educational deprivation among indigenous and rural students in Guerrero.⁵ This became Unisur's foundational document. It not only mapped institutional deficiency and staked its claim for public education, but also tapped into the agenda of interculturality.

The emergence of intercultural education in Latin America is part of major attempts to overcome the social and cultural exclusion of indigenous peoples through wider multicultural reforms. In 1991, constitutional reforms proclaimed the multicultural basis of Mexican society. This transition led to the development of intercultural education programs, which aim at the diversification of curricular models and school praxis more generally. Across Latin America, institutional efforts to recognize different ways of knowing and speaking emerged (see Mato 2008). Following this trend, Mexican president Vicente Fox (2000–2006) launched a national initiative to found intercultural universities (see Schmelkes 2009; Lehmann 2013). Soon, indigenous organizations, state agencies, private foundations, scholars, and international NGOs engaged in discussions about the meaning and purpose of intercultural universities. In this light, Rappaport (2005) argues that the meaning of the notion of intercultural is constantly reshaped, negotiated, and contested in a web of affiliations. In Mexico, social contestation over public and culturally relevant education go back a long way. In the aftermath of the Mexican revolution (1910–1917), ruling groups and indigenous people waged struggles over the place of the latter within the nation-state: “the front line of this battle was occupied by the school system” (Stavenhagen 2002, 28).

In Guerrero, a diverse group of indigenous leaders, local union leaders, and left-wing intellectuals from Mexico City and Guerrero elaborated a detailed plan for a grassroots intercultural university in 2006. Although state officials initially worked together with the group, Unisur's doors eventually opened without state recognition. Meanwhile, the university itself became a locus of institutional conflicts over the meaning of intercultural

³ INEGI 2016. “Conociendo Guerrero, Sexta Edición.” Accessed April 1, 2019. http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/Productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/estudios/conociendo/702825218645.pdf.

⁴ In 2011, for example, twenty-nine thousands adolescents graduated from high school in Guerrero, of whom twenty-one thousand applied to higher education institutions, which in turn only allowed just over thirteen thousand students to enter: Carreto, Xavier A. 2012 “Los retos de la educación superior en Guerrero.” *La Jornada Guerrero*, August 26, 2012. Accessed July 29, 2015. <http://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/2012/08/26/index.php?section=opinion&article=002a1soc>.

⁵ Dr. Humberto Santos Bautista, M.C. Alfredo Méndez Bahena, Dr. José Joaquín Flores Félix, Lic. Bulmaro Muñoz Olmedo, Dr. Rodrigo Pimienta Lastra. 2006. “Estudio de factibilidad - Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur.” Chilpancingo, Guerrero.

education. During my fieldwork, I observed how such debates affected everyday university life, the academic program, and future possibilities of students. Unisur became a key site of the activism studied in this dissertation.

In addition to education, insecurity has increasingly become a matter of great social concern in Mexico, and Guerrero in particular. Violence deeply affects the state's social fabric. Between 2005 and 2011, homicide rates increased by 310 percent⁶ and, in 2012, Guerrero became the state with the highest level of intentional killings nationwide.⁷ Opium poppy cultivation is widespread and, according to the state government, at least eleven organized crime groups operated in the state in 2015.⁸ Soldiers, police officers, judges, and politicians have been accused of ties with organized crime. Collusion between crime and law enforcement further complicated politics in Guerrero, a state that already has a long history of violent rule. In 1996, Mexican anthropologist Armando Bartra wrote a book called “Guerrero *bronco*” (rough Guerrero) to point out the everyday violence experienced by Guerrerenses perpetrated by local *caciques*, political elites, and the army. In addition to political and structural violence, citizens nowadays face unpredictable criminal violence that makes them live in constant uncertainty (Bartra 2015).

The wave of new violence and insecurity is connected to the so-called “war on drugs,” initiated by President Calderón (2006–2012). Ever since, Mexico has experienced widespread human rights violations, illustrated by the thirty-two thousand people who have disappeared since 2006.⁹ The situation did not change under the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018). According to Human Rights Watch, in recent years, state security forces have repeatedly been implicated in extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and torture.¹⁰ The forced disappearance of forty-three Ayotzinapa students on September 26, 2014, in Iguala brought international attention to Mexico's human rights crisis and put Guerrero in the spotlights. Investigations of the role of various state police forces and the army in the killings and disappearances of that fatal night in Iguala are ongoing at the time of writing.¹¹ My fieldwork took place during this critical

⁶ INEGI 2012. “Press report number 310/12.” August 20, 2012. Accessed October 11, 2017. <http://www.inegi.org.mx/inegi/contenidos/espanol/prensa/Boletines/Boletin/Comunicados/Especiales/012/agosto/comunica29.pdf>.

⁷ Secretaría de Gobernación (SEGOB) 2012. “Incidencia Delictiva.” Accessed October 11, 2017. http://www.secretariadodejefecutivosnsp.gob.mx/work/models/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Resource/133/RID_AltoImpacto_1997-2012_05DIC2012.pdf.

⁸ Cervantes, Jesus. 2015. “Guerrero Tierra de Carteles.” *Proceso*, December 12, 2015. Accessed on July 21, 2017. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/424007/guerrero-tierra-de-carteles>.

⁹ Human Rights Watch Mexico. 2017. “Mexico Events of 2017.” Accessed April 1, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mexico>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights created the Special Follow-Up Mechanism to the Ayotzinapa Case (MESA) on July 29, 2016 to follow up on the recommendations made by the Inter-disciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI), who were initially appointed to investigate the Ayotzinapa case: the Organization of American States (OAS) “Ayotzinapa.” Accessed April 3, 2019. <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/activities/giei.asp>.

period and I witnessed the mobilizations for justice and political change that emerged in all corners of Guerrero. Both Upoeg and Unisur joined in. The large-scale civic response should not have come as a surprise. The state is known for its history of radical popular activism, which I examine in chapter 3. Peasants, teachers, indigenous people, and students in Guerrero have been at the forefront of turning local grievances into popular mobilizations. In the current context of organized crime, extreme violence, impunity, and distrust in law enforcement, citizens in Guerrero again turned to self-organization. Already before the Ayotzinapa drama, many armed civil society organizations started to appear in Guerrero, and in other parts of Mexico, to bring security to communities and towns.

In 2013, Upoeg was the first organization to take up the fight against organized crime in Guerrero. The new organization emerged against the backdrop of the earlier indigenous community policing experiences of the Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias-Policía Comunitaria (Crac-PC). The Crac-PC was set up in the 1990s and succeeded in substantially reducing local insecurity in Guerrero's Montaña region. It operates by principles of *usos y costumbres*, normative systems of indigenous governance, and still functions as an important referent for struggles of indigenous self-determination (see Sierra 2015a). In 2013, a report of the National Commission of Human Rights on Guerrero counted at least six community police and self-defense forces that had revived this tradition more recently, including Upoeg.¹² The latter received much attention after it successfully took on organized crime in 2013, and, since 2015, because of its violent confrontations with other armed policing groups.

3. The Research Focus and Objective

Although concerns about security and culturally relevant and accessible education lie at the basis of the organizations under study in this dissertation, their activism goes beyond these terrains. Some time ago, Lund (2006, 686) argued that “ostensibly non-political situations may reveal themselves to be active sites of political negotiation and mediation over the implementation of public goals or the distribution of public authority in which local and regional identities and power relations are reshaped and recast.” The event in El Mesón that opened this chapter showed the local, civic participation in the projects of education and security, as well as the cooperation between diverse cultural and ethnic groups, and connections between different communities and municipalities. These are signs of the way in which rural citizens in Guerrero seek to reshape local identities, political relations, and institutions on the local and regional level. I understand the

¹² Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH). 2013. “Informe Especial sobre los Grupos de Autodefensa y la Seguridad Pública en el Estado de Guerrero.” D.F Mexico. Accessed July 21, 2017. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/2016_IE_gruposautodefensa.pdf

activism concerning educational and policing organizations as practices through which citizens attempt to satisfy their range of economic, social, political, and cultural needs, which are linked to larger struggles over the meaning of multiculturalism.

For my research, I have used a specific methodological and conceptual approach. The ethnographic material for this research was gathered over a period of eleven months during 2014 and 2015. I accompanied Upoeg and Unisur members in their daily activities according to principles of participant observation. I conducted informal conversations and in-depth interviews to make sense of their experiences and political aspirations. These research encounters were shaped by my privileged position as a white European researcher who worked with indigenous and Afromexican people, who have historically been misrepresented and excluded from anthropological knowledge production. Taking up Shannon Speed's advice (2008a, 7), I foregrounded reflexivity and continual interrogation of the relations of power and ideas that underpinned my research. To that end, I employed a collaborative approach, among others by making use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) techniques. I will come back to this in chapter 2.

To study social contestation in the Costa Chica region, I use perspectives from the field of political anthropology. The activism of Unisur and Upoeg members takes place in a context of violent pluralism, in which violence stems from multiple actors such as states, elites, non-state violent actors, and criminal organizations, all locked in struggles about social order (Arias and Goldstein 2010, 4). For Guerrero, this means that the political landscape is made up of spatial, social, and political divisions where various actors coexist, collaborate, or compete over power, space, and meanings. When a multiplicity of sources of power is at play in a given setting, gaps and contradictions open up new possibilities for political change (Li 2007, 25–26). Such marginal spaces may become “spaces of invention and creativity, as marginalized people explore new ways of resolving local problems” (Goldstein 2012, 28). Here lies the aim of this dissertation: to offer insight into what happens when rural and ethnically diverse citizens rethink education and security through these margins, in settings characterized by institutionalized multiculturalism and multifaceted violence. In the remaining part of this chapter, I examine debates in political anthropology about power, politics, and social contestation and develop an analytical perspective for the study of Unisur and Upoeg. Afterwards, I connect these insights to discussions about multicultural politics in Latin America, and thereby complement the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

4. Political Anthropology and Social Contestation

This research builds on political anthropology that is concerned with analyzing ideologies, political structures, and political action (Vincent 2004, 2). Since the 1990s, anthropological debates about the way power is exercised and contested have been heavily influenced by

Foucault (1991). He introduced perspectives on power as dispersed throughout society by techniques of domination and disciplinary forces “aimed at the ordering and control of bodies and populations” (Aretxaga 2003, 399). Bio-power and bio-politics were the modes through which subjects were disciplined. His work on governmentality suggested a break with the concept of sovereignty, perceived by Foucault as a premodern form of political power embedded in the body politics of kings. Some scholars have pointed at the limits of Foucault’s framework, especially in understanding the dynamic ways in which people mobilize to contest and change their living conditions (Li 2007, 19).

In attempts to overcome some of the limits of Foucault’s work, some scholars began to reevaluate the meaning of sovereignty. According to Clarke (2017, 364–65), twenty-first century anthropology concentrates on the concept of sovereignty to understand the way people engage in diffuse forms of authority, power and social action within and toward the state. The work of Agamben (1998) analyzed sovereignty as the power to declare states of exception, that is, when legality is suspended in the name of a juridical order that cannot be held accountable. Others have challenged Agamben’s grounding of sovereignty within state forms, since it could not account for the multiple violent actors outside formal institutional systems that exercise authority in complex relation to these systems. To study the multiple, coexisting, and competing sovereign claims of state and non-state actors, Stepputat and Hansen (2006, 297) defined sovereignty as “a tentative and always emergent form of authority grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear and legitimacy from the neighborhood to the summit of the state.” Over the years, scholars have elaborated on this approach and proposed concepts such as “micro-sovereignty” (Humphrey 2008), “fragmented sovereignty” (Davis 2010), “competing sovereignties” (Pansters 2015), “criminal sovereignty” (Cribb 2009), “formations of sovereignty” (Stepputat 2015), and “contested sovereignties” (Sieder 2011). Their work focuses on sovereign claim making, the cooperation, and competition in relationships between state and non-state armed actors, and the effects of such interplay on political outcomes.

Other scholars have expressed concerns about the usage of sovereignty as the dominant lens to understand the way power works. Jennings (2011), for instance, especially challenged the analysis of sovereignty as an *always* emerging and totalizing form of authority. Referring to the work of Hannah Arendt, he argues that, if our analytical perspective becomes limited to one particular form of political power—the one grounded in arbitrary violence—this leaves little space for political alternatives, such as a form of political organization free from subjection and from subjecting others (Jennings 2011, 43). Foregrounding sovereignty as constitutive of political and moral community might close our eyes to other forms of political life (Jennings 2011, 51–53). Graeber (2011, 12–13) therefore argues that sovereignty should be considered as a certain form of political power rather than as something inevitable. The question is whether recent work has given too much weight to sovereignty as constitutive for politics, and how useful this

may be for the study of social contestation in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero.

When I first traveled to the region, I obtained a good idea of Upoeg's visible claims to authority. The streets were marked by base camps of the *policía ciudadana*, decorated with banners carrying Upoeg's logo. Around the base camps, I saw men with rifles who wore T-shirts that read S.S.J.C, short for Sistema de Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana (Citizen Security and Justice System). By making their presence visible, they affirmed their authority while contesting that of others. This turned the streets of Guerrero into important spaces of political expression for groups that, for different reasons, sought control of the area. Diphhoorn (2016, 13) refers to the definition of policing as a social process through which a range of actors maintain a particular social order. In the case of Upoeg, however, rather than acting to *maintain* a social order, I argue that the aim is to *change* the social order through policing. Arias and Goldstein (2010) have studied the interplay of civil society, violent groups, and state actors in Latin America and how this allowed for the emergence of new forms of political orders.¹³ In fact, armed groups play important roles in generating new processes of local governance and transforming political institutions (Arias 2017). In this study, I see Upoeg as a particular expression of social contestation that goes beyond conventional notions of policing.

To elaborate my theoretical approach, I build on the work of Kyed (2018). She identified two shortcomings in the existing literature on policing, vigilante groups, and armed civil society groups by bringing us back to discussions about the limitations of analytical perspectives of governmentality and sovereignty. First of all, she argues that there is a strong focus on Foucault's understanding of power as diffused and dispersed throughout society. This perspective leads scholars who study the current pluralization of authority to conclude that there are "no clear-cut centers of authority or fixed hierarchical relationships" in plural political orders (Kyed 2018, 21). It turns scholarly attention to networks and assemblages. Such a perspective may overlook the distinct forms of political contestation and authority embodied by community policing as one element within such a government arrangement (Kyed 2018, 21–22).

Other scholars work with sovereignty to study local policing claims and informal sovereign performances (see Pansters 2015; Diphhoorn 2016; Goldstein 2015). When studying community policing, this also has its limitations. While sovereignty helps to understand the violent aspects of non-state authorities and contestations with state forces, it fails to capture its broader political efforts (Kyed 2018, 31). In Kyed's case studies in Mozambique and Swaziland, community policing groups were not only alternative security forces, but became new authoritative actors that became involved in distinctive micropolitics. It is true that non-state actors can reproduce, simulate, or contest statist

¹³ Arias and Goldstein (2010) introduced the concept of violent pluralism to argue how widespread violence has been an integral element in the reconfiguration and maintenance of neoliberal political orders in Latin America.

practices by acting like a state (Diphorn 2016, 19–21). However, when scholarly approaches to the (re)constitution of order are based on the kind of power originating from the sovereign state, there might be drawbacks. According to Kyed (2018, 31), the usage of concepts such as “informal sovereignty,” for instance, signify “a mirrored inversion of state sovereignty which precludes the distinct characteristics of politics.” In order to find a way out of these concerns, I engage with the question raised by Smith (2003, 102): “what conceptual apparatus can we build to re-center analysis on what politics do, rather than what type they resemble?”

5. (Re)Turn to Political Authority

To foreground the political dimension of educational and policing activism, I turn to the concept of political authority. I find the ideas put forward by Smith (2003) particularly useful. Smith distinguishes different authoritative relationships, such as parent–child, teacher–student, and boss–worker, but *political* authority lies in the “presumptive claim to be the authority of last resort, able to exert its commands within all other such relations and thus reconfigure them, if only momentarily, in the public realm” (Smith 2003, 107–8). He used the concept to analyze the emergence of relations of political power within a framework of legitimate governance in early complex societies. Following his ideas, I understand political authority as the will and practice to locate legitimate authority in acts of governance of last resort. By adopting political authority as a central concept, I make analytical space for the specific modes of authority making by my participants rather than taking sovereignty as the basis for the exercise of power and its contestation. To illustrate how I apply this approach, I briefly turn to the case of Unisur.

An internal document on the history of Unisur offers insight into its political struggles. One can read about the origins of the university, when the initiators organized “numerous community assemblies and regional forums, three state congresses and various academic events that reflected on the subject.”¹⁴ The document recounts that indigenous communities assembled in a regional congress and decided to create Unisur by themselves, after the state government withdrew its support. The university was presented as a bearer of authority with the support of the *pueblos*. This form of legitimacy is mobilized in complex ways vis-à-vis the state. Following Gustafson’s (2011, 232) work on social movements in Bolivia, which looks at such mobilizations as constitutive projects that seek to transform regional relationships of power and authority, I approach the various actors and communities behind Unisur in a similar vein. The university not only shapes students’ sense of self and their political aspirations, but, more

¹⁴ Unisur. (date unknown). “b) Breve reseña histórica del proceso de creación de la universidad intercultural en Guerrero.”

broadly, attempts to reconstruct politics in the region. I study how academics, teachers, community leaders, grassroots organizations, and students work together to rearrange the governance of university institutions. Upoeg has similar objectives with its policing practices. The organization engages in policing as part of a broader plan to restructure the authority of rural communities vis-à-vis municipal administrations, Mexico's lowest level of governance. In chapter 3, which examines Guerrero's social and political history, I explain how Upoeg's and Unisur's political ambitions are part of long-standing struggles over rural democratization and autonomy.

I will examine two interrelated aspects of political authority: aspirational claim making and social practices. In Smith's (2003, 107) definition of political authority, he refers to the first by writing about the presumptive claim to become the legitimate authority of last resort. This is also what Rappaport (2005) teaches us in her study about indigenous movements in Colombia. In elected councils (*cabildos*), on the family level, and personified in shamans, legitimate authority remains a utopian aspiration in all cases. In her words: "*cabildos* are accused of indulging in petty politicking, and families have become brittle entities in the face of labor migration, language loss, and rampant violence" (Rappaport 2005, 239). She understands claims of legitimate authority as cultural and political potentialities through which indigenous movements in Colombia construct new and radical political realities.

I study the "presumptive" claims and cultural-political potentialities of the organizations studied here through a focus on legitimacy. What is legitimate and what is not is constantly challenged and negotiated, and differs across groups and time (Lund 2006, 693). Lund (2006) refers to the study of repertoires through which actors seek to legitimate their actions. He sees two repertoires that are popular in rural and small-town politics in Africa: actors and institutions claim legitimacy by referring to "the local," either in contrast to "the outside" or as spatial referent, and to history and the past (Lund 2006, 693–95). A study on Argentine border towns brings different repertoires of legitimacy to the fore. Border residents link legitimacy to their understandings of legality and national laws (Jusionyte 2013). As the next section of this chapter will illustrate, indigenous and Afromexican movements draw abundantly on rights and laws to make claims of legitimacy. I will examine various repertoires of legitimacy used by Upoeg and Unisur to make authoritative claims. Their claims are based on a wide range of notions such as *pueblos*, ethnic identity, security, and cultural rights and legality. I study how the primacy of certain repertoires are established under specific societal circumstances, and in interplay with other actors. Sometimes, their claims are strategic and instrumental; at other times, they reflect the cultural-political potentialities of the organizations.

To understand the ways in which aspirational claims translate into everyday activism, I study the social practices of the grassroots organizations. I follow the footsteps of Buur and Jensen (2004), who have studied "who exercises authority, in whose name they act and how they do it" by employing a social practice approach (Buur and Jensen 2004,

145). In their studies of vigilantism, they argue in favor of an approach focused on the practice of everyday policing to understand how groups create social order and how they contest it. For my research, I take a closer look at the following social practices: everyday policing, armed interventions, and trans-local collaboration (chapter 4); cross-cultural interactions and legal activism (chapter 5); university management, institution building, and social mobilizations (chapter 6), and educational practices and extra-curricular activities (chapter 7). I study the practices in which Unisur and Upoeg engage to understand their wider political implications. Furthermore, I study how all of this takes place in complex interaction with the various civic, armed, and state actors that make up Guerrero's plural political order.

By combining a social practice approach with the study of aspirational claims, I make a break with previous approaches to political authority. These approaches looked at the way political authority was embedded in kinship and clans, or saw it as a symbolic and centralizing institution (Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 298). My approach offers me the analytical space 1) to study the political dimension of policing and educational activism, and 2) shift the focus to what politics does rather than what it resembles. I want to contribute to a critical political anthropological perspective on the distinctive characteristics of social contestation and its wider political implications in violent and multicultural settings. I now turn to debates about multiculturalism in Latin America. After all, the social contestation studied in this dissertation is deeply entangled in the politics of multiculturalism. The aspirations and practices of my participants are informed by multicultural possibilities, risks, and challenges.

6. Multiculturalism, Ethnic Activism, and Well-being for All

This section looks at some key debates about multiculturalism and introduces the reader to discussions of multiculturalism specific to Latin America, and Mexico in particular. Many studies on the legal and societal arrangements of multiculturalism are indebted to Taylor's 1992 seminal essay on the "Politics of Recognition," in which he posed recognition of cultural identity as the road toward social justice: on the personal level in the sense of achieving equal personal dignity, and on group levels in the form of equal value for all cultures. Taylor saw multiculturalism as inherently a problem of cultural recognition. But, how to grant universal recognition to cultural groups with mutually exclusive values? Kymlicka (1995) subsequently examined the challenges of governing cultural diversity and reconciling the recognition of collective minority rights with universal human rights grounded in individualized protections. From this liberal perspective, minorities have the right to retain their distinctive cultural values and practices within a certain political community only if these do not infringe on universal individual rights. Ever since, debates have waged about *how* to decide when a cultural group does not respect

or receive individual freedom, *who* decides on what counts as cultural groups and their boundaries, and *what* exactly multiculturalism should recognize (see Hall 2000; Parekh 2001; Okin 1999; Fraser 1995). To the last question, Baumann (1999) answers that the dialogical nature of all identities should be “recognized” for an “abiding vision of equality across all cultural differentiations” (Baumann 1999, 135).

In the 1990s, political-philosophical debates about multiculturalism touched the ground in Latin America. Various Latin American states, including Mexico, started to embrace multicultural reforms in response to pressures from “above and below” (Lucero 2013, 22). The multicultural turn was a move away from histories of exclusion and ethnic subordination, which has its roots in colonial times. Indigenous movements successfully put their demands on national political agendas with the support of international institutions that recognized indigenous rights.¹⁵ Ever since, laws and programs have been implemented across Latin America, including Mexico, in response to demands of indigenous movements and, increasingly, Afro-descendants.

This multicultural turn and the dilemmas it brought about has obtained widespread scholarly attention. In Mexico, indigenous peoples did not only make claims to cultural difference and self-determination on the basis of their cultural rights, but they also sought political inclusion and demanded solutions to economic inequality. Indigenous organizations have been described as “seeing with two eyes,” from an indigenous and peasant perspective (Mattiace 2003). They combined class-oriented activism with identity politics as two sides of the same coin. This required the reconciliation of the politics of socioeconomic redistribution with the politics of cultural recognition, the central topic of a classic work by Fraser (1995). In the United States, Fraser saw increased mutual alienation between labor struggles and difference movements. In Latin America, other challenges surfaced. States and indigenous organizations faced the fundamental political and theoretical dilemma of how to reconcile inclusive national citizenship with forms of political, economic, and cultural autonomy (Smith 2007, 240). Indigenous groups negotiated the devolution of authority from the nation-states in favor of indigenous autonomy, while making claims on the same nation-state for social benefits.

A large body of work focuses on how ethnic politics followed these ambitions. Scholars have studied strategies of indigenous movements by which they politicized their identity and gained authority to mobilize their political agendas (see Álvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998). While indigenous people collectively emphasized their cultural distinctiveness to claim group rights, it strengthened unification and allowed for collective action. A long time ago, Spivak (1989) coined such tactics “strategic essentialism,” since groups reified group boundaries to effectively make cultural-ethnic claims. In contrast, anthropological

¹⁵ Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples was ratified in 1991, and the United Nations declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples came into effect in 2007.

studies identified the fluidity of ethno-cultural meanings within such organizations and the ways in which the politics of difference involved active constructions and negotiations over categories and identities (Jackson and Warren 2005, 556). Claims of difference then served to widen political spaces (Escobar 2008, 15).

Anthropologists have examined the ambiguities that emerge when political activism takes on legal discourses and juridical tools, referred to as the juridification of indigenous activism (Sieder 2010). When cultural categories are put into legal frameworks, there is the risk of fixing group identities as distinct, bounded, static, and homogeneous. Multiculturalism can thus reify cultural differences without taking into account complex relations between culture, ethnicity, race, gender, and class. Some scholars raised concerns about how legal demarcations of the state can lead to new processes of exclusion and disempowerment (Speed 2005). Take, for instance, indigenous people who do not speak an original language or live in urban neighborhoods, and whose experiences do not match the cultural characteristics codified in legislation and policies. Canessa (2016) sees such forms of exclusion in Bolivia as one of the paradoxes of multiculturalism. When the state legitimates certain indigenous identities and not others, frictions within and between ethnic groups may increase over the benefits of state policies. Gledhill (2016, xvii) refers to the ultimate test of multiculturalism, that is, “whether multiculturalist remedies for some, constitute injustice for others, or enhance overall social well-being.”

7. Neoliberal Multiculturalism Revisited

A few years ago, Lehmann (2016) wrote about significant changes that were brought about by years of multicultural “politics of inclusion” in Latin America. It created new institutions attuned to the interests of indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations, and opened up spaces for their leaders to engage in policy making. Inclusive politics had brought new groups in the purview of the state. Notwithstanding, Lehmann called for a renewed discussion of the politics of recognition. This dissertation aims to contribute to that discussion. Three decades of multicultural legislation has generated “new axes of power which in turn create novel inequalities and vested interests” (Lehmann 2016, 2). This take us to the main critique of multicultural policies in Latin America, which is why policies that appear to recognize diversity “ignore the inequality and hierarchic relationships between ethnic groups that coexist in the multicultural context” (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2013, 44). Did legal advances and multicultural attention to social inclusion contribute to the reconstitution or transformation of structures of institutional power? (Walsh 2012a, 28)

Many scholars have attributed such ambiguities to the parallel emergence of multicultural and neoliberal reforms in Latin America. Under the banner of neoliberalism, countries such as Mexico cut assistance to the peasant sector in the 1980s and implemented

economic liberalization and privatization policies. These neoliberal policies intensified economic pressures on already marginalized peasants and indigenous communities. This set the stage for social mobilizations and grassroots action. The breakdown of peasant-based development models shifted activism to other mobilizing identities, such as indigeneity. In fact, indigenous demands for autonomy were partly compatible with neoliberal efforts to decentralize governance (Yashar 2005). Simultaneously, political liberalization created spaces for civil society to contest the state (Postero and Zamosc 2004). When indigenous demands were connected to neoliberal agendas, multiculturalism became a “menace” (Hale 2002). While states tolerated and authorized the demands of indigenous activists for specific cultural rights, this often happened at the expense of indigenous organizations fighting for more radical political and economic change. According to Hale (2002), the double politics created a logic that divided radical indigenous activists from their more moderate peers, and hence weakened the force of indigenous mobilizing. This is the regulatory dimension of indigenous rights struggles: states increasingly accepted cultural demands only as long as they did not question the neoliberal status quo.

Many scholars have drawn on Hale’s work to make sense of the way “neoliberal multiculturalism” in Latin America has been deeply contradictory for indigenous peoples. In Mexico, for instance, multicultural reforms followed the same logic: “They end up being compensatory measures recognizing collective rights without questioning the established legal order or the new economic global policies” (Sierra 2005, 54). When it comes down to the indigenous right to self-determination, the Mexican state allowed for measures of autonomy on the local level. Indigenous people are then confined to local spheres of action, such as the community or municipality. This limits the building of broader spaces for political representation to challenge the political and economic status quo (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010).

In reference to the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Postero (2017, 16) raises the question: “Can social movements seeking justice find use in the tools of liberalism, like representative democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and constitutionalism?” Some scholars and activists have expressed doubts over whether constitutional reforms are the best way to alter relations between indigenous people and the state. Burguete Cal y Mayor (2013, 59) points to the failed attempts by the Zapatistas in Chiapas to negotiate with the Mexican government within a legal framework. The government never lived up to the San Andrés Accords (see chapter 3). Other indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations argue that the above mentioned liberal tools can play important roles in remedying manifold injustices. These can be used to bring legal and social inclusion in society, but also have transformative functions. Fraser (1995, 82) once used the term “transformative remedies” to point to efforts to change underlying political-economic structures. Legal activism can thus be employed to reconstruct the state, “by pushing it toward a radical brand of pluralism” (Rappaport 2005, 16).

Over time, indigenous peoples in Latin America shifted the focus from waging struggles over rights toward “the practical realization of their demands from the spaces they won” (Juan Martínez 2013, 160). In Mexico, examples of such spaces are intercultural education and local indigenous self-determination. Even so, it should be asked under what conditions indigenous and Afro-descendant movements can redirect the limited spaces opened up by neoliberal multiculturalism toward more radical political alternatives (Hale 2011). In this dissertation, I study the efforts of Unisur and Upoeg to accomplish precisely that. I examine how the organizations work to realize their manifold demands from institutional and juridical spaces opened up by multicultural policies and legislation. I especially study the way my participants negotiate their futures, and that of their communities, by drawing on the challenges, risks, and lessons of three decades of multiculturalism.

8. Building Bridges: The Organization of the Book

This study of social contestation in Guerrero is particularly interested in the political dimension of grassroots education and policing. In the first sections of this chapter, I explained that I foreground the concept of political authority to study how the activism of my participants taps into larger political issues. In doing so, I look at the aspirational claims and social practices of my participants. These are partly shaped by indigenous and Afromexican rights struggles, which I looked at in the last sections of this chapter. For Upoeg, ethnic-cultural references surface in everyday activist interactions, claims to legitimacy, and legal challenges. Students and teachers of Unisur also employ markers of difference in everyday university activities and their struggle over recognition. In this dissertation, I study what social contestation in the field of education and policing teaches us about the opportunities and challenges of political change for grassroots rural Guerrero after three decades of multiculturalism and in the current context of plural violence. I hope to generate understandings that will motivate academic debates and activist practice.

My dissertation is divided into three parts. Part I consists of two chapters that, together, set the stage for my research. In chapter 2, I reflect on my fieldwork. I look at how my methodological choices influenced the data used in this dissertation. By drawing on anthropological debates about engaged scholarship, collaboration, and fragmented research sites, I explain my methods, positionality, and emotions in the field. As it turned out, especially the conditions of violence and my collaborative efforts complicated my research and raised particular ethical and practical dilemmas. Altogether, I describe how my fieldwork process can best be understood as an “art of the possible.”

In chapter 3, I offer an account of Guerrero’s social and political history to situate recent activism in regional historical trends and nationwide events. This chapter examines the

key themes of democracy, economic justice, and indigenous and women's rights that have made up Guerrero's civil society aspirations, and the shifts between electoral and radical popular strategies of change and reform. I pay specific attention to the municipality as an important site of struggle as well as to scaling strategies. It also offers the necessary background to understand dilemmas provoked by divergent ethnic, class, and gendered demands and identities. In the last part of chapter 3, I turn to more recent developments to explain the unfolding of multifaceted violence in Guerrero, and how this has come to shape present-day activism.

Part II of this dissertation contains two empirical chapters about Upoeg. It starts with chapter 4, where I explore the policing practices of Upoeg as a new manifestation of long-standing struggles over rural democratization. By studying the organization's emergence and evolution, I show how Upoeg's assertions of legitimacy resonated with local communities and opened up ways to construct authority through spatialized practices. This type of scale making unfolded in the midst of conflicts and negotiations with state and non-state actors on community, municipal, and state levels. By zooming in on the particular area of the Centro region of Guerrero, where deadly conflicts flared up some time after Upoeg emerged, I analyze how the efforts to reconstruct political relations and institutions unfolded in this particular area. I argue that the new conditions of insecurity that triggered the organization in the first place also brought forth contradictions that frustrated Upoeg's ambitions to locally reconfigure authority.

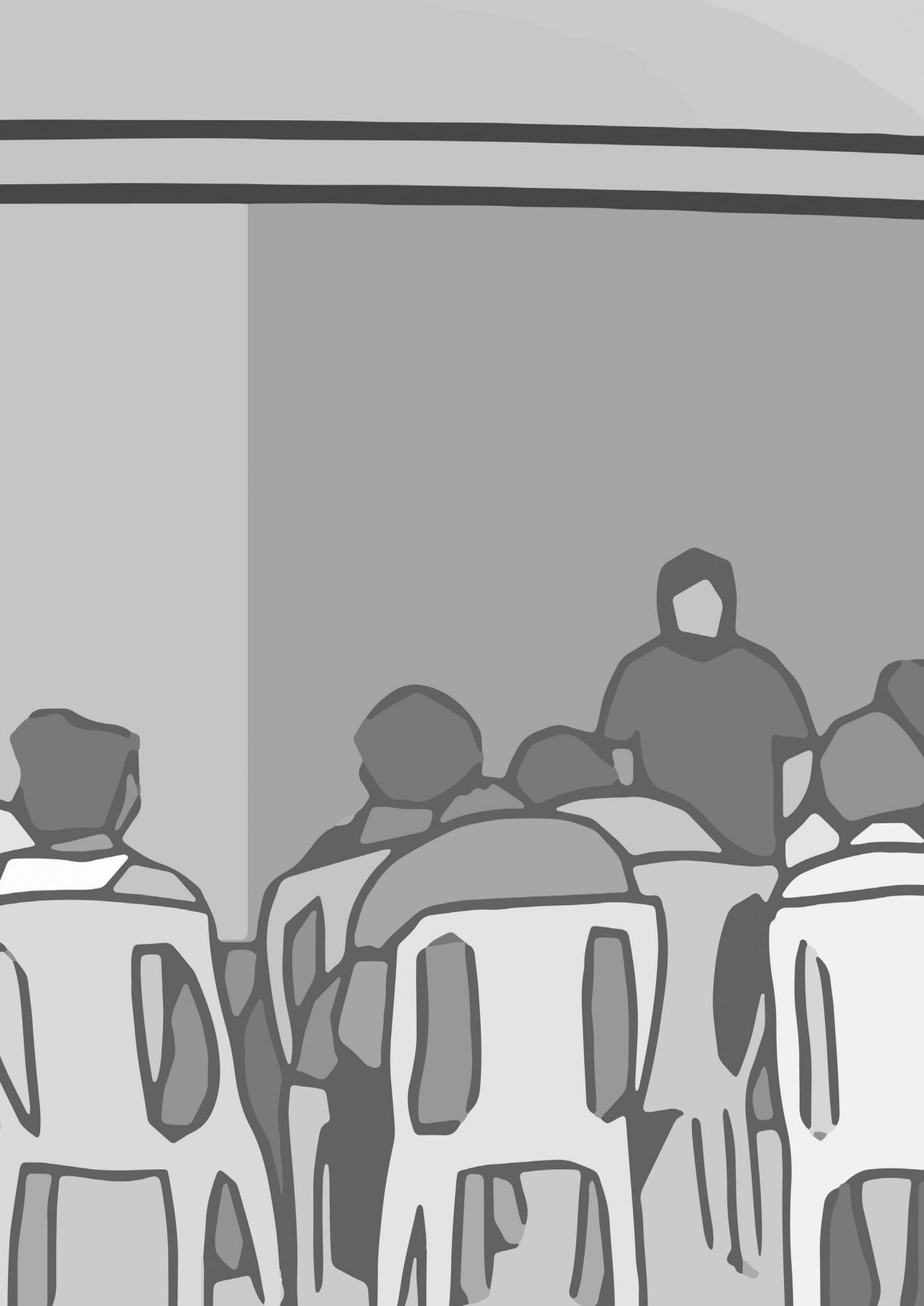
In chapter 5, I explore the legal activism practiced by Upoeg and how this relates to the manifold aims of the organization. Upoeg attempted to mobilize indigenous rights as a way of legalizing the policing organization, but also employed legal tools for its political ambitions beyond policing. Upoeg leaders organized two municipal referendums about indigenous governance in the Costa Chica region. By examining Upoeg's legal activism, I look at how the organization's multi-ethnic identity opens and closes doors for its constituency. The chapters examines how strategies of legal activism opened up ways for the organization to lodge its policing authority in new practices of legitimate governance. While making use of multicultural laws, Upoeg managed to restructure political relations on the municipal level, but also encountered difficulties in addressing multiple local injustices.

Part III shifts the focus to Unisur. In chapter 6, I use the notion "educational governance" to study how academics, teachers, community and social leaders, state officials, and students constitute and negotiate the university model. By tracing the university's origins and its contemporary developments, I examine the aim to be a university "from the *pueblos*, directed by the *pueblos*" and how this relates to struggles over authority and the meaning of multiculturalism. I study the university's search for state recognition by reconnecting to communities and organizations, partnerships with established universities, and social mobilizations. Whereas the university locally served as a vehicle for discussions and community engagements, I analyze how the prospect

of Unisur to become a platform for new forms of educational governance experienced problems, and turned the university project toward ambitions on other levels.

In the last empirical chapter, I continue the study of Unisur by zooming in on the university classes and the everyday lives of Unisur students. Chapter 7 looks at the way larger struggles over multiculturalism take shape in the university's pedagogy and curriculum. It also examines how students experience these functions and ambitions. Since Unisur invites students to effect change on the personal, community, and societal level, I examine the political-academic aspirations on these different scales. By doing so, I show how Unisur's double ambition of inclusion and transformation created difficulties for the students. In efforts to give meaning to Unisur's program, students negotiated different roles and aspirations. At the same time, they played an important role in pushing for new directions of popular struggles and in rethinking community improvement.

I conclude this dissertation with some final reflections. Chapter 8 connects the analysis of Unisur and Upoeg, and points out the results of my study of the political dimensions of education and policing. I elaborate on the benefits of the notion of political authority for the study of the pluralization of authority and grassroots activism. My approach brings out the distinct political-cultural potentialities behind activism and enables scholars to shed light on the specific circumstances, actions, alliances, and moments when possibilities for political change appear and disappear in the midst of plural violence. I situate my results in discussions about state-sanctioned multiculturalism, the (in)ability of grassroots movements to redirect its course, and struggles over local autonomy in Mexico. It leads me to argue that scholars would benefit from a specific focus on the political dynamics that take place when groups are granted or denied recognition under the multicultural framework. In closing, I briefly review events and developments after my fieldwork ended, and include some ideas for future research. I finish with remarks about engaged methodologies in conflictive and politically tense research settings.



PART I

2

Ethnographic Fieldwork: an “Art of the Possible” in the Costa Chica of Guerrero

1. Introduction

My master research in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca in 2011 turned my attention to the activism studied in this dissertation. In the mountainous Mixteca Baja region, I conducted fieldwork at a preparatory school founded by activists dedicated to indigenous emancipation. At the time of my arrival, a student called Ana had just graduated from the preparatory school and dreamed of continuing her studies at a university. However, as the daughter of a poor peasant family, this was very unlikely. She then learned about the existence of a university free of charge and particularly designed for indigenous and marginalized youth, located in the neighboring state of Guerrero. Ana wanted to know all about it and I volunteered to accompany her on this adventure. Off we went. After fourteen hours on the road, we arrived at the coastal town of Cuajinicuilapa to visit Unisur.

I was surprised by what I observed during my first days in Guerrero. The highly politicized students intrigued me, just as the academic program that was taught in the classes I attended. On the second day of our visit, the university rector suspended classes and announced that something historical was about to happen. Everyone hurried into two white minivans and I witnessed a regional assembly of the community policing organization Crac-PC. We joined the hundreds of people and armed police gathered at the basketball court of Santa Cruz del Rincón, a Tlapaneco community that hosted another university department of Unisur. I still remember the intense smell of burned plants and the deep gray smoke rising up from piles of marijuana, taken from criminals, and then burned on behalf of the assembly. Altogether, this episode made a deep impression on me. While we headed back to Oaxaca, Ana decided to enroll in the university and my mind buzzed with dozens of questions.

I started off this research thinking about a methodology that would accommodate my academic and activist interests and that would suit the research setting. The work of David Graeber (2009) and Charles Hale (2008) inspired me to employ a methodology that enabled rigorous scholarly research while making political commitments as a researcher. The work of Shannon Speed (2008a) and Joanne Rappaport (2005) guided me in addressing concerns about positionality and the politics of knowledge. The methodology for this dissertation was also profoundly shaped due to the research setting being fraught with violence. As such, the social conditions I encountered upon arrival

in Guerrero significantly influenced the methods and possibilities of my fieldwork. Especially my engagements with community policing featured specific challenges. Since Upoeg struggled against organized crime, the organization willingly and unwillingly became enmeshed in the complex constellation of violence in the region.

This chapter reflects on my practice of doing ethnography, my immersion in the research setting, and provides an account on how my data have been gathered. The first part of this chapter examines anthropological debates about engaged scholarship, positionality in collaboration, and fragmented research sites. These debates provide a frame for the next section in which I talk about my fieldwork and explain why it can best be described as an art of the possible. It introduces the diversity in fieldwork sites and groups under study, addresses the conventional and collaborative methods used during the course of my fieldwork, and touches upon the consequences of doing research in conditions of insecurity. The final section of this chapter turns to the dilemma's of engaged research relations shaped by class, ethnicity and gender hierarchies. My efforts to understand the meanings of educational and security activism in the daily lives of my participants became an act of balancing between various goals, ethics, visions and conditions of safety.

2. Anthropology and Engagements

2.1 Engaged Scholarship

Various scholars agree that during research, participants increasingly demand political commitments, solidarity or proof that the research will be beneficial to them (Speed 2008b, 224). In this sense, activism has often become “a condition or circumstance” of most contemporary fieldwork practice (Marcus 2005, 677). Social justice work is then a precondition of doing fieldwork, not merely a possibility (Goldstein 2012, 37). Long ago, Scheper-Hughes (1995, 418) approached this issue from another angle: Why pursue ethnography if it cannot be used as a tool for critical reflection and for human liberation?

The literature on activist scholarship encompasses a wide array of cross-disciplinary approaches, such as Participatory Action Research or collaborative research, and methodological practices within anthropology, such as public anthropology, engaged anthropology, or militant anthropology (Merry and Low 2010). An important question addressed in this work is how academic research can facilitate social change without compromising rigorous scholarly research practices and principles. “The positivist strain within anthropology remains strong,” writes Goldstein (2012, 43), even though post-structuralists and feminists have pointed out the politically situated character of all knowledge production. Positivists believe that objectivity and methodological rigor are compromised by political engagements. Hale, however, argues that the contradiction between activist research and academic validity does not hold water. He explains how

politically engaged research can lead to thorough academic knowledge when activist scholars make their political commitment explicit and systematically reflect on how this shapes academic understanding (Hale 2001, 14). When activist scholars continuously reflect on their positioning and goals, it enables a careful research practice (Goldstein 2012, 45).

In reflecting on my own methodological approach, I attempted to create order out of the broad range of engaged approaches. At one end of the continuum, scholars regard ethnographic writing and theory building as *the* locus for political engagement. The early work of Nader (1969) is exemplary in this sense as she advocates the study of cultures of power, by "studying up," rather than cultures of the "powerless." The same holds true for Marcus and Fischer's (1996) proposal to voice cultural critique of western societies from subaltern perspectives, and Scheper-Hughes's (1995) ethnographic work that expresses the voices of disenfranchised groups, or her research into globalized oppressive processes such as organ trafficking (Scheper-Hughes 2000). In general, these scholars put their research "products"—that is, ethnographies, concepts, and theories—to work in service of local concerns and marginalized groups. The emancipatory potential of academic research then takes shape in critical writing. These scholars influence public debates, or engage in social policy and advocacy work.

At the other end of the continuum, the research process is considered a space for liberating practices. Scholars aim to democratize the research process by sharing control over the research with participants and by fostering horizontal collaboration (Graeber 2009; Lassiter 2008; Rappaport 2008). This kind of remaking of anthropological research can require explicit political alignment with a particular social group. In its ideal form, such a collaborative research practice allows for horizontal dialogues that shape each phase of the research process (Hale 2006, 97). In this way, research unsettles hierarchies in the production of knowledge. For instance, scholars working in postcolonial contexts increasingly seek to engage research participants as partners, an academic practice also known as decolonizing knowledge (Smith 2013).

The distinctions that I identify among engaged approaches—either more product-centered or process-based—often overlap in practice. For instance, Participatory Action Research (PAR) explicitly combines collaborative efforts and critical writing (see Fals-Borda 1984). It strives for horizontal interaction in which research problems are defined by co-researchers and engages in cycles of reflection in the hope to achieve knowledge as input for social change (Kinson, Pain, and Kesby 2007). Besides the approaches embedded in academic practice, some scholars argue that, at the end of the day, marginalized groups are mostly in need of direct help. Scholars may offer practical guidance or other types of support to the communities in which they conducted research. Speed's (2006) work with Zapatista communities in Chiapas is exemplary. She provided ethnohistorical evidence that enabled an indigenous community to make claims to the ILO 169 Convention.

2.2 Positionality and Collaboration

My research participants included Afromexicans, indigenous people, and *mestizos* from peasant and middle-class backgrounds, ranging from adolescents to adults. In this research setting, my identity as a white, middle-class, female PhD candidate from the Netherlands put me in a position of privilege. To understand the way privilege and power emerge within research practices, feminist theories offer conceptualizations of power as situated within particular intersubjective relationships (Bickham Mendez 2008, 140). My research relationships were shaped by intersected dynamics of ethnicity, class, and gender, which can only be understood in the larger fields of historical and contemporary global North–South relations.

The last decades have seen “an increasing recognition of the historical complicity of social science research in colonialism and the still-existing neocolonial power relations between the researcher and ‘the researched’” (Speed et al. 2009, 304). Indigenous people and Afro-descendants have historically been excluded from knowledge production in anthropology and subjected to misrepresentations. As such, they can have unsympathetic or uncomfortable attitudes toward anthropologists (see King 2007). Local knowledge produced by indigenous intellectuals themselves is at times “marginalized as insufficiently rigorous” by academics (Rappaport 2005, 274). Martínez (2008, 184) has summed up the point nicely: “while anthropologists might not seem to be powerful people, it is a form of power to have the authority and ability to say what is important to study, dictate how it shall be studied, and decide to whom and in what forms the results of the research will be distributed.”

Against this background, I hoped that employing a collaborative approach would address the inequalities in my research relationships. Although my research proposal was already set before entering the field, I looked for forms of collaboration and consultation with my participants as much as the circumstances in the field and my institutional responsibilities allowed. Since the politics of my participants coincided with much of my own anti-racist beliefs and trust in local forms of self-determination and popular education, it seemed only natural to politically commit myself to their struggle. One of the ways to express this commitment was to become a voluntary teacher at the university, like all teachers involved in Unisur. My relationship with the community policing organization was more cautious and complicated, mostly due to safety concerns. Nevertheless, conditions and expectations for collaboration profoundly informed all of my fieldwork encounters.

2.3 Fragmented Ethnography

During her research in Chiapas, Speed (2008a) experienced that constantly spreading conflicts and violence can produce ever-shifting fields. In the presence of rapidly changing

events and movements, Edwards (2007, 348) argues that anthropologists increasingly face fields that are "spatially discontinuous and temporally disjointed." Whether or not fieldwork is therefore in transition, as suggested by Marcus (2002), is beyond the scope of this chapter. But, it is worth recalling that, nowadays, numerous anthropologists employ new methodological approaches to cope with and grasp such "messy" research realities.

Anthropologists have turned to multisited approaches, described by Marcus (1995, 105) as "designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer established some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, positioned logic of association or connection among sites." Rather than "peoples and place" as domain of research, the connections and associations among sites become the focus. For instance, Speed (2008a) set out to write an ethnography of a Zapatista community in Chiapas, but her study became multisited as she followed a human rights discourse through multiple terrains.

Violence can also be a catalyst of the growing range of sites and organizations in which a researcher becomes involved. When conflict spreads across fieldwork sites, ethnographers have to deal with highly politicized and fast-changing fields. Ethnographers can also be forced to turn their attention to violence because it is impossible to ignore, or make research choices based on their personal safety (Rodgers 2007, 448). Such research settings stir intense emotions, political stakes, and unexpected circumstances that influence the entire fieldwork practice (Nordstrom and Robben 1996, 3). In response to the dangers and difficulties experienced under these fieldwork circumstances, different techniques have been designed to mitigate the risks: Nordstrom (1997) talks about "runway anthropology," and Sluka (2007) of "danger management strategies." When dealing with violence, Bourgois (1995, 18) mentions the risk for anthropologists of falling prey to sensationalism, what he calls "pornography of violence."

To offer an account of how this dissertation came about, I draw on these methodological insights about collaborations, fragmented sites, and violent settings. Over the course of my fieldwork in the Costa Chica of Guerrero, my field became more scattered and unstable than I had expected. I conducted research in the different university departments and followed the pathways of my research participants across Guerrero's regions. Furthermore, the affiliations of the university drew my attention toward a particular community policing organization, in turn producing complex new associations and more sites of research. And, importantly, the changing conditions of conflict and violence that troubled the research area considerably influenced my fieldwork. Drawing on personal stories and academic considerations, I next take the reader along my research journey to show that my ethnographic fieldwork sometimes resembled what Hannerz (2003, 413) called "an art of the possible."

3. A Fieldwork Chronology

3.1 Cuajinicuilapa and the University

The fieldwork for this study was conducted over a period of eleven months, divided over one shorter and two longer periods, in 2014 and 2015. Cuajinicuilapa was my home base for the entire fieldwork period. It is a municipality located in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero, close to the border of the state of Oaxaca. The Pacific breeze offers some relief in Cuajinicuilapa's summer, when the temperature hovers around 45 degrees Celsius. The municipality of Cuajinicuilapa has 25,922 inhabitants, of whom an estimated 10,000 reside in the largest town and commercial center of the municipality also named Cuajinicuilapa, or "Cuaji."¹⁶ I rented a room in the town center, on the premises of a family that was involved in Unisur.

The dry lowlands and extensive plains make agriculture and livestock the principal productive activities for Cuajileños. The prominence of cattle ranchers in Cuajinicuilapa is hard to overlook since livestock supplies are for sale on every corner of Cuajinicuilapa's main road. The only higher education institution present in Cuajinicuilapa during my research, the faculty of the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (UAG), offers Veterinary Medicine. Cattle rancher families are the more well off in Cuajinicuilapa, while many Cuajileños face high levels of poverty. Over forty percent of the inhabitants suffered extreme poverty in 2010, in the form of illiteracy, lack of primary school education, absence of electricity, drainage, and running water.¹⁷ These socioeconomic conditions have made migration an attractive option. Over the years, many Cuajileños have migrated to North Carolina. The southern US state nowadays accommodates a large migrant community from Guerrero's coastal area.

Cuajinicuilapa's population is diverse, with indigenous people, mainly Mixtecos and Amuzgos, *mestizos*, and a large population of Afromexicans, descendants of black slaves and servants who were brought to the coastal area during colonial times, at the end of the sixteenth century. Cuajinicuilapa is locally known as the heart of Guerrero's Afromexican region, an area that extends along Guerrero's coast, all the way into Oaxaca. The Museum of Afromestizo Cultures (Museo de las culturas afromestizas "Vicente Guerrero Saldaña") in Cuajinicuilapa is illustrative, since it is the only such museum in the region. The town of Cuajinicuilapa is also the place from which NGOs and activists struggle for the recognition of Afromexicans as a minority group within Mexico's nation state.

¹⁶ Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL). 2010. "Resumen Municipal." Accessed on June 13, 2016. www.microrregiones.gob.mx/catloc/LocdeMun.aspx?tipo=clave&campo=loc&ent=12&mun=023.

¹⁷ SEDESOL and Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL). 2010. "Informe anual sobre la situación de pobreza y rezago social: Cuajinicuilapa Guerrero." Accessed June 13, 2016. http://www.dof.gob.mx/SEDESOL/Guerrero_023.pdf.

In the rural outskirts of the town of Cuajinicuilapa, four buildings disrupt the familiar landscape. They catch the eye because of their round constructions and red conical roofs. These so-called *redondas* are wattle and daub houses based on houses built by Afromexicans during and after the colonial period. In an attempt to revive Afromexican culture and history, the university Unisur houses Cuajinicuilapa's department in these buildings. Other Unisur departments, for instance in areas where indigenous people make up the majority population, are equally adapted to local cultural settings. As far as the *redondas* are concerned, three of the buildings serve interchangeably as classrooms and a dormitory. The university radio station, which broadcasts programs and regional music throughout the area, operates in the remaining *redonda*. Besides the *redondas*, the university site has toilet facilities and a kitchen, although the latter was still under construction at the time of research.

Since Unisur has a system of semi-classroom education, in which classes take place during two extended weekends every month, these weekends accounted for peaks in my ethnographic fieldwork. I alternated my teaching responsibilities with classroom ethnography, understood as the study of behavior, activities, interaction, and discourse in educational settings (see Watson-Gegeo 1997; González Apodaca and Rockwell 2012). I started teaching English during my first fieldwork period and, once I familiarized myself with the university's pedagogy, I dedicated my second and third fieldwork period to teaching the first-year course "Territory, Culture and Identity." I also supervised students who wrote their thesis. While my work as a teacher allowed me to contribute to the project, it also facilitated continuous participant observation and engagement in informal conversations. I studied the standard ways of talking about the university and distinctions and categories employed by students and teachers to make sense of the project and the place it occupied in their lives. More specifically, I studied the discourses and practices of difference and belonging that permeated university life and paid close attention to the pedagogy and curriculum. It helped me to identify the political and cultural ideals behind the university project. Once the weekends of classes came to an end, and most students headed back home to their communities throughout the region, as only some of them lived in Cuajinicuilapa, I studied student life outside school. I worked as a sidekick at Unisur radio for a period and spent my time hanging out with students and joining them in everyday and political activities. I studied how they talked about themselves, the university, and their community, and I paid particular attention to the ways in which students carried out university projects in their communities.

After spending some time in town, I became aware of the disturbing side of Cuajinicuilapa's reality. As references to violence entered into everyday conversations, it became clear to me that a local *cacique* family was spreading fear and violence. They were said to be involved in drug trafficking and extortion, among other criminal activities. Insecurity shaped the movements and imaginations of students as they contemplated their future paths. This aspect of social life became part of my fieldwork and feelings of

insecurity came to influence my personal and professional conduct.

Violent fieldwork settings can produce strong feelings of alienation and disorientation (Robben and Nordstrom 1996, 13). On one particular occasion, Unisur student Carolina took me along an afternoon stroll through her neighborhood in Cuajinicuilapa, pointing out the specific corners and abandoned houses that reminded her of excessive violent events, which proved to be abundant. At these moments, I temporarily experienced a breakdown of my own points of reference in terms of security. Even so, my identity as Unisur teacher generally enabled me to feel relatively safe in Cuajinicuilapa. During the first week upon my arrival, a Unisur graduate took me to the town hall, where she introduced me to the chief of police as the new Unisur teacher from the Netherlands. In one of my field reports, I wrote about the encounter: “I was introduced to the head of the municipal police ‘for him to keep watch over my safety,’ others tell me he is part of the *narco* group here.” Half a year later, in October 2014, a group of armed men assassinated him, while on duty escorting primary school children during a parade.¹⁸ Local gossip linked the murder to his involvement in organized crime. At this point in time, I already understood that my presentation to the police chief was above all a message to those who ruled the town about my local associations. I was connected to the Unisureños and was therefore to be left alone. At least, that was how people at Unisur thought about it. Nevertheless, students and teachers alike were always cautious in and around Cuajinicuilapa.

3.2 Collaborative Methods

As Cuajinicuilapa was my home town, I started my collaborative research efforts with participants living nearby. I held thirteen conversations with Unisur leaders and students to discuss the research approach, concepts, and research plan I had designed before going into the field. I took on an apprenticeship role to foster mutual exchange and encourage critique and recommendations. I attempted to overcome the conventional distinction in ethnographic inquiry between “categories of practice,” employed by participants during conversations and interviews, and “categories of analysis,” as the exclusive work of researchers during the process of data interpretation (Rappaport 2008, 22). Ideally, the research conversations would allow us to exchange thoughts about categories of analysis and set the stage for longer-term collaborations.

During the research conversations I held with two Unisur leaders, I planned to discuss a written summary of my research plan. The conversations turned out differently. When I appeared at the house of a Unisur leader in Cuajinicuilapa, he was rocking

¹⁸ Briseño, Héctor. 2014. “Ejecutan al director de seguridad pública del municipio guerrerense de Cuajinicuilapa.” *La Jornada Política*, October 28, 2014. Accessed June 13, 2016. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2014/10/28/politica/006n1pol>.

comfortably in his hammock while he said: "I don't understand your concepts very well, but let me tell you something."¹⁹ I spent the rest of the afternoon listening to his stories. Equipped with an eccentric way of storytelling, he shared anecdotes of past university events by imitating parts of conversations, including the bodily movements of the people involved in the stories. Rather than discussing concepts and theory, he used his personal experiences in narratives to link contemporary issues to societal debates. Evidently, my formats of "collaboration" did not resonate with those of my participants. I did end up listening to his advice and insights regarding my research, something we would repeat often throughout my research.

To facilitate my research conversations with students, I made use of a conceptual map that visualized my research plan. Students commented on missing angles in my research approach, such as comparative studies with other intercultural universities, or offered practical advice to organize student meetings. Students also raised questions about the relevance or accuracy of certain concepts I used. This is a list of my notes of the recommendations that I collected during these talks:

- He tells me that I can only understand Unisur if I compare the university with other schools and projects.
- Study the different experiences of students at the various Unisur departments.
- Participatory methods: he suggests to organize a sleepover or get-together, with popcorn and a movie afterwards, to get students involved.
- It is important to study what Upoeg gets done and to identify what does not work out.
- Study Upoeg and its horizontal and vertical tendencies.
- It is interesting to study how Unisur has changed over the years, and if the project meets the expectations of its founders. (She seems to doubt it.)
- About interviews with Unisur students: I need to interview those students who suffer the most, the poorest students.
- Study the history of the university and the persons who founded it.
- Study the internal rules of the various community policing groups and compare them.
- Study Unisur/Upoeg and its various branches: health, security, politics, education, policing.
- Ask the Crac and Upoeg what they think about Unisur.
- Study the perspectives of Unisur teachers: the newer teachers and the older ones.
- Study the Crac's and Upoeg's dependency on the state.
- Announce my participatory sessions in a university plenary.

¹⁹ Conversation, August 29, 2014.

As will become clear in the empirical chapters of this dissertation, I took many of the student recommendations to heart. In general, however, I did find it hard to move away from an interviewer–interviewee dynamic during these talks. Students often started to deliberate about the possible answers to my research questions rather than giving feedback on my approach itself. Nevertheless, these conversations were a useful way to warm up students for another kind of collaborative practice, that is, Participatory Action Research (PAR) sessions.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I organized a total of ten PAR sessions with groups ranging from two to twelve students, at four Unisur departments. The applied techniques varied from drawing, storytelling, diagramming, and the spiderweb technique.²⁰ These sessions served as moments to creatively express and rethink matters that concerned either the university or community policing, and opened up space for the exchange of experiences and collective interpretation. Ideally, the sessions would generate insights that could benefit the everyday (activist) practice of its practitioners.

To offer some insight into the workings of PAR methods, I will describe how I employed the spiderweb technique during a session in Cuajinicuilapa in December 2014. The main purpose of this particular session was to collectively reflect upon the state of affairs of community policing in the area. Participatory sessions always consisted of two parts: first, I employed an interactive technique to motivate the sharing of experiences, stories, and understandings; subsequently, I used visual methods as a way to organize our thoughts and collectively draw conclusions. For the first part, I made a large spiderweb on the floor using cords and tape. Each leg of the web represented a theme up for discussion, such as “integrity of community police.” Both ends of every leg indicated oppositions, such as “trust” or “distrust,” written on small pieces of paper. By placing small stones somewhere along the different legs, students defined their own position regarding the particular theme. After the students had covered the spiderweb with stones, we were able to start the group discussion. First, we identified the similarities and differences in opinions visualized by the spiderweb, after which the students were asked to explain their choices with examples. In the meantime, each student was responsible for writing down keywords on issues that came up in the discussion. Once the discussion about the spiderweb ended, I guided the group to the next part of the session. Now, all the keywords jotted down during the discussion about the spiderweb were used to engage in a final reflection about what we had learned about community policing.

These sessions enhanced the joint gathering of data about community policing or university affairs, issues that permeated the daily lives of students. I experienced these

²⁰ I enrolled in the course “Participatory Action Research” at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of the Erasmus University Rotterdam in March–April 2014. During the course, Kees Biekart, associate professor in Political Sociology, introduced various approaches and debates concerning PAR, and trained MA and PhD students in the usage of PAR methods.

sessions as most rewarding because of the way we worked together in thinking through themes. These sessions embodied the closest attempt to address the politics of knowledge in my research as it included the collective interpretation of experiences, often the exclusive task of the anthropologist. However, it was only part of my research efforts and especially limited in the sense of how it translated into this dissertation. I will return to this at the end of this chapter when I discuss the dilemmas involved in engaged research.

3.3 Multiple University Departments and Connections

My fieldwork was not confined to Cuajinicuilapa, nor by educational activism as a field of interest. I was drawn to unexpected places, conflicts, and new collaborations that made my field experience more fragmented. First of all, the geographical dispersion of Unisur's departments made for multiple field sites. The six university departments included the Costa Chica region (in the communities of Cuajinicuilapa and El Mesón), the Montaña region (in the communities Santa Cruz del Rincón, Metlatónoc, and Hueycantenango), and the Acapulco district (in the neighborhood Llano Largo). Besides my in-depth study of Unisur in Cuajinicuilapa, I wanted to study the ways in which university discourses, educational practices, and political imaginaries took shape in different departments. What is more, to comprehend the origins of the university and the way it operates through networks of leaders, communities, and various civil society groups, I needed to bring myself close to Unisur members in various parts of Guerrero. The simultaneous university schedule of all Unisur departments, which means that teaching takes place during the same weekends in all departments, and my teaching responsibilities in Cuajinicuilapa at times hindered my efforts to study other university locations. However, I managed to become familiar with all departments, except for Metlatónoc due to difficult access. I extended the scope of my fieldwork mainly to the university departments in El Mesón, Llano Largo, and Santa Cruz del Rincón.

During my field trips to other university departments, I employed a wide array of data collection methods to study the specific experiences and the institutional and social contacts of the university. I conducted semi-structured interviews and held informal conversations with university founders, leaders, and students; participated in staff meetings and university events such as inaugurations, cultural festivities, seminars, fora, anniversaries, marches, and meetings with government officials; and reviewed official documents, and the academic program.

By moving around the university departments, I learned how the university was connected to numerous civil society organizations. During my first fieldwork period, one of the university's affiliations caught my attention specifically. Students and teachers talked about a community policing organization called Upoeg. Its leaders are people with hearts in the right place, one teacher said: "without such community processes, Unisur

would not exist.”²¹ Students from one of the localities where Upoeg had emerged said the organization had chased away organized crime and calmed things down: “some villagers think they are scary, because of the rifles, others finally feel safe.”²² Other students were cautious and mentioned Upoeg’s close relationship with important political figures as reason to doubt the organization. At this moment in time, in 2014, Upoeg stood out as an important driving force of social change in the Costa Chica communities and beyond. As Upoeg was closely linked to the university project, especially in El Mesón, where Upoeg leaders were co-responsible for bringing Unisur to the community, it seemed only natural to incorporate community policing into my research.

I ended up studying organizations that played important roles in public and political debates in Guerrero. Their activities often reached the regional news and leaders were vocal advocates. This brought me to consider how to deal with questions regarding the anonymity of my participants and the locations of study. I use pseudonyms for all participants mentioned in this dissertation, except for those leaders for whom an alias was unfeasible because of their public roles and the available documentation of the events analyzed. This differs per empirical chapter. In chapters 4 and 5 about Upoeg, only Bruno Plácido Valerio is not anonymized because of his established role as principal leader of Upoeg. In chapter 6 about the emergence and development of the university project, the same goes for the academic leaders Joaquín Flores Félix, Pedro de Jesús, Bulmaro Muñoz, and Bulmaro García. In chapter 7, all my participants are given pseudonyms. I have applied the same approach to the locations mentioned in this dissertation. I have used pseudonyms for communities and towns in my ethnographic descriptions, except for the places where the university departments are located and where well-known public events related to Upoeg have taken place (such as El Mesón, Ahuacachahue, El Pericón, El Ocotito, Xaltianguis, and Tierra Colorada). In my ethnographic descriptions of Upoeg, I more often refer to Guerrero’s general regions (Costa Chica, Montaña, Centro) because cross-regional dynamics are important for the analysis of the organization.

3.4 Researching Upoeg

After including Upoeg in my research, my travels reached another level. In 2013, the Mexican National Commission of Human Rights documented that Upoeg was active in twenty-one municipalities of Guerrero.²³ Upoeg’s main operative territory during the time of research encompassed the Costa Chica district (the municipalities of Marquelia, Copala, Cruz Grande, San Marcos, Ayutla de los Liberes, and Tecoaapa), the Centro region (in the municipalities of Xaltianguis, Tierra Colorada, El Ocotito, and Petaquillas),

²¹ Conversation, February 25, 2014.

²² Conversation, February 27, 2014.

²³ Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH). 2013. “Informe Especial sobre los Grupos de Autodefensa y la Seguridad Pública en el Estado de Guerrero.” D.F Mexico. Accessed July 21, 2017. http://www.cndh.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/2016_IE_gruposautodefensa.pdf.

the Montaña region (in the municipality of Ometepec), and, during my last fieldwork period in late 2015, Upoeg also moved into the Sierra region (in the municipalities of San Miguel Totolapan, Heliodoro Castillo, Leonardo Bravo, and Chilpancingo). It goes without saying that I spent many hours on the road. I made use of my time in collective taxis and on buses by writing down my observations, emotions, and reflections on my smart phone. Back home in Cuajinicuilapa, I would elaborate my messy telephone field notes and transfer my jotted-down notebook recordings of the field trip to my laptop. My departure from my home in Cuajinicuilapa always gave rise to mixed feelings. I enjoyed making field trips but also felt vulnerable as a woman traveling alone into areas infested with violent crime, where tourists were rarely spotted.

As far as access was concerned, my identity as Unisur teacher helped me in approaching Upoeg members. After all, Upoeg and Unisur both had their origins in the same historical network of social movements and still worked together. Furthermore, students living in communities with Upoeg presence often acted as brokers between me and its members. In fact, some students shared my curiosity in community policing and decided to dedicate their thesis projects to the subject. As such, it happened that we teamed up and jointly visited Upoeg members and local meetings to learn more about what was taking place at the heart of the organization.

To study security practices, authority claims, and the social work of the organization, I conducted semi-structured interviews with leaders and occasionally accompanied them in their everyday work. I also attended public assemblies, internal meetings, and encounters with state functionaries or partners to get a sense of the organization's social and institutional embedding. To gather information about the ways in which local people made sense of the community police presence, I talked with them about tensions, accomplishments, and personal participation in the work of community policing. I employed press research to keep informed about developments in the region and to identify public discourses and map out chronologies of Upoeg events.²⁴ For the bulk of data collected on Upoeg, I often opted for using old-fashioned notebooks. The political sensitivity surrounding the organization made me hesitant to record interviews.

My engagement with Upoeg gave my fieldwork another dimension, especially in view of the ever-changing conditions of insecurity. External threats and internal conflicts that engulfed the organization often changed the contours of my field, as safe localities could suddenly become highly conflictive spaces. My risk calculation determined my movements in the field, reminiscent of what Sluka (2007) calls "danger management." For instance, when I was eager to attend a regional assembly of Upoeg in November 2015, I weighed my curiosity against the possible risks. I knew that the assembly would take place on the outskirts of a community, which would make it more difficult to reach and

²⁴ I frequently consulted the following regional newspapers: *El Sur de Acapulco*, *El Faro de la Costa Chica*, *La Jornada Guerrero*.

harder to leave independently in order to travel back before dark. The meeting was held in a town already on edge because of the recent arrest of criminals by Upoeg. I consulted my local sources about the security conditions, but received mixed advice. In the end, I decided to stay at home this time.

These types of calculations shaped my possibilities for data collection. Besides the insecurity that impeded my access to certain areas, internal factionalism at times polarized the organization and forced me to distance myself from some participants, by then labeled dissidents. Sometimes, eruptions of violence even downright frustrated my work, for instance, when conflicts within Upoeg led to an armed confrontation in late March 2015. And, most sadly, Miguel Ángel Jiménez Blanco, one of the Upoeg leaders I had the privilege of meeting as an exceptionally dedicated leader, was killed in August 2015 in his home town.²⁵ When conflicts and violence intensified, I limited my research about Upoeg mostly to the specific places where I held close contacts with Unisur students and their families.

Rather than planning and stability, fragmentation and haphazardness more often characterized my fieldwork with Upoeg. A drama that deeply affected my fieldwork happened at the start of my second fieldwork period, when, in September 2014, forty-three Ayotzinapa students disappeared in Iguala. The political crisis that followed left nobody in Mexico untouched. I joined Unisur in marches in Mexico City and local protests in Cuajinicuilapa, and went to Iguala for Upoeg's search parties. The Ayotzinapa drama added more localities, political practices, and forms of collaboration to my research.

4. Engagement: Dilemmas and Reflections

The collaborative approach of my research was not realized in the form that I had envisioned at the outset. The dilemmas produced by this approach were at times daunting and difficult. Comparable to Goldstein's (2012, 37) experiences in activist anthropology, "my experience has been equal parts failure and success, as perhaps all such experiences must be." Engagements at times overwhelmed me and generated unforeseen dilemmas. This final part of this chapter addresses the possibilities and limits of engagement. I will look at the assertion of ambiguity and hierarchy during collaborations, and difficulties concerning critique, violence, and gender dynamics.

²⁵ I wrote an article about the political activism of Miguel Ángel Jiménez Blanco in a Dutch Latin America magazine: "Mexicaanse activist in nasleep van Iguala-drama vermoord." *La Chispa*, August 13, 2015. <http://www.lachispa.eu/artikelen/mexicaanse-activist-in-nasleep-van-igualadrama-vermoord>.

4.1 Beyond Rosy Collaborations

The people and organizations I encountered in the field at times cherished specific expectations when it came to our collaboration. Immersed in a politically tense context, it was only natural that my presence triggered people's personal or political agendas. Likewise, I had my own research interests. Especially my positionality as a white European produced expectations. On various occasions, I was asked by individuals or organizations to teach English classes to the communities they represented. This produced practical problems with respect to time, which I tended to manage by opening up the English classes I taught at Unisur to others. However, it also produced some personal issues on my part. Illustrative in this sense was a trip with Upoeg to the National Human Rights Commission in Mexico City. One of the reasons Upoeg asked me to come along was because my presence at the meeting indicated international support for Upoeg's demands—in this case, expert assistance in the search for clandestine graves in Iguala. Whereas I sought horizontal collaborations, I was sometimes politically useful for my participants precisely because of my "transnational social capital" (Bickham Mendez 2008, 145). I learned to make concessions to the political realities of my field.

The image of a rosy relationship between engaged scholars and local organizations is further complicated by the conflicts that often accompany processes of social change. When scholars collaborate with such organizations, they almost inevitably become part of their conflicts. Not all members of local organizations have common visions and internal conflicts and divisiveness are likely to occur (Bickham Mendez 2008, 153). I found this out when a long-lingering conflict among university personnel reached a peak during my second fieldwork period. Personal animosities and political differences temporarily divided the university in Cuajinicuilapa. As an ethnographer, I feared losing part of my research participants by taking a stance, but as a university teacher and collaborator, I felt the need to take part in the discussions even though I saw the tensions more as the result of personal issues rather than political differences. I experienced great difficulty navigating this conflictive environment and some participants blamed me for my *de facto* neutrality, thereby undermining our relationship. In one of my field reports I wrote: "It hasn't been a pleasant time, since I have friends in both groups who constantly pressure me to take sides and are annoyed when I talk to people of the other group. It was particularly unfortunate that this affected the participatory method I organized last Thursday. The fifteen students present at the session all brought the university tensions with them, which considerably marked the afternoon." With regard to the PAR session, I organized smaller group sessions from then onward to make sure everyone felt comfortable. When I returned to the field for the third fieldwork period, I was relieved to see the dispute had been resolved.

The factions that emerged within Upoeg were even more difficult to navigate in terms of fieldwork and ethics. As I will describe in chapter 4 of this dissertation, various

factors contributed to a split in the organization, causing violent confrontations between dissidents and Upoeg members. About halfway during my fieldwork, people also started to get killed due to the conflicts, a trend that continued after I concluded my fieldwork. Since this violence happened over the course of my fieldwork, it raised questions about my position toward the organization, in the tradition of engaged scholars working with indigenous organizations such as Charles Hale (2006), Shannon Speed (2008b), María Teresa Sierra (2017), and Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo (2017). What happens with solidarity when violence erupts within the movement ranks? For the case of Upoeg, community and regional assemblies were the mechanisms to control the organization and hold its members accountable in the case of arbitrary violence. Nevertheless, the complexity of the situation—an increase in violent incidents suffered by Upoeg as well as the organization's involvement in violence itself—made it hard to define my engagement and made me adopt a more dispassionate perspective.

Speed (2008b, 230) urged engaged researchers to frequently ask themselves: Do you maintain a critical focus even though you make political commitments? Rather than asking *if* I maintained a critical focus, I struggled more with the question of *how* to deal with critics and give shape to uncertain political commitments. I wished to avoid falling into the trap of criticizing grassroots organizations from a comfortable and privileged position as a European scholar on the one hand, while neither wanting to lapse into relativism on the other. At the same time, romanticized portrayals of activists are not useful for the groups under study and activism in general, and unjustifiable to the academic public. As such, I attempted to strike a balance. I found that critical writing was in line with what the situation demanded, rather than more collaborative engagements such as with Unisur. It was a way of dealing with my emotions and ethical concerns. This gave me the necessary space to raise topics that seemed both academically pertinent and useful for a broader audience. For instance, it led me to ask why factional violence emerged in some of the localities where Upoeg was active and not in others. And, I came to focus on the specific branch of Upoeg's legal activism in chapter 5, as a novel cross-ethnic activist expression combined with grassroots policing.

4.2 Hierarchy Reasserts Itself

“She is one of us, Unisur,” a student told somebody inquiring about my affiliation during an Afromexican event.²⁶ I enjoyed the moments when participants merged me into the Unisur community, since I interpreted them as signs of trust and that my collaborative efforts were well received. However, tensions rooted in our research relations were never far away. A case in point was the start of a PAR session in the indigenous community of

²⁶ Fieldnotes, November 4, 2015.

²⁷ Participatory Action Research session “Story Telling,” November 11, 2015.

Santa Cruz del Rincón. As part of my introduction to the students, I presented myself as an anthropologist. "Then we start off badly," one student stated, after which I explained my intentions to collectively engage in interpretations during this session. "That is alright, but you have to know about . . ." and he continued to talk about researchers who had come to do research and had misrepresented the situation of his community.²⁷ We ended up having constructive conversations and he participated actively in the session. However, I could not engage in the same way with every instance of critique toward my research. When I asked permission to join a workshop about the empowerment of Afromexican women in which Unisur students participated, I was not allowed to do so on the grounds that it would be colonization all over again. This incident triggered doubts about whether I was failing my political-academic intentions. According to Davies (2010), such states of disorientation can trigger alterations and contemplations in the field. For me, the emotional discomfort functioned as a way to keep reflecting on my research relationships and to challenge my analytical views in regard to the field.

Drawing on the work of Joanne Rappaport, Martínez (2008, 203) argues that hierarchy tends to reassert itself in collaborations between northern academicians and southern research partners, making it an illusion to think that horizontal collaboration can be achieved. In terms of my own collaborative ambitions, the final stage of my research turned out most problematic. In terms of authorship, engaged research often runs into the same problems as conventional research (Wolf 1996, 32). That is, once we write, the politics of knowledge return with little distinction. In other words, despite my efforts to engage participants in collective deliberations in the field, turning the material into a dissertation unequivocally implied my final control over the research. As such, I encountered difficulties in finding a place for the descriptions and outcomes of the PAR sessions in the chapters of this dissertation. The multiplicity of issues that unfolded during such sessions made it hard for the data to speak to the material retrieved through other methods and fit lines of argumentation. In hindsight, I would have liked to present the PAR sessions more in equal dialogue with other types of data. It would have mirrored the voices of researcher and participants, or, in the words of Rappaport (2005, 85), "situate indigenous interpretations on an equal footing with academic analysis." Instead, I now leveled the participatory data to other data. I included parts of PAR sessions in chapter 6, where it reflects student perspectives on the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of the university. In chapter 7, I included parts of a session that illustrates student experiences with Unisur's ambition of bringing improvement to rural communities. I hope future research will allow me to experiment with more participatory writing styles and analysis.

4.3 Reflections on Gender Dynamics

Female anthropologists sometimes strategically use essentialist notions of womanhood to advance their fieldwork (Wolf 1996, 9). Although I prefer to shy away from such strategies, because they can reproduce stereotypical gender roles, this turned out to be less straightforward in the reality of the field. Being a woman at times indeed opened doors. I should be glad that some of the leaders are *mujeriegos* (lady lovers), one participant once told me, because it made it easier to be invited to join them on work trips. But, by opening doors, it also produced dilemmas, which were as much academic and political, as ethical and personal.

I had difficulties coping with manifestations of *machismo*, I wrote in one of my first field reports. I learned that being a female researcher in the predominantly masculine environment of Upoeg was challenging at times. Such problems are in no way particular to research experiences in Mexico. Female ethnographers who conduct research in various countries and settings recount similar stories (see Kloß 2017; Sharp and Kremer 2006). Female researchers can become involved in a relationship of supposed dependency with male participants, especially when these men are so-called gatekeepers. It can happen that participants cross certain bodily or social boundaries that anthropologists in daily life would not have accepted (Kloß 2017, 404).

During my fieldwork, I sometimes employed strategies of protective withdrawal (Davies 2010, 83). I partly worked around the male participants who provoked a sense of unease, and focused on others with whom I felt comfortable. And, on the positive side, my gendered experiences in the field also guided me to research topics. For instance, as I disclosed my difficulties in dealing with particular men to my female participants, they gave me practical advice and shared their own experiences: “When I tell [Unisur student] Lupita what happened with a participant who made sexual advances, she tells me something similar had happened to her in the political organization where she is active. The leader wanted to take her along everywhere and have her always by his side, supposedly to learn. After political meetings, she always had to stay a while to chat with him. . . . Now she doesn’t go to the office [of the political organization] anymore.”²⁸ In chapter 7, I draw upon female student experiences and localized struggles for women’s rights in the university setting.

²⁸ Fieldnotes, November 29, 2014.

5. Concluding Comments

This chapter provided an overview of my choices, methods, positioning, and emotions in the field, and showed, accordingly, how these shaped my interpretations and writing. Violence and collaborative engagements especially complicated my research and raised particular ethical and practical challenges. The violent setting required precautions and danger management, leading partly to research marked by fragmentation. My collaborative efforts enriched the research by partly addressing issues concerning the politics of knowledge and by producing data that, without engagement, would have been hard to achieve. However, at times, the dilemmas generated by my engagements were daunting. I became entangled in internal conflicts, which put pressure on my solidarity and relationships in the field. The limits of my collaborative ambitions unequivocally surfaced in the writing of the dissertation. I hope to have contributed to identifying and grappling the dilemmas that come with collaborative research projects, which will never be free of tensions and contradictions. The same holds true for the specific gender-related issues that female anthropologists face in the field. I would urge researchers to devise plans before going into the field that prepare them for potential difficulties while also recognizing that problems are likely to arise anyway. In both cases, ambiguities and tensions can also be the basis for new scholarly insights. Finally, I would urge university departments to create institutional spaces for researchers and students to effectively deal with stressful experiences during fieldwork.

3

Setting the Stage: Popular Struggles for Democracy, Economic Justice, and Rights in Guerrero

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a broader background of the activism studied in this dissertation. I explore the sociopolitical contours of the state of Guerrero and its history of popular struggles, for which it is necessary to include particular national trends and developments. More than twenty years ago, Mexican anthropologist Armando Bartra (1996) coined the term “Guerrero *bronco*” (rough Guerrero) to characterize the southern Mexican state’s social and political culture. It refers to the state’s record of high levels of social mobilization and radicalization of popular movements, and especially the violent rule to which Guerrero’s population has been subjected. In reference to the latter, Bartra (2000, 16) describes: “One of the unwritten norms of its political culture is that neither reason nor rights matter, only force.”

Ever since the state was founded in 1849, peasants, teachers, and indigenous peoples have been at the forefront of popular struggles. They have turned to elections, mass mobilizations, guerrilla tactics, municipal takeovers, and coalition building to change Guerrero’s political structures, social and ethnic hierarchies, and economic relations. Over the years, reformists became revolutionary guerrillas, and struggles over socioeconomic inclusion and local democracy came to intersect with issues of culture and gender. Importantly, the political actions of Guerrero’s popular class have often transcended the level of the state itself. Some even argue that struggles on Guerrero’s countryside have shaped almost every important political conflict in modern Mexico (Aviña 2014, 2). The interaction between grassroots political processes and state formation constitutes the “fundamental problematique in Mexican history” (Joseph and Buchenau 2013, 5). In this chapter, I examine Guerrero’s particularities in terms of activism and how these have developed in interplay with changing political configurations.

I employ a chronological structure. In section 2, I start with the struggles that made Guerrero an independent state within the Mexican federation in the wake of the country’s independence (1821), and briefly examine how the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) unfolded in Guerrero. I show how peasant demands shaped the postrevolutionary era, while *caciques* inserted themselves into a new corporatist regime. Subsequently, popular struggles for socioeconomic reform and democracy eventually morphed into guerrilla struggles and a dirty war during the 1960s and 1970s. The militarized counterinsurgency campaigns, and the violent repression of civil movements in general, are indispensable

to understand civic action in modern Guerrero (Bartra 1996, 11). This is the topic of section 3. To understand the ways in which popular organizing shifted in the 1980s, I then turn to the political reforms adopted in these years in section 4. While neoliberal political and economic reforms deeply restructured Mexican society, economy, and politics, older struggles over federalism and ethnic-cultural rights regained significance. This complex process is the topic of section 5. In the section that follows, I take a closer look at two indigenous organizations that defined the course of multicultural politics in Guerrero. The Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular (CG500) spearheaded indigenous struggles in Guerrero, and also played a significant role in national indigenous politics. Furthermore, the Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias – Policía Comunitaria (Crac-PC) has been referred to as “perhaps the indigenous movement with the greatest resistance and success ever seen in the state” (Ávila 2009, 356). Both organizations were important forerunners of the groups and organizations under study in this dissertation. In section 7, I turn to the contemporary reconfigurations of violence in Guerrero and Mexico more generally, while I address civil society responses to growing conditions of insecurity in section 8. In the conclusion, I identify continuities and shifts in regional historical grassroots strategies and aspirations to situate the emergence of Upoeg and Unisur. Furthermore, I reflect upon how older struggles in new contexts bring the organizations under study before specific challenges. But, first, I introduce the reader to Guerrero’s specific location and socio-geographical features as they have shaped regional conflicts substantially.

The state’s northern part borders on the states of Mexico and Morelos. The latter served as a breeding ground for revolutionary Zapatismo at the beginning of the twentieth century. Guerrero’s eastern neighbors are the states of Puebla and Oaxaca; the latter is known for its indigenous organizing. In Guerrero, about fifteen percent of the population speaks an indigenous language and thirty-four percent self-identifies as indigenous.²⁹ Furthermore, the state’s western border is formed by the state of Michoacán and the Pacific Ocean. Its harbors and beaches make Guerrero economically attractive to outside investors. The city of Acapulco is connected to Mexico City by a toll road that has brought tourists to Guerrero’s coastal hub for decades. The accessibility of Acapulco stands in sharp contrast to other parts of Guerrero, which, up until today, are more isolated. Even though over half of Guerrero’s estimated 3.5 million people live in urban areas, Guerrero is generally seen as a rural state. Almost fifty percent of its population lives in towns with less than five thousand inhabitants.³⁰ Often living in dispersed villages, the rural population engages

²⁹ INEGI. 2015. “Principales resultados de la Encuesta Intercensal 2015 Guerrero.” Accessed February 11, 2019. http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/inter_censal/estados2015/702825079772.pdf.

³⁰ In comparison, seventy-eight percent of Mexico’s population lives in urban areas, while twenty-two percent live in rural communities: INEGI. 2010. “Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010 Guerrero.” Accessed February 11, 2019. <https://datos.gob.mx/busca/dataset/censo-de-poblacion-y-vivienda-2010-principales-resultados-por-localidad-iter/resource/e1f863b5-7378-44a4-bc35-68180ee6645e>.

mainly in subsistence agriculture, in addition to commodity production or seasonal wage employment. More than forty thousand rural workers, predominately indigenous, migrate yearly to work temporarily in other Mexican states or the United States.³¹ This migration is mostly driven by poverty. In 2010, Guerrero was the state with the highest level of marginalization in the country.³² In 2016, sixty-four percent of Guerrero's population faced "poverty" while twenty-three percent of the people lived in "extreme poverty."³³ Socioeconomic opportunities in Guerrero differ substantially across its diverse socio-geographical regions (see Espinoza Damián and Meza Castillo 2000, 75–77).

The state of Guerrero is made up of seven subregions that, together, are made up of eighty-one municipalities. The Norte region, with Taxco and Iguala as important urban centers, stands out because of its high mountains and extractive mining industry of gold, zinc, silver, and lead. Mining, especially silver, has a long history in Taxco, but, over the last decade, Guerrero's extractive industries have substantially spread across the territory after the discoveries of new mining potential.³⁴ In 2012, six hundred mining concessions were in the hands of national and international investors, the latter mainly from Canada.³⁵ Furthermore, the Norte region also hosts a substantial indigenous population, mainly Nahuas, who live close to the Balsas river that flows into the Centro region. The latter region holds the capital city of Chilpancingo, the seat of the state's political power and center for urban development, contrasting its surrounding valleys. To the west, the plains of the Tierra Caliente region are known for commercial agriculture and livestock, both of which are most important to the state. When moving toward the west coast, the Costa Grande region houses most of the state's coffee production, while copra (dried coconut meat) and wood production are also important. Guerrero has about forty-two thousand hectares of forests and jungle. However, deforestation goes at an alarming rate. The state ranks fourth on the list of Mexican states with the highest loss of forests.³⁶ Following the coastline downward, the coastal city of Acapulco is the most important economic center of the state. Tourism is the backbone of its economic prominence. This stands in stark

³¹ Congreso del Estado de Guerrero. 2016. "Plan de Desarrollo Estatal 2016-2021 Guerrero." Accessed February 11, 2019. http://www.congresogro.gob.mx/files/PLAN%20ESTATAL%20DE%20DESARROLLO/ESTRATEGIAS_TRANSVERSALES_ECOLOGIA_PUEBLOS_ORIGINARIOS.pdf.

³² Consejo Nacional de Población. 2010. "Índice de marginación por entidad federativa y municipio 2010." Accessed February 11, 2019. http://www.conapo.gob.mx/work/models/CONAPO/indices_margina/mf2010/CapitulosPDF/1_4.pdf.

³³ A person lives in extreme poverty when he or she has three or more "social needs" (education, healthcare, social security, housing, basic housing needs, alimentation) and lacks sufficient income to provide a basic subsistence: El Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL). 2016. "Pobreza estatal 2016 Guerrero." Accessed March, 12, 2019. <https://www.coneval.org.mx/coordinacion/entidades/Guerrero/Paginas/Pobreza-2016.aspx>.

³⁴ Subsecretaría de Minería. 2018. "Panorama Minero del Estado de Guerrero." Accessed February 12, 2019. <http://www.sgm.gob.mx/pdfs/GUERRERO.pdf>.

³⁵ El Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina (OCMAL). 2012. "La Minería en Guerrero." October 12, 2012. Accessed February 12, 2019. <https://www.ocmal.org/la-mineria-en-guerrero>.

³⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2018. "La deforestación sigue imparables." July 29, 2019. Accessed February 12, 2019. <https://suracapulco.mx/2018/07/29/la-deforestacion-sigue-imparable>.

contrast to the lower situated and marginalized Costa Chica region, whose economy is based on, among others, fishery, livestock, and copra production. An estimated six and a half percent of the region's population self-identifies as Afromexican based on shared culture, history, or traditions (see chapter 2).³⁷ While there are indigenous people in the Costa Chica, as in the Centro and Norte regions of Guerrero, the Montaña region makes up the state's indigenous heart. More than sixty percent of its population is indigenous, consisting mainly of Nahuas, Mixtecos, Tlapanecos, and a smaller group of Amuzgos.³⁸ The rural municipalities in the Montaña region have high levels of marginalization.³⁹ Unsurprisingly, socioeconomic inequality has historically been an important catalyst for popular resistance. The next sections will not provide a historical analysis of the sociopolitical developments of every subregion. Instead, I will examine the state's main social and political events and refer to specific subregional events when required.

2. From Independence to Postrevolutionary Guerrero

The state of Guerrero is named after Vicente Guerrero, who arrived in the region as an Afromexican leader of the War of Independence (1810–21). After the successful fight against colonial Spain, factions and elites clashed over the question that Aviña (2014, 23) recently put as follows: “Would Mexico comprise a centralized national entity that restricted political access to social elites, limited suffrage and practically erased the political importance of municipalities? Or would the former Spanish colony operate on the federalist premises of mass male political participation, powerful legislative and weak executive, and political power spread to the state and local levels?” Although debates on federalism continue to play a role in contemporary political debates, this research mainly focuses on the lower levels of Mexico's political system: Guerrero's state government, municipal administrations, and local communities.

On Guerrero's countryside, independence did not do away with the power of large landowners, *latifundios*, who controlled the rural economy through taxation and land rents (Bartra 1996, 28–29). When, in 1836, a centralist regime established itself in Mexico City, various groups in Guerrero resisted. Indigenous peasants started an armed rebellion

³⁷ INEGI. 2015. “Principales resultados de la Encuesta Intercensal 2015: Guerrero.” Accessed February 11, 2019. http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/inter_censal/estados2015/702825079772.pdf.

³⁸ Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI). 2006. “Regiones indígenas de México.” Accessed February 11, 2019. http://www.cdi.gob.mx/regiones/regiones_indigenas_cdi.pdf.

³⁹ Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO). 2010. “Índice de marginación por entidad federativa y municipio 2010.” Accessed February 11, 2019. http://www.conapo.gob.mx/work/models/CONAPO/indices_margina/mf2010/CapitulosPDF/1_4.pdf; El Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (CONEVAL). 2015. “Pobreza a nivel municipio 2015 Guerrero.” Accessed February 11, 2019. https://www.coneval.org.mx/coordinacion/entidades/Guerrero/Paginas/pobreza_municipal2015.aspx.

in Guerrero's Centro region in 1842 (Aviña 2014, 25). After centuries of suffering because of the invasion of their lands, racism, and political oppression, the peasant population demanded fair land distribution and taxes, as well as patriarchal democracy on the municipal level. In fact, the 1821 Constitution had allowed for the establishment of municipalities, which made these the centers of local politics (Aviña 2014, 23). Regional elites temporarily settled their disputes to join forces against the centralists in favor of regional autonomy, above all to defend their economic and political interests (Bartra 1996, 17). Local power domains, such as those of *caciques*, resented the centralizing forces of Mexican nation-state building (Jacobs 1981, xix). *Caciquismo* means for an individual or small group to have political control over communities or a region through the control over economic and political resources (Pansters 2005, 354). *Caciques* functions as intermediaries for villagers by controlling the circulation of resources. Moreover, *caciques* use extreme force to keep people under control (Bartra 2000, 16).

Political pressures by peasants and caciques resulted in the foundation of the state of Guerrero in 1849, when the new entity was carved out of the states of Puebla, Michoacán, and México. However, the sources of discontent did not go away and ongoing struggles reached another peak when centralist president Santa Anna came into power in 1852. In Guerrero, peasants and regional elites joined forces against the president while the country experienced a major civil war. In Ayutla de los Libres, in the Costa Chica, general Juan Álvarez drew up the Plan of Ayutla in 1854, calling for the overthrowing of the president. These events left their mark on national politics. A coalition of insurgent peasants under the command of colonel Florencio Villorreal defeated dictator Santa Anna in 1855. The Plan of Ayutla led to the first act of Liberal Reform in Mexico (Aviña 2014, 27–28). For a short while in 1855, Juan Álvarez occupied the Mexican presidency.

By 1857, the Mexican congress accepted a liberal constitution. Even so, mid-nineteenth-century Mexico remained unstable until the dictatorial rule of President Porfirio Díaz, which lasted from 1876 to 1910. Under his rule, socioeconomic tensions increased as peasants suffered political oppression, heavy taxation, and land theft, hardship that only deepened with the 1907 depression. In the run-up to the 1910 presidential elections, a broad political opposition mobilized to make the liberal Constitution a reality. This all set the stage for the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) (Knight 2016, 10–23).

In Guerrero, as in other states, the revolutionary movement that eventually brought down the regime of President Porfirio Díaz was fragmented and divided along class conflicts, ideological differences, and rival factions (see Jacobs 1981). Peasants in the Tierra Caliente followed the lead of revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, active in the neighboring state of Morelos, who struggled for land and political rights. He adopted the slogan “Land and Liberty” to advocate agrarian radicalism and municipal democracy. Apart from Morelos, Guerrero became the only state temporarily ruled by the Zapatistas in 1914, under the leadership of Jesús Salgado (Aviña 2014, 32). During this brief period, the Zapatistas authorized peasants to confiscate the land of landowners opposing the

revolution, suspended taxes, and removed *cacique*-imposed local authorities (Bartra 1996, 34). Guerrero's cattle ranchers, teachers, merchants, and professionals mainly from the Norte and the Centro regions fought for free elections and local autonomy and supported Francisco Madero, who ousted President Díaz and became president in 1911. The Figueroa brothers, ranchers from Huitzucó in the north of Guerrero, became important leaders of Guerrero's Maderistas, who primarily advocated political reforms couched in a language of regionalism (Bartra 1996, 32). After the repression and defeat of the Zapatistas, a member of the Figueroa family (Francisco) became provisional governor of Guerrero in 1918.⁴⁰ He subscribed to the new 1917 Constitution, which granted autonomy to municipal governments and promised agrarian reform. From then onward, the Figueroas were there to stay (Bartra 1996, 40).

Although the Zapatistas were defeated, their demands were a key component of the 1917 Constitution. Accordingly, radical political parties and agrarian unions emerged during the 1920s to make the revolutionary promises happen. In Guerrero, the most important one was the Partido Obrero de Acapulco (POA). In the 1920s, workers and agricultural cooperatives united in the POA to democratize municipal towns and fight for workers' rights across the Costa Chica and, later, the Costa Grande (Aviña 2014, 33–35). There were, however, also counterrevolutionary forces. After POA leader Juan Escudero became mayor of Acapulco, he was killed by soldiers in 1923. As such, political activists experienced the first signs of state-sponsored violence by the postrevolutionary regime. When the POA understood that the electoral road did not lead to the democratization of politics and economic production, it turned to arms. A self-defense guerrilla force emerged, mainly active in the Costa Grande, that provoked a military counterinsurgency (Bartra 1996, 45–50). The radicalization of popular organizations in response to a failing electoral system and political violence would become a trend in Guerrero, just as its harsh repression.

With the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), Guerrero's popular sectors saw some of the revolutionary promises fulfilled. Cárdenas nationalized industries, introduced agrarian reform by means of *ejido* land redistribution, and instituted a range of social reforms.⁴¹ As part of the postrevolutionary nation-state building process, Cárdenas gave a new impulse to *indigenista* politics. This was a dynamic ideological project to bring Mexico's indigenous groups into a new revolutionary nation-state, further discussed in section 5. The Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) was set up and bilingual and bicultural education was introduced in schools in indigenous regions. Furthermore, Emiliano Zapata's earlier call for rural schools was adopted by Cárdenas, whose socialist education policies built many schools in the countryside (see Vaughan

⁴⁰ The so-called *Mariscalistas*, followers of the conservative bourgeois Silvestre Mariscal from the Costa Grande, had repressed and defeated the Zapatistas with the help of federal forces.

⁴¹ *Ejid*os are collective landholding units, expropriated from large landholders and redistributed among peasants, called *ejidatarios*.

1997). Through such reforms, Cárdenas tied economic and social sectors to the ruling party, later to be called Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).⁴² Cárdenas became the architect of Mexico's vertical corporatist state structure to enhance representativity and increase postrevolutionary state legitimacy (Joseph and Buchenau 2013, 198).⁴³ Notwithstanding, Guerrero remained conflictive. For instance, the year 1938 counted twenty-six killings of peasant leaders in a context of widespread social violence (Bartra 1996, 73). These struggles waxed and waned and featured what Bartra (1996, 12) called a mismatch (*desencuentro*) between socioeconomic and political demands. Popular organizations made socioeconomic demands as peasants under the flag of social justice, while others foregrounded their citizen identities to make claims about political liberties, self-governance, and democratization.

The political and bureaucratic reconstruction after the revolution created the conditions for what Pansters (2005, 355) calls the emergence of “modern or revolutionary *caciques*,” who started to work with and through state institutions. The *caciques* redefined their position toward the country's center and became part of a corporatist–clientelist PRI system. On municipal government levels, *caciques* controlled political, administrative, and economic decisions. Citizens negotiated their rights with political leaders through informal structures of power, thereby perpetuating the unequal exchange of influence and resources in return for political support (Selee 2012, 12). In addition to clandestine violence and thuggery, *caciques* relied on army support to keep order in the countryside (Gillingham 2012).

The Figueroa family exemplified the growing influence of this new type of *caciques* in Guerrero. In his extensive study of Rubén Figueroa Figueroa's political career, Lettieri (2015) portrays the way Rubén Figueroa worked toward becoming Guerrero's governor during 1975–81 with the use of corporatist organizations and violence. He established extensive networks with Guerrero's transport sector, local politicians, peasant groups, and his relatives while also enhancing his connections with Mexico City's political elite (Lettieri 2015, 326). Figueroa's links to the PRI's national bureaucracy in the capital, and his control over the state through clientelist networks and violence, makes him a textbook example of the PRI regime in postrevolutionary provincial Mexico. There was much at stake as Guerrero underwent capitalist modernization. In the midcentury, Acapulco was becoming a booming commercial port city and international tourist destination, and the plans for a Rio Balsas Dam set the stage for large-scale export agriculture such as copra, coffee, and sesame (Blacker 2009, 185). Unequal capitalist development and the stiffening

⁴² In 1929, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) was founded to institutionalize the revolution. When Cárdenas came to power in 1934, he restructured the party that became the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM). In 1946, the party's name was changed again, to Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The PRI remained in office on the federal level until 2000.

⁴³ For instance, the Confederación Nacional Campesina organized peasants under government support, while the Congresos Regionales Indígenas built alliances between indigenous people and the state.

cacique dominance increasingly led to rural tensions. Guerrero became a place of intense social conflicts and political upheaval by older and new social groups who defended the right to land, education, economic justice, and political participation.

3. New Civic Movements and Guerrero's Dirty War

The agrarian reform of Cárdenas produced a new social category of *ejidatarios*, who organized regionally to attain control over agrarian production processes (Bartra 1996, 76). In Guerrero, large copra and coffee unions in the Costa Grande especially waged these social struggles. Interestingly, labor actions and social mobilizations in Mexico City politicized a specific group of Guerrero's adolescents who studied in the capital's teachers college called Escuela Normal (Blacker 2009, 188). The college forms part of a federal network of teacher training schools, established in the 1920s to "teach in Mexico's remote areas and facilitate the revolutionary state project" (Padilla 2018, 54). In the heydays of the Cardenista era, there were thirty-five rural teacher training schools: the Escuelas Normales Rurales. Ever since, the colleges have faced cutbacks and political attacks for its socialist education approach. In Guerrero, especially the rural teacher training school in Ayotzinapa became the breeding ground for new forms of political activism that combined class struggles and democratic demands. These institutions forged the student-teacher identity of *normalistas* "that fused rural education with protecting and practicing the radical principles of the 1910 revolution and Cardenismo" (Aviña 2014, 42).

Students and teachers became a new generation of leaders of Guerrero's peasant and labor organizations while a student movement emerged on the national level. This started with university students in Mexico City, who demanded institutional autonomy and democratization during the 1950s, but grew into a militant and nationwide movement that denounced the authoritarian rule of the "revolutionary" state. These students, teachers, and intellectuals came to represent Mexico's "New Left." They distinguished themselves from older communist organizations and gave new meaning to the Mexican Revolution by focusing on the undemocratic features of local and national institutions (Pensado 2013, 152).

Genaro Vázquez was one of Guerrero's adolescents who studied in Mexico City's teachers training school and turned back to his home state to set up a regional social movement in the 1960s. The Asociación Cívica Guerrerense (ACG) was a diverse and trans-classist coalition of professionals, teachers, peasants, and students. The so-called *cívicos* found union in their struggle against political repression and corrupt rule of Guerrero's governor Caballero Aburto (1957–61). More generally, the ACG demanded the right to political participation and municipal autonomy, which was perceived by peasants as a way to obtain economic justice and for women to denounce their limited rights (Aviña 2014, 41). Unlike many labor unions that were part of the PRI controlled

corporatist structures, the autonomous origins of the ACG stood out. The movement especially turned itself against Aburto's defiance of municipal autonomy. At times, it has also been defined as a democratizing movement of the municipalities against the state government (Bartra 1996, 91). Such activist practices turn attention to "how initiatives for change can scale up, down and across" (Fox 2007b, 2). Social contestation over state-society relations then concerns specific levels of government and alliances (community, municipality, regional, state).

In December 1960, during a violent crackdown of an ACG protest, soldiers killed fifteen *cívicos* in Chilpancingo. The massacre resulted in the ousting of Governor Aburto and set the stage for Guerrero's "democratic spring" (Aviña 2014, 70). By means of direct actions, the ACG took over municipal administrations across the state and turned them into experiments with direct popular rule. At the same time, its leaders prepared for the 1962 elections by fielding candidates for mayor and deputies, and *normalista* teacher Suárez Téllez for governor. But, again, the electoral road became a dead end. During the same year, Téllez and other ACG leaders were arrested, while subsequent mass protests elicited more bloodshed in Iguala with the death of seven *cívicos* by soldiers. The elections turned out fraudulent. Vázquez concluded that the destruction of the regime was necessary to advance the democratic aspirations (Blacker 2009, 195). Consequently, the once reformist movement transformed into an armed and revolutionary force: the Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria (ACNR). At the same time, another guerrilla movement emerged under the leadership of Lucio Cabañas. Both organizations were inspired by historical ideals such as the radical agrarianism of the Mexican Revolution and Cárdenas's social democracy and reformism, but they also engaged with Marxist-Leninist ideas of Latin Americas guerrillas (Aviña 2014, 6).

As a teacher who graduated from Ayotzinapa, Cabañas became involved in local struggles in the municipality of Atoyac de Álvarez in the Costa Grande. Like Vázquez, he started his political activism by challenging economic inequality and the lack of access to political participation, only to develop revolutionary socialist and anti-capitalist aspirations later on. His radicalization was triggered by the 1965 police killing of seven peasants and parents of schoolchildren in Atoyac de Álvarez during a strike. Afterwards, Cabañas turned to the Costa Grande mountains to start an armed rebellion. He formed the Partido de los Pobres (PDLP) and a peasant-based militant group called the Brigada Campesina de Ajusticiamiento (BCA). The PDLP aspired a type of socialism adapted to Guerrero's countryside: "a radically direct democracy in which peasant communities dictated political and economic organization" (Aviña 2014, 166). Furthermore, the demand for equal rights for women was among the focal points of the party while education also had a special place in Cabañas's revolutionary ideas. For him, education served as a powerful rural mobilizer, illustrated by his promotion of Marxist readings in Guerrero's main university (UAG), the ideological reading groups of the BCA, and his advocacy of state-independent public secondary schools, that is, *preparatorias populares*

(Blacker-Hanson 2012, 107). When the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico City revealed the violent face of the PRI regime, Cabañas's peasant-based socialism became the most significant guerrilla force to challenge the regime since the 1920s (Bartra 1996, 111). Fearing the ideas and broad support of both the PDLP and ACNR, the state launched a violent counterinsurgency campaign in Guerrero.

From 1967 to 1980, thousands of soldiers, federal and state police, *cacique* sponsored hit men, and paramilitaries engaged in what is now called Guerrero's "dirty war." Political violence during the dirty war cannot be understood without making reference to the emergence of the marijuana and opium poppy production in Guerrero in the 1960s. Under the influence of the Cold War, counterinsurgency operations in Guerrero were waged in the name of counter-narcotic campaigns (Aviña, forthcoming). In fact, the same *caciques* and state agents who engaged in counterinsurgency later became important players in the development of a transnational drug economy, further discussed in the last part of this chapter. While the guerrillas were criminalized by portraying them as drug traffickers, thousands of people were arrested and tortured and hundreds disappeared, as revealed by the Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (FEMOSPP) in 2005.⁴⁴ Eventually, the armed rebellion was defeated.

For the case of both Vázquez's ACNR and Cabañas's BCA, the extremely violent repression was the main cause of their disintegration. In 1972, the ACNR's downfall was initiated by Vázquez's death.⁴⁵ In the aftermath, some of Vázquez's fellow guerrillas joined Cabañas's BCA, which was still active in the Costa Grande mountains and the Tierra Caliente. However, the army managed to isolate Cabañas "demographically and geographically" (Blacker-Hanson 2012, 109). Unlike Vázquez, Cabañas had not forged alliances and networks in more urban centers. This gave the organization a more rural and localist character. The persistent fragmentation on the Left also worked against them. For instance, Vázquez and Cabañas never managed to unite forces due to "difficulties of distance, logistics, differing strategies, and dueling charismatic leadership" (Blacker-Hanson 2009, 109). When, in 1974, the BCA kidnapped PRI Senator and candidate-Governor Rubén Figueroa, this marked the end of years of revolutionary struggle. After three months in captivity, the army freed Figueroa and killed Lucio Cabañas in the process.

The dirty war left deep wounds in Guerrero. Apart from the bloodshed, it had blocked peaceful collective action and unmade the connections between civic and labor struggles in their critical position toward the regime, so carefully constructed throughout the 1960s (Bartra 1996, 113). Only in the second half of the 1970s, some space opened

⁴⁴ For more information: Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (FEMOSPP). 2006. "Chapter 6 La Guerra Sucia en Guerrero," draft report. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB180/index.htm>.

⁴⁵ Genaro Vázquez supposedly died in a car accident, although the actual cause of his death remains unclear and contested (Aviña 2014, 134–35).

up again for mobilizations. After having formed opposition parties, independent unions, popular fronts, and militant guerrillas, social groups in Guerrero regained the courage to take the electoral road in 1988, inspired by the nationwide resurgence of Cardenismo.

4. Toward Neoliberal Restructuring and Decentralization

Ever since Cárdenas's rule (1934–40), governments attempted to maintain political stability in the Mexican countryside by means of land redistribution schemes and subsidy programs, financed by economic growth. However, the 1982 debt crisis and the subsequent 1986 collapse of oil prices heavily impacted the national economy, after which Mexico could no longer pay its enormous foreign debt and finance its development model (Yaworsky 2005, 408). As a consequence, the PRI experienced a serious crisis of legitimacy and credibility (Rodríguez 1993, 133). In response to the imposed austerity and economic adjustment programs by the IMF, people organized and mobilized in major civil movements as well as the electoral field. Before the onset of these neoliberal reforms and in response to social protests, the PRI had hesitantly started political liberalization. More political parties were allowed to participate in elections since 1973, followed by further electoral reforms in 1979. The latter increased the representation of opposition parties in federal and state legislatures and local government, and introduced proportional representation on municipal councils (Grindle 2007, 34).

Cuahtémoc Cárdenas, the son of former President Lázaro Cárdenas, had defected from the PRI and participated in the 1988 federal elections as presidential candidate. He had united left opposition parties, including some *priístas*, to challenge the political control of the ruling party. Cárdenas's campaign was built on the political and ideological legacy of his father's presidency. An important part of Cuahtémoc Cárdenas's program was about the democratization of municipal life. The 1988 election offered Mexicans the choice between the democratic and social reforms promised by neocardenismo, or a deepening of the neoliberal agenda, which had been put into place gradually by President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–88). Even though Cárdenas enjoyed massive civil support, PRI candidate Carlos Salinas took office after rigged elections. Cárdenas continued the struggle for democratization and an alternative development model by setting up the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD) one year later.

During the presidency of Carlos Salinas (1988–94), the PRI unquestionably let go of its postrevolutionary rhetoric of reform and economic nationalism (Joseph and Buchenau 2013, 181). Under the banner of free trade, the government dismantled protectionist tariffs and market regulations, and abandoned state ownership of a wide range of companies and infrastructure to attract international investment. Furthermore, President Salinas changed constitutional Article 27, which put an end to land redistribution and opened up the possibility to privatize *ejido* lands. The system that had previously subsidized and

regulated rural and poor Mexico was dismantled as well. These reforms fundamentally changed the relationship between peasants and the state. To make up for retreating state support, President Salinas installed a program called “Solidarity,” which replaced general subsidies with more targeted programs that actively solicited citizen participation in local development (Rodríguez 2018). Besides socioeconomic restructuring, this program offered the framework for political decentralization.

Decentralization had already been on the agenda of President Miguel de la Madrid. His 1983 municipal reform attempted to strengthen the financial and administrative autonomy of municipalities (see Barracca 2005). This was a first official step to break with a historical trend. Despite the fact that Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 had granted autonomy to municipalities, political and economic resources had mostly been concentrated in the hands of federal and state authorities (Rodríguez 1993, 134; Meyer 1994). Ever since the revolution, various popular movements had emerged to contest the subordination of municipal administrations to the control of state and federal governments in Mexico’s three-level political system. Notwithstanding the moderate steps made by the federal government, it did not go far enough for Guerrero’s popular actors. The PRD took the lead in continuing political and social struggles on the local level.

With upcoming local elections in 1989, Guerrero’s *perredistas* organized a municipal congress that was widely attended by social leaders of Guerrero’s coast (Bartra 1996, 143). They discussed the tenets of a participatory municipal government model and introduced a local development plan for 1990–93. More specifically, they touched upon ways to make municipal governments more responsive to the needs of their communities. This could counteract the tendency of mayors to privilege municipal seats over other outlying rural communities. Mexican municipalities are made up of rural communities and a municipal seat (*cabecera*), the latter distinguished by its size and better geographical location in terms of transport. Municipal power has often remained concentrated in municipal seats, which tended to privilege these towns in the distribution of resources (Dehouve and Bey 2006, 362). There is also an ethnic dimension in play. Ethnic inequalities have historically subordinated rural communities to municipal seats, since municipal governments used to be predominantly represented by *mestizos*, also in indigenous territories (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 80). With plans, among others, for the equal distribution of municipal resources and for rural citizens to partake in decision-making, Guerrero’s branch of the PRD won nine out of eighty-one municipalities in the local elections.

This modest PRD victory in Guerrero was met with political violence. Between 1988 and 1990, fifty-six PRD members were killed (Bartra 1996, 152). Political activists responded with municipal takeovers to institute people’s councils (*cabildos populares*). Some municipalities experimented with participatory forms of governance, while most *perredista* municipalities failed to achieve any structural institutional changes (Bartra 1996, 151). The people’s councils were brought to a standstill when, in 1990, state police killed five people who had occupied the Cruz Grande municipal building in the Costa

Chica.

Against the backdrop of municipal conflicts in Guerrero, President Salinas launched decentralizing programs to build new local leadership structures and civic involvement in governing processes, and enhance the accountability of state governments (Rodríguez 1998, 251). Although Salinas continued to work hard to centralize the power of the presidency, his government also created the National Center of Municipal Development to strengthen local governments in their administrative capacities and management of public services (Grindle 2007, 30). This decentralization process continued later, when, in 1998, Branch 33 (*Ramo 33*) was founded, a federal fund for municipal development that generated financial flows to municipal offices. While *ejido* governance became less important socially and economically, financial flows to Branch 33 increased the importance of municipal governments (Fox 2007a, 531). In fact, in 2000, municipalities obtained more policy making capacity, when they were officially recognized as an “order of government” and not only as an administrative body (Grindle 2007, 32). As a result of these reforms, municipal governments obtained more authority and autonomy than at any other time in the country’s history (Selee 2011, 164).

With municipal seats empowered as entities of governance and financial decision-making, rural inhabitants mobilized to demand participation in decision-making and have a more equal share of resources (Dehouve and Bey 2006, 364–65). One of the ways to change the power balance of rural communities vis-à-vis municipal seats was to remove communities from the control of a municipal center and create a new municipality of its own, that is, remunicipalization. Since the 1990s, many communities in Guerrero made official requests to become part of new municipalities. According to Rodríguez Wallenius (2009, 367), the following factors play a role in the search for remunicipalization by Guerrero’s communities: the aim to democratize local elections and overcome the power imbalance between communities and municipal seats, and respect for community leadership elections. It was also an attempt of indigenous communities to overcome domination by non-indigenous people in municipal centers. However, due to political resistance in state congress, only a small fraction of local demands for new municipalities was approved.

During the neoliberal restructuring of the Mexican state, economic restructuring turned the focus of peasants to increased socioeconomic disparities and poverty. Besides struggles on the municipal level, Guerrero’s peasants also engaged in organizing on another scale. In 1987, twenty-seven *ejido* unions across Guerrero joined to form a statewide coalition of independent peasant organizations, the Alianza de Organizaciones Campesinas Autónomas de Guerrero (AOCAG), to obtain more leverage in their negotiations with the government (Fox, García Jiménez, and Haight 2009, 277). However, the independent coalition was unable to unseat organizations affiliated to the PRI. In this context, the infamous Aguas Blancas massacre took place in 1995. Seventeen peasants, on their way to a protest in Atoyac de Álvarez, were killed by state police. The massacre

caused major popular outrage and forced then Governor Rubén Figueroa Alcocer (1993–96), son of Rubén Figueroa Figueroa, to step down. He was succeeded by Ángel Aguirre Rivero, a *cacique* with roots in the Costa Chica town of Ometepec, who held strong kin relationships with municipal presidents, politicians and commercial cattle ranchers in that region (Rodríguez Wallenius 2005, 127). Just as other, previous massacres had polarized and radicalized popular struggles, Aguas Blancas gave rise to the formation of the guerrilla organization Ejército Popular Revolucionario (EPR). It carried out several actions against military units in Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Chiapas during the following years.

Facing a reconfigured neoliberal state and new political violence, peasants in Guerrero and elsewhere had a hard time redefining activist strategies. At this political juncture, indigenous movements began to claim a new role for themselves. They became important social and political actors that asserted claims to local autonomy and economic-cultural justice.

5. The Rise of Indigenous Movements and a Multicultural State

The foundational roots for racist practices against Mexico's indigenous people go back to colonial times. Spanish colonizers deprived indigenous people from their land and instituted the status of superiority over the so-called "Indian" into society and its structures. Racism legitimized exploitation and social hierarchies, such as the enslavement of indigenous people but also of black people, who together were the most important workers for colonial companies (Castellanos Guerrero, Gómez Izquierdo, and Pineda 2009, 226–28). Once an independent country, Mexico's ruling class excluded the social category of *indios* (indigenous people) from the national identity, based on ideas of white supremacy (Bartra and Ortero 2008, 403). Indigenous people were to be civilized and educated, and those who rebelled risked persecution and execution (Castellanos Guerrero, Gómez Izquierdo, and Pineda 2009, 229). Especially the Porfiriato (1876–1910) deprived indigenous people from their land and, hence, livelihood in favor of capitalist expansion. Afterwards, in Mexico's postrevolutionary era, state policy toward indigenous people was carried out under the banner of *indigenismo*, featuring paternalistic attitudes and assimilation. In reference to *indigenismo* policies, De la Peña (1999, 290) states: "The measure of success of the latter was that the Indians ceased to be Indians." Indigenous people found temporal relief during the Cardenista period (1930–40), when land was returned to them and indigenous leaders were included in state institutions. Nevertheless, Cárdenas's policy was corporatist in nature, mainly conceding indigenous leadership to those people who supported the president's agenda (Joseph and Buchenau 2013, 189).

By the 1970s, critics of *indigenismo* policies became more vocal. A growing group of educated indigenous leaders denounced the suppression of their cultural identity as well as

the impoverished conditions of indigenous people living in the country (De la Peña 2006, 283–84). The main critical voices came from the previously mentioned teacher training schools and indigenous leaders who had gained positions inside *indigenista* institutions. In fact, education had become an important site from where to contest postrevolutionary *indigenismo*. Governments had used schools to inject a populist nationalist ideology, whereas leaders, teachers, and intellectuals had disputed and negotiated state education projects (Vaughan 1997). Even though indigenous struggles over bilingual education, land, and local autonomy had taken place throughout postrevolutionary Mexico, indigenous people had often done so by foregrounding their peasant identities. This effectively changed in the wake of the neoliberal era, when indigenous identities became dominant tropes in popular protests. The anti-quincentenary protests made this exceptionally visible.

In 1991, indigenous people all over Latin America protested against the official celebrations of the arrival of Columbus on the continent five hundred years before. Rejecting the official frame of “the encounter between two worlds,” indigenous people called for the celebration of five hundred years of indigenous resistance. Right when neoliberal politics created conditions for the prioritization of indigenous identities, indigenous movements emerged as important political actors throughout Latin America (Yashar 2005). In Mexico, the anti-quincentenary protests gave rise to a national campaign 500 Años de Resistencia and the Asamblea Nacional Indígena Plural Por La Autonomía (ANIPA), which represented a voice for indigenous people on the national level. The Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular (CG500) became the most significant expression of indigenous struggle in Guerrero, but also held national and international significance (Sarmiento, Mejía Carrasco, and Rivaud Delgado 2009, 351).

While peasant-based organizations had a hard time adapting to neoliberal realities, part of the peasants adopted a “politically more visible identity as indigenous peoples” (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 56). The neoliberal emphasis on decentralization and self-reliance dovetailed with emerging indigenous demands for political autonomy and self-determination. Furthermore, socioeconomic hardship, resulting from neoliberal programs and the economic crisis, formed the backdrop of new forms of political collective action. The most important and visible expression of this new indigenous demand making in Mexico was the Zapatista uprising.

In 1994, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in Chiapas declared war against the Mexican state. The group reclaimed the struggle of revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata. The new Zapatistas belonged to Mayan communities in Chiapas who had migrated to the Lacandón rain forest in the 1970s as part of a federal program that promised them *ejido* land. They had claimed land titles for a long time, but never obtained them. These marginalized conditions, “neglected by the federal government and abused by elites controlling the funds and decisions of municipalities” (Nash 2001,

111), formed the roots of the uprising. When indigenous communities were hit hard by neoliberal restructuring and Salinas dismantled the postrevolutionary agrarian reform project in 1992, the Zapatistas prepared to rise. On the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada, and the US went into effect, which took down tariff barriers and national market protections, the Zapatistas launched their rebellion. They demanded the right to govern themselves locally and regionally according to traditional laws, to control their resources and land, and to enjoy the recognition of indigenous customs, traditions, and spirituality (Mattiace 2003). The right to intercultural education was on their agenda as well and indigenous women became vocal advocates for gendered and indigenous rights (Bertely 2008; Speed 2008a). In short, the indigenous movement merged older demands for democracy, local autonomy and socioeconomic justice with claims to ethnic and women's rights.

The uprising of the Zapatistas facilitated a broader convergence of indigenous struggle across Mexico. In 1996, the Zapatistas called for the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI), which brought together indigenous communities across Mexico to collaborate on social and political issues. A long process of deliberation began to redefine the relationship between indigenous people and the state. Similar developments took place in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia (see, for instance, Rappaport 2005; García 2005; Postero 2007). As I observed in chapter 1, these people faced the dilemmas of the “politics of recognition,” that is, how to recognize distinct identities in the context of a liberal state based on universal rights. Indigenous people mobilized for autonomy on the basis of cultural distinctiveness, but also demanded access to public goods and rights to which all citizens are entitled. Gustafson (2009, 232) defines this as the paradoxical stance of indigenous movements: “pursuing authority based on indigeneity while demanding state resources based on citizenship.” Then, indigenous organizations looked for a form of autonomy that would reconstruct the political power of indigenous communities, and establish a relation of mutual respect vis-à-vis larger structures of power (Díaz Polanco 1997). Hale (2011, 204) describes it as a negotiation that aims for the devolution of state authority to a particular delimited space.

Indigenous organizations such as the Zapatistas, ANIPA, and the CNI organized meetings, dialogues, conferences, and congresses to come to an agreement with the Mexican government about their demands. This eventually resulted in the 1996 San Andrés Accords, signed by President Ernesto Zedillo and the EZLN. When a team of legislators proposed a law to implement the San Andrés Accords, the government withdrew its support and the law was deferred for four years until President Vicente Fox of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) came to power (2000–2006). Fox issued the Law of Indigenous Rights and Culture in 2001. The reforms recognized a degree of legal pluralism and obliged all levels of government to consult indigenous people about development plans and to devise specific social programs for them (De la Peña 2006, 292). Bilingual and intercultural education programs became obligatory. However, according to

Hernández (2016, 192), the law recognized cultural diversity in a way “that separates the concept of culture from its political and territorial dimension and established a number of padlocks against indigenous autonomy.” For instance, the law acknowledged the right to self-determination, but left the specific implementation and political responsibility in the hands of state legislators (Speed 2005, 39). The law explicitly granted indigenous communities a legal status and the right to choose their forms of government and social and economic organization locally, but state legislators would be the ones to decide on how such autonomy would be exercised. In fact, the terms of the legal status of communities did not live up to the Accords, because the 2001 law only recognized them as “entities of public interest” and not as full-fledged local governments (Sprague 2016, 44). What is more, indigenous communities were not allowed to politically represent themselves in front of state or federal governments, only before municipal authorities, and they could only politically associate with indigenous communities within the same municipality (De la Peña 2006, 292). For all these reasons, indigenous organizations rejected the law. All the while, the Mexican government increased its military presence in Chiapas and continued a low-intensity warfare. The struggle was far from over.

Hale (2002) coined the term “neoliberal multiculturalism” to make sense of how nation-states across Latin America recognized cultural difference of indigenous peoples without changing the economic and political status quo (see chapter 1). By restricting land reform, regional autonomy, and economic justice for indigenous communities, cultural rights were implemented as long as it was functional for the neoliberal system. Even so, the formal transition from a mestizo to a multicultural state, initiated by Salinas’s constitutional reforms in 1991, produced new grassroots claims and aspirations on a specific level: “Claims for the legal and political recognition, pluriculturalism and the free determination of indigenous peoples are expressed primordially in the exercise of local power” (Hernández-Díaz 2010, 142–43).

Among the indigenous movements in Mexico, three distinct perspectives developed about the meanings of local autonomy. ANIPA adopted a model of plural-ethnic or mono-ethnic autonomous regions with a regional government that would represent all groups, as described by Velasco-Cruz (2003, 75). It advocated a fourth level of government, situated between municipal and state administrative levels, that allowed for regional autonomy. ANIPA wanted constitutional guarantees for indigenous representation in parliament and participated in party politics. However, others, for instance representatives of state institutions such as the INI, argued that ethnic identities should be grounded in local communities (Velasco-Cruz 2003, 85). They saw plural-ethnic autonomous regions as artificial and vulnerable to internal conflicts. This second perspective argued for autonomy of communities, practiced through communal structures of *usos y costumbres*. Communities would then become formally recognized autonomous entities with more economic and political faculties (Velasco-Cruz 2003, 79–85). In fact, they wanted to assign all decision-making power to indigenous people through community or municipal

governance (Flores Félix 2007, 82). Proponents of the regional model, however, expressed concerns that the community model would lead to fragmentation. A third position saw the municipality as the privileged autonomous unit, since it was already constitutionally recognized (De la Peña 2006, 290).

With the 2001 multicultural reform, the state had foregrounded the municipality as the key administrative space for the realization of indigenous rights. However, critics have pointed out how the legal design of the municipality does not allow for the diversity of sociopolitical forms of governance and organization practiced by indigenous and multiethnic communities (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2008). Some groups, such as the CNI, and some Oaxacan intellectuals argued that municipal forms of government should be rearranged in response to local indigenous customs, while the responsibilities of community governments could be amplified under the same framework as well.

Among indigenous organizations, no consensus was reached about how to rearrange local political power and gain cultural and economic rights. Ever since, discussions have continued. In Chiapas, the Zapatistas set up *de facto* autonomous municipalities that function outside legal frameworks, parallel to state institutions (see Speed 2008a). While they decided to govern without political parties, they did not disqualify the other two models (Velasco-Cruz 2003, 96). In contrast, the state of Oaxaca is often mentioned as a case where indigenous communities practice and advocate the community–autonomy model (Hernández-Díaz and Juan Martínez 2007). This can at least partly be explained by the fact that the hundreds of small Oaxacan municipalities often geographically coincide with indigenous communities (Velasco-Cruz 2003, 94).

In Guerrero, organizations such as the CG500 and the community policing organization Crac-PC became important players in defining the course of indigenous activism in the state. In addition, when indigenous movements started to discuss the pluricultural state, it served as a point of reference for Afromexican advocacy in the Costa Chica. In the next section, I take a closer look at the claims and development of these organizations, which became key spaces for the political formation of the future leaders of Upoeg and Unisur.

6. Ethnic Organizing in Guerrero

The emergence of indigenous movements in Guerrero goes back to the 1970s. Organizations such as Guerrero's branch of the Movimiento Nacional Indígena and the Consejos Supremos de Pueblos Indígenas preceded the emergence of the CG500 (Sarmiento, Mejía Carrasco, and Rivaud Delgado 2009, 357). The leaders of the Consejo de Pueblos Nahuas del Alto Balsas became active as indigenous organizers in Guerrero at the end of the 1980s (Gutiérrez Ávila 2009, 355). Back then, Nahua leaders mobilized against a government project to build a hydroelectric dam in their territory. Fearing

displacement and the destruction of their homes, they appealed to ethnic identity and rights in reference to the ILO Convention 169 to stop the megaproject.⁴⁶ When international mobilizations started against the quinqucentenary celebrations in 1991, the Nahuas forged alliances with Mixtecos, Amuzgos, Tlapanecos, and Afromexican groups as well as peasant organizations such as Guerrero's branch of the Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas (UNORCA) (Flores Félix 2007, 166–68). After the international protests against the celebration of 1492, the CG500 continued its activism and inspired new initiatives.

6.1. The Rise and Fall of the Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular

In her extensive study of the CG500, Overmyer-Velázquez (2010) examines its claims to a legitimate place in the Mexican nation by mobilizing peasant and indigenous identities. This was part of a Latin American trend in which indigenous movements appropriated rights discourses. Initially, twenty-four groups formed part of CG500, mainly indigenous and peasant organizations (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 35). Mestizo academics also joined in, such as Joaquín Flores Félix, who would later become Unisur's rector. CG500's organizational structure consisted of commissions (about culture, infrastructure, justice, human rights, women, finances, and communication) and a board of directors (Sarmiento, Mejía Carrasco, and Rivaud Delgado 2009, 361). In order to attain autonomy, the CG500 mediated between its indigenous base and state and federal governments about social services, indigenous rights, and political representation. CG500 leaders mobilized large numbers of indigenous people for congresses, marches, protests, and roadblocks, which made the organization a recognized representative of indigenous people in interactions with the government (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 8). Like the national indigenous organization ANIPA, the CG500 forged alliances with political parties. This substantially differed from the Zapatistas, who promoted a version of autonomy that rejected any government support. In fact, CG500 leaders gained important positions in state institutions, such as state and federal deputies and INI director functions on the state and national level (Sarmiento, Mejía Carrasco, and Rivaud Delgado 2009, 364).⁴⁷ Despite its major achievements in terms of public representation, CG500 experienced a crisis around the turn of the century.

CG500's local support was conditioned by the ability to deliver state resources. This produced a form of dependency on government assistance, and, hence, played into the

⁴⁶ In 1989, the International Labour Organization (ILO) published the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169, the first international document that offered protection to indigenous and tribal peoples. Mexico ratified the Convention in 1990 and it went into force in September 1991.

⁴⁷ In 2003, the INI turned into the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI).

hands of federal and state governments. For instance, the organization played a role in implementing President Salinas's Solidarity program in Guerrero. The resources could not bring about structural socioeconomic change for indigenous communities (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 146–48). In the best-case scenario, the funds satisfied direct needs of communities in times of economic hardship. Looking back, CG500 Nahua leader Pedro de Jesús, later to become cofounder of Unisur, stated that CG500 had emphasized material demands over political rights (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 175).

The local needs of impoverished communities had, in a way, played against the broadening of political activism. Overmyer-Velázquez (2010) writes of CG500's localism. CG500 leaders focused on the local community, the *pueblo*, as the privileged space to construct autonomy.⁴⁸ This is not surprising. In Guerrero, one's community is often the strongest source of identification for people, in relation to, for instance, ethnic or class identity (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 94). With the community as entity on which to make mobilizing claims, CG500 leaders essentially came to fulfill the role of mediators between their communities and the government. Over the years, CG500's work often consisted of requesting a variety of government agencies for particular community development projects. While striving for the improvement of their communities, leaders lost sight of the larger movement and its broader political and cultural demands. Leaders who did attempt to act beyond the borders of their communities were dismissed for being unrepresentative (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 158). State officials played into these dynamics by legitimizing only one way of being indigenous, the so-called local Indian, the one "tied to the local peasant community" (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 136). Leaders were only deemed legitimate when confined to these local spaces of organizing. This prevented the emergence of a broader political platform with sufficient bargaining power to question the economic and political status quo, and change the relationship with the state in favor of indigenous autonomy and political rights. All the while, the CG500 contributed indirectly to the power of the federal and state government by channeling their funds. The CG500 faced the dilemma of claiming autonomy while depending on government assistance (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 100).

CG500 faced increased political marginalization and disintegrated altogether in 2002. CG500 leaders had nonetheless activated thousands of indigenous people and managed to put indigenous rights high on the national and international agenda. CG500 had also served as a breeding ground for new leaders and institutions such as the Human Rights Center Tlachinollan. The Mixteco brothers Cirino and Bruno Plácido Valerio became involved in political activism through the CG500. Bruno would later become the founder of Upoeg. But, before that, the brothers became important leaders of the community policing organization that emerged one year after the anti-quincentenary protests, the Crac-PC. One of the Crac-PC's headquarters, the community of Santa Cruz del Rincón,

⁴⁸ The term *pueblo* has various meanings in the Mexican language, since it can refer to a geographical place, a form of communal life, and a way of imagining collectivity (see Eiss 2010; chapter 6).

became a critical node in the establishment of Unisur in 2007. CG500 had also brought about an emerging leadership of indigenous women. Female indigenous CG500 leaders continued their work by setting up Guerrero's branch of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 180).

6.2 The Emergence of the Regional Policing and Justice Organization Crac-PC

In the context of the dismantling of rural welfare programs and CG500 mobilizations, Mixteco and Tlapaneco leaders in Guerrero's Montaña region set up the Consejo de Autoridades Indígenas (CAIN) in 1992. The leaders of the municipalities San Luis Acatlán, Malinaltepec, and Azoyú joined forces to organize communities around their most pressing needs. One of its founders explained to me that CAIN adopted a comprehensive view of development. The organization promoted four issues: economic development, healthcare, education, and security. Over the years, CAIN managed to involve the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN), which established a department in the Tlapaneco community of Santa Cruz del Rincón. And, after much pressure and mobilizations, the state constructed a highway between the cities of Tlapa and Marquelia and set up several healthcare centers (Flores Félix 2007, 119–20). Notwithstanding its socioeconomic focus and accomplishments, the most significant achievement of CAIN, however, became its community policing organization.

In 1995, the *Policía Comunitaria* was founded in response to increased insecurity in communities because of cattle theft, assaults, sexual violence, conflicts over land, and intercommunity conflicts (Sarmiento, Mejía Carrasco, and Rivaud Delgado 2009, 379). The presence of the community police soon reduced the levels of violence and insecurity. When new questions emerged about how to legally process those persons captured by the police, CAIN set up the Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias (Crac) in 1997. The Crac was meant to deal with issues of justice on the basis of indigenous law. As the state failed to provide security and justice, the indigenous justice system became an alternative based on the reeducation and reintegration of wrongdoers (Sierra 2010).

The organization consisted of two bodies: the regional justice system administered by the Crac, and the local community security groups known as *Policía Comunitaria* (PC). The Crac-PC falls under the collective rule of communities through the practice of local and regional assemblies (Sierra 2010, 36). Community policing members are locally elected according to *usos y costumbres*. Accordingly, they gain legitimacy through community election and also work in the service of the same community in the form of rotating work (*cargos*). Furthermore, the Crac consists of community authorities, regional

⁴⁹ The community justice system attends to minor and serious offenses and aims to rehabilitate wrongdoers into the communities through community service and education under the coordination of community authorities. More complex cases are handed over to Crac-PC's regional assembly (Sierra 2013b, 21).

coordinators, and councilors who operate under the mandate of the regional assembly, which is the highest authority (Sierra 2013b, 13).⁴⁹ The organization sets regional security and justice goals, embedded in local demands and participatory democracy.

Like the CG500, the Crac-PC made strategic alliances with political parties, such as the PRD and PRI. For instance, the above mentioned CG500 leader Pedro de Jesús was a PRD sympathizer and state delegate of the INI. He defended the Crac-PC from inside political institutions (Sandoval Cuevas 2010, 53). Unlike the CG500, whose leaders predominantly mediated between local communities and state and federal governments, the Crac-PC engaged in municipal politics, among others to obtain resources or to help supportive politicians into power (Sandoval Cuevas 2007, 59). The Crac-PC did not want to abandon political parties on the municipal level to set up alternative governing structures as the Zapatistas did. They feared legal problems and state persecution. Rather, attempts were made to reinvent political parties in municipal governments, for instance by making them function through assemblies (Flores Félix 2007, 209). During the 2002 municipal election campaign, indigenous identity became an important topic in the Montaña region and brought the Crac-PC significant results. One of Crac's founding Tlapaneco leaders, Apolonio Cruz, became municipal president of Malinaltepec for the PRD (Flores Félix 2007, 209).

With regard to autonomy, Crac leader Cirino Plácido told Jonathan Fox: "In my region it's even prohibited to use the word autonomy, because it scares the regime. We're doing it in practice, but we don't call it that way" (Fox 2007a, 550). In the Montaña region, autonomy is not often evoked as a claim, but is integrated in the strategy and organizational setup of the Crac-PC. Its leaders are locally elected, non-partisan leaders of communities who coordinate security and justice through a regional platform, which functions parallel to municipal governing bodies.

Over the years, state versus Crac-PC relations shifted from negotiation to dialogue, to fierce antagonism. The latter took the form of cooptation, the criminalization of leaders, and threats of disarmament (Sierra 2013b, 24). To claim their right to carry out justice and security work, Crac-PC leaders drew upon a number of laws such as Convention 169 of the ILO, the San Andrés Accords, the UN Declaration of Indigenous People, and the second article of the Mexican Constitution. In doing so, Human Rights Centre Tlachinollan offered legal assistance. In 2011, the Crac-PC obtained official recognition by Guerrero's state government, which issued Law 701. I will return to this law in chapter 5. Even so, external and internal tensions remained part of the project, for instance between Crac-PC's ability to exercise justice and security in autonomous ways, and the management of state resources. I further unpack these tensions in the last section of this chapter. In times of neoliberal restructuring and multicultural reforms in Guerrero, the Montaña region was a forerunner in experiments that reconstructed local power by appealing to indigenous rights.

6.3 Afromexican Advocacy

The inclusion of Afromexicans in the Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular reflected the emergence of another ethnic group in the political arena. Such organizations had already emerged since the 1980s, facilitated by decentralization politics and the Mexican state's incorporation of ethnic variables in development policy (Hoffman and Gloria 2012, 10–11). Afro-descendant people increasingly appropriated terms such as “Negro” or “Afro” to celebrate their cultural distinctiveness, and address socioeconomic problems and structural racism that had roots in colonial Mexico. Mexican anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán was one of the first to study Afromexicans in Mexico, also in the Costa Chica of Guerrero (Beltrán 1958). Anthropologists such as Luz María Martínez Montiel (2017) continue this research today by analyzing the economic, social, and cultural history of Afromexicans and their place in the Mexican nation as the third root (*tercera raíz*). In the Costa Chica, various civil society organizations have emerged to promote economic justice and cultural recognition for Afromexicans and push for constitutional reforms. A member of one of those NGOs, México Negro, said there were about three other organizations—Movimiento Nacional Afrodescendiente, Costa Verde, and Mon Amigo—that were active in Guerrero at the time of my research, and five similar organizations that worked in Oaxaca. I address the juridical progress of Afromexican rights struggles in chapter 6.

7. New Configurations of Violence

Since 2010, Guerrero has become one of Mexico's most violent states. Guerrero has replaced Chihuahua as most bloody state and the city of Acapulco has become more violent than Ciudad Juárez (Padgett 2015, 12). Violence is largely the outcome of an increased drug economy and collusion between state agencies and drug trafficking organizations. Between fifty and seventy percent of opium poppy cultivation in Mexico takes place in Guerrero (Kyle 2015, 13). How did Guerrero become an export-oriented marijuana and opium poppy cultivation region?

In the 1940s, Northern Mexico became the main center of poppy cultivation and opium production. This had to do with the prohibition and criminalization of drugs in the United States and World War II requiring large quantities of morphine (Padgett 2015, 18). While the consumption of drugs in the US increased, its government waged a fierce campaign to end drug trafficking. The subsequent administrations of Nixon, Ford, and Carter employed various strategies to end drug production in Mexico. In the Cold War setting, this often served as a pretext for the persecution of left-wing groups. In the late 1970s, a collaboration between Mexico and the US to eradicate drug cultivation in Northern Mexico, “Operation Condor,” forced drug trafficking organizations to move

part of its cultivation southwards (Padgett 2015, 19–21).

The drug economy especially took root in Guerrero, which had already become a major marijuana producer since the 1960s. There, the counterinsurgency campaigns during the dirty war of the 1970s further enabled the emergence of a transnational drug economy. In his recent work, Aviña (forthcoming) illustrates how PRI officials and military officers in Guerrero employed an anti-drug narrative to repress guerrillas, who were portrayed as drug-related criminals. When the dirty war was over, the same counterinsurgent agents came to play a fundamental role in what Aviña (forthcoming) describes as “the rise in more centralized, cocaine-enriched drug trafficking organizations that fundamentally depended on intimate local collaboration and negotiation between traffickers and a constellation of state agents: federal and state judicial police, military zone commanders and officials, DFS agents, and politicians.” The Beltrán Leyva cartel from Sinaloa held grip on Guerrero’s drug market in alliance with PRI politicians and *caciques*.

The neoliberal economic restructuring and political openings of the 1980s significantly affected the drug trade in Guerrero. Agrarian hardship made poppy and marijuana cultivation appealing to poor peasants (Bartra 2000, 44). More generally, the international liberalization of trade boosted the globalization of illicit business (Pansters 2018). While the international drug economy grew, competitors challenged the market dominance of local elites and drug cartels in Guerrero. When the PRD won Guerrero’s governorship in 2005, after decades of PRI rule, this probably caused a rupture in the power balance between PRI elites and the cartels (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 121). This coincided with changes on the national level, where President Felipe Calderón (2006–12) launched his so-called “war on drugs.”

During his presidency, Calderón introduced the Mérida Initiative, a bilateral anti-narcotics initiative funded by the United States and Mexico.⁵⁰ The Initiative officially aimed to dismantle criminal organizations and reform the justice system. Calderón’s “war on drugs” deployed over fifty thousand soldiers, thousands of federal police, and more than two thousand state and municipal police (Paley 2014, 118). Ever since, the country experienced an increase in assassinations, human rights violations, public insecurity, and militarization: “indiscriminate violence in which criminals and the ‘forces of order’ get mixed up; an insane barbarism that, combined with economic uncertainty and poverty, leaves people stunned, isolated, impotent, socially-paralyzed, in a state of civic catatonia that immobilizes them both physically and spiritually” (Bartra 2015, 54). More than one

⁵⁰ The Mérida Initiative cannot be mentioned without referring to its predecessor Plan Colombia, which ended in 2006. Plan Colombia was launched in 1991 as a US-backed plan to destroy Colombia’s cocaine trade and to dismantle guerrilla groups such as the FARC. As a result of the plan, overall levels of violence in Colombia increased while it failed to meaningfully reduce the flow of drugs. The plan diverted drug trafficking practices to other countries such as Mexico (see Paley 2014).

⁵¹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2015. “Statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, on his visit to Mexico, October 7th, 2015.” Accessed March 1, 2019. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16578>.

hundred fifty thousand people have been murdered since 2006 and 2014,⁵¹ and, in 2017, Human Rights Watch Mexico registered the disappearance of over thirty-two thousand Mexicans since 2006.⁵²

In Guerrero, the war on drugs led to the falling apart of large drug cartels. While state officials celebrated the dismemberment of the Beltrán Leyva cartel, it paved the way for the emergence of new criminal groups such as Los Rojos, Guerreros Unidos, and Los Ardillos. In 2015, at least eleven criminal organizations operated in Guerrero.⁵³ The small and rivaling criminal groups relied on unprecedented levels of violence in the conflicts over the drug market and territory (Kyle 2015, 20).⁵⁴ Homicide rates increased substantively,⁵⁵ and Guerrero became “one of the hotspots” of displacement due to insecurity (Gledhill 2015, 127). In 2012, Guerrero also ranked second in *feminicidios* (Padgett 2015, 54), and kidnapping has become commonplace while the perpetrators enjoy “near complete impunity” (Kyle 2015, 6). Disappearances are likely the result of the diversification of criminal organizations, from drug trafficking toward new ventures such as kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, and weapons smuggling (Paley 2014, 3). In general, the restructuring of criminal organizations has led to a new sense of insecurity. While *cacique* violence has always been present, it is especially the unpredictability and volatile behavior of the criminal groups disputing territory that makes people live in constant uncertainty (Bartra 2015).

However, Mexico’s human rights crisis has more complex roots. The country is part of a broader Latin American trend in which violence is not necessarily caused by state failure, but rather part of the state’s functioning in conjunction with armed actors (Arias 2010, 132). On the national level, for instance, Anabel Hernández (2013) suggests that the PAN governments (2000–12) made agreements with the Sinaloa Cartel. In Guerrero as well, soldiers, police, judges, and politicians have been accused of ties with organized crime. On the municipal level, organized crime members assume positions in municipal governments, or strike deals with or extort municipal authorities. For instance, the Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal published a list of twenty-five mayors and ex-mayors with presumed links to organized crime.⁵⁶ One of my participants described how organized crime actors are especially eager to control the municipal departments of security, transit, and finance to secure their monopoly

⁵² Human Rights Watch Mexico. 2017. “Mexico Events of 2017.” Accessed April 1, 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mexico>.

⁵³ Cervantes, Jesus. 2015. “Guerrero Tierra de Carteles.” *Proceso*, December 12, 2015. Accessed on July 21, 2017. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/424007/guerrero-tierra-de-carteles>.

⁵⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*, 2014. “Guerrero, el estado más violento y comparable con los lugares más peligrosos del mundo: Campa.” November 25, 2014. Accessed July 27, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/249976>.

⁵⁵ INEGI 2012. “Press report number 310/12.” August 20, 2012. Accessed October 11, 2017. <http://www.inegi.org.mx/inegi/contenidos/espanol/prensa/Boletines/Boletin/Comunicados/Especiales/012/agosto/comunica29.pdf>.

⁵⁶ *Proceso*, 2014. “Entregan a la PGR lista de 25 narcoalcaldes de Guerrero.” December 2, 2014. Accessed January 27, 2017. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/389647>.

over violence, protect business interests, and launder their illegal revenues, respectively. According to Bartra (2015, 47), the situation in Guerrero demonstrates: “that for some time now, organized crime groups, capital and political power have been interlaced such that it is possible to speak of a narco-state.” The role of national and international capital interests also deserves attention. There appear to be connections between the paramilitary violence perpetrated by cartels in rural Mexico and certain business interests (Gledhill 2015, 174). That is why Ackerman has used the term “competitive authoritarianism” to depict the contemporary entanglements between economic elites, drug cartels, and international business.⁵⁷ With the return to power of the PRI in 2012, corporate interests only gained ground. The controversial reforms implemented by President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–18) were authoritarian and vertical in nature (Navarro 2015, 45). It opened the door for the privatization of education and the energy sector. As a result, the justice and humanitarian crisis in Mexico intensified during Peña Nieto’s rule. Amnesty International’s America director stated that, under Peña’s six-year rule, the number of disappearances increased, multiple instances of extra-judicial executions were carried out by security forces, and torture, including sexual torture, was a standard procedure in the justice system.⁵⁸ The last two years of Peña’s rule became the most violent in the country’s recent history, especially for women, human rights defenders, and journalists. In this context of increased, unpredictable, and multifaceted violence, popular organizations in Guerrero started to redefine themselves.

8. Emerging Social Responses

The Crac-PC did not fare well in the newly violent Guerrero, particularly after 2010. Its leaders were unaccustomed to deal with organized crime and disagreed on the course to follow. Divisions intensified in view of the complexity of the problems (Sierra 2013b, 19). Furthermore, state-supported international mining corporations arrived to the scene, eager to exploit natural resources in the Montaña region. This made the Crac-PC join an anti-mining campaign in 2011.⁵⁹ Although the organization reactivated important collective struggles over territory, the mining struggle also redirected energy away from security and justice work (Sierra 2013b, 18). In general, the state responded by increasing

⁵⁷ Ackerman, John. “Peña Nieto and the return of authoritarian politics.” Paper presented at the Society of Latin American Studies (SLAS), Aberdeen, April 2015.

⁵⁸ Erika Guevara Rosas, Americas director at Amnesty International. 2018. “Surveying the damage: Enrique Peña Nieto.” November 20, 2018. Accessed March 18, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/enrique-pena-nieto-el-recuento-de-los-danos>.

⁵⁹ In 2011, the Consejo Regional de Autoridades Agrarias en Defensa del Territorio y contra la Minería (CRAADT) was formed. CRAADT rejected all mining concessions and the creation of the Biosphere Reserve in the Montaña region. According to the Council, the inhabitants of the twelve villages that would be affected by the Reserve project had not been consulted while the same was the case for the mining projects (Gasparello 2017, 185–87).

the presence of state forces and the military in the region (Sierra 2015b, 145). Another catalyst of problems had to do with the resources provided by the state to the Crac-PC.⁶⁰ The money aggravated internal divisions and conflicts. Meanwhile, state repression continued. That same year, the state government imprisoned Crac-PC leaders Nestora Salgado, Bernardino García, Gonzalo Molina, and Arturo Campos Herrera.⁶¹

While the Crac-PC faced problems on multiple fronts, other community policing groups appeared in Guerrero. Faced with increased insecurity in 2013, at least six self-defense or community policing groups were active in more than half of Guerrero's eighty-one municipalities.⁶² The most important newcomers were the Coordinadora Regional de Seguridad y Justicia-Policía Ciudadana y Popular (CRSJ-PCP) in the Nahua municipality of Olinalá, located in the Montaña region; the Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero (Upoeg), which emerged in the Costa Chica; and the armed branch of the Consejo de Ejidos y Comunidades Opositores a la Presa la Parota (CECOP) in the Acapulco area. These groups resembled the Crac-PC in terms of organizational structure and objectives. Nevertheless, most attempts to coordinate between the different groups failed. In fact, the rise of these new groups accelerated Crac-PC's internal conflicts and factionalism. The situation became even more complicated when the Crac-PC extended toward Tixla, Ayutla de los Libres, and Olinalá, districts where Upoeg and CRSJ-PCP were already active. As a result, disputes emerged about geographic control among the different groups. In this light, the federal state posed this revival of policing groups as a significant new security threat that required intervention. State and federal officials strengthened previous efforts to centralize public security from municipal to state levels. These developments directly challenged the survival of the Crac-PC since it infringed on their community control over security (Sierra 2015a, 22).

The complex conditions of violence created or aggravated a multitude of problems for the oldest community policing organization in Guerrero, which grappled with increased internal and external tensions. All the while, new popular actors perceived community policing as the only way to protect their communities in the context of increased insecurity. They not only followed the indigenous tradition of the Crac-PC but also have to be understood in the context of a recent history of self-defense forces that emerged in politically violent settings, such as the self-defense brigades of Vázquez and Cabañas in the 1970s. In chapter 4, I examine how Upoeg played into the momentum created by this new configuration of violence, when state institutions were unable or unwilling to protect

⁶⁰ A special rapport of the National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) documents state donations. For example, the Crac-PC received approximately €46,000 in financial contributions in the year 2013.

⁶¹ Hernández Navarro, Luis. 2015. "Los comunitarios guerrerenses presos." *La Jornada*, May 26, 2015. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/05/26/opinion/017a2pol>.

⁶² Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH). 2013. "Informe Especial sobre los Grupos de Autodefensa y la Seguridad Pública en el Estado de Guerrero." D.F Mexico. Accessed July 21, 2017. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/2016_IE_gruposautodefensa.pdf.

its citizens. Its leaders seized the opportunity not only to bring security to communities, but also to initiate new experiments to reconstitute local power. In chapter 5, I show how these efforts are connected to the openings created by multicultural reforms. Importantly, the case of Upoeg is not an isolated phenomenon, illustrated by the claims and actions of the Asamblea Nacional Popular (ANP).

The ANP appeared in 2014 to demand justice for the forced disappearance of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students. On the night of September 26, 2014, students from the Ayotzinapa rural teaching college came under attack from state forces in the city of Iguala, in northern Guerrero. Six students and bystanders were killed, and forty-three students were taken by state forces in collusion with members of organized crime.⁶³ Only the bodily remains of one of the students have been found, the whereabouts of the other forty-two students remain unknown at the time of writing. In the aftermath, months of massive protests pushed the country toward a political crisis. In Guerrero, the ANP emerged as a coalition of indigenous people, students, militant teachers' unions, and other supportive social sectors, with family members of the disappeared students at the forefront. Internationally, the Ayotzinapa drama exposed the consequences of what protesters called "the *narcostate*," with Guerrero as its epicenter. As had happened before, Guerrero played a leading role in what was a political crisis of national proportion. The attack on the Ayotzinapa students was widely understood as part of a long-lasting pattern of political violence in Mexico. In Guerrero, nobody has forgotten the history of political repression during the 1960s and 1970s. The repression of Ayotzinapa students and teachers was also not exceptional. Some years before, in 2011, the police had killed two Ayotzinapa students on the road toward Chilpancingo.

Similar to Genaro Vázquez *cívicos*, who had demanded the dissolving of powers (*desaparición de poderes*) of the state governor and municipal authorities in the 1960s (Bartra 1996, 91–92), the ANP called for the resignation of authorities on all levels of Mexico's three-level political system.⁶⁴ Through ongoing mobilizations and international pressure, the ANP forced the governor, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, to step down. Aguirre had been elected in 2011, after having served as interim-governor in the 1990s and shifting from the PRI to the PRD. Furthermore, in November 2014, the ANP took over municipal town halls in Guerrero. Some were only symbolic takeovers for one day, but, in most cases, municipal governments were forced to operate from alternative locations for months.⁶⁵ In

⁶³ Hernández, Anabel and Steve Fisher. 2014. "Iguala: la historia no oficial, Reportaje Especial." *Proceso*, December 13, 2014. Accessed July 21, 2014. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/390560/iguala-la-historia-no-oficial>.

⁶⁴ *Desaparición de poderes* is a legal process that allows the Mexican senate to reconstitute all the constitutional powers (legislative, executive, and judicial) of a state within the Mexican federal system, as articulated in Article 76 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States.

⁶⁵ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. "Están tomados 40 ayuntamientos, informa la CETEG." November 30, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2014. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/estan-tomados-40-ayuntamientos-informa-la-ceteg>.

some places, the ANP installed a “popular government.” In Tlapa, for instance, the ANP formed a popular municipal assembly that was to elect a council to govern municipal life without the interference of political parties. They planned to hold the 2015 municipal elections by means of *usos y costumbres*.⁶⁶ In reference to these developments, one protester told me: “Unfortunate, but Ayotzinapa gave us space to carry out our ideas. These ideas already existed and now is our chance.”⁶⁷ Born as a protest against the state and criminal violence, the ANP took up struggles over municipal democracy that had started prior to the Mexican Revolution.

By June 2015, the ANP called upon its support base to hand over all municipal town halls that were still in hands of the movement, because of the rise in arrest warrants against ANP leaders.⁶⁸ As such, ANP’s direct actions and large-scale mobilizations did not manage to structurally rearrange the political functioning of municipal governments, although the attempts continued in various localities. Neither did ANP’s call to boycott the elections prevent the PRI’s return to power in Guerrero with the governorship of Héctor Astudillo Flores in 2015. In the following chapters, I will show how Upoeg also focused on the municipality as a locus for political change.

9. Concluding Comments

This chapter has provided a historical context for the organizations studied in this dissertation. I situated Guerrero’s activism in nationwide trends and linked local conflicts to more general developments. As this chapter shows, popular actors in Guerrero have played a major role in defining the course of Mexico’s history. Groups from Guerrero’s different regions actively participated in political processes on various scales. After independence, elites and peasants in the Costa Chica joined forces and brought down centralist dictator Santa Anna. In the 1970s, armed peasant teachers in the Costa Grande formed the greatest popular challenge to the PRI regime. Currently, Guerrero is one of the country’s most insecure states. The Ayotzinapa movement and the rise of community policing organizations illustrate how the state’s popular classes have again taken the lead in contesting the political status quo. In this conclusion, I identify some important historical trends in activism in relation to the key themes of democracy, economic justice, and indigenous rights.

⁶⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Instalan en Tlapa la Asamblea Popular que eligira al Consejo; funcionara por usos y costumbres, acuerdan.” December 1, 2014. Accessed December 1, 2014. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/instalan-en-tlapa-la-asamblea-popular-que-elegira-al-consejo-funcionara-por-usos-y-costumbres-acuerdan>.

⁶⁷ Conversation, December 4, 2014.

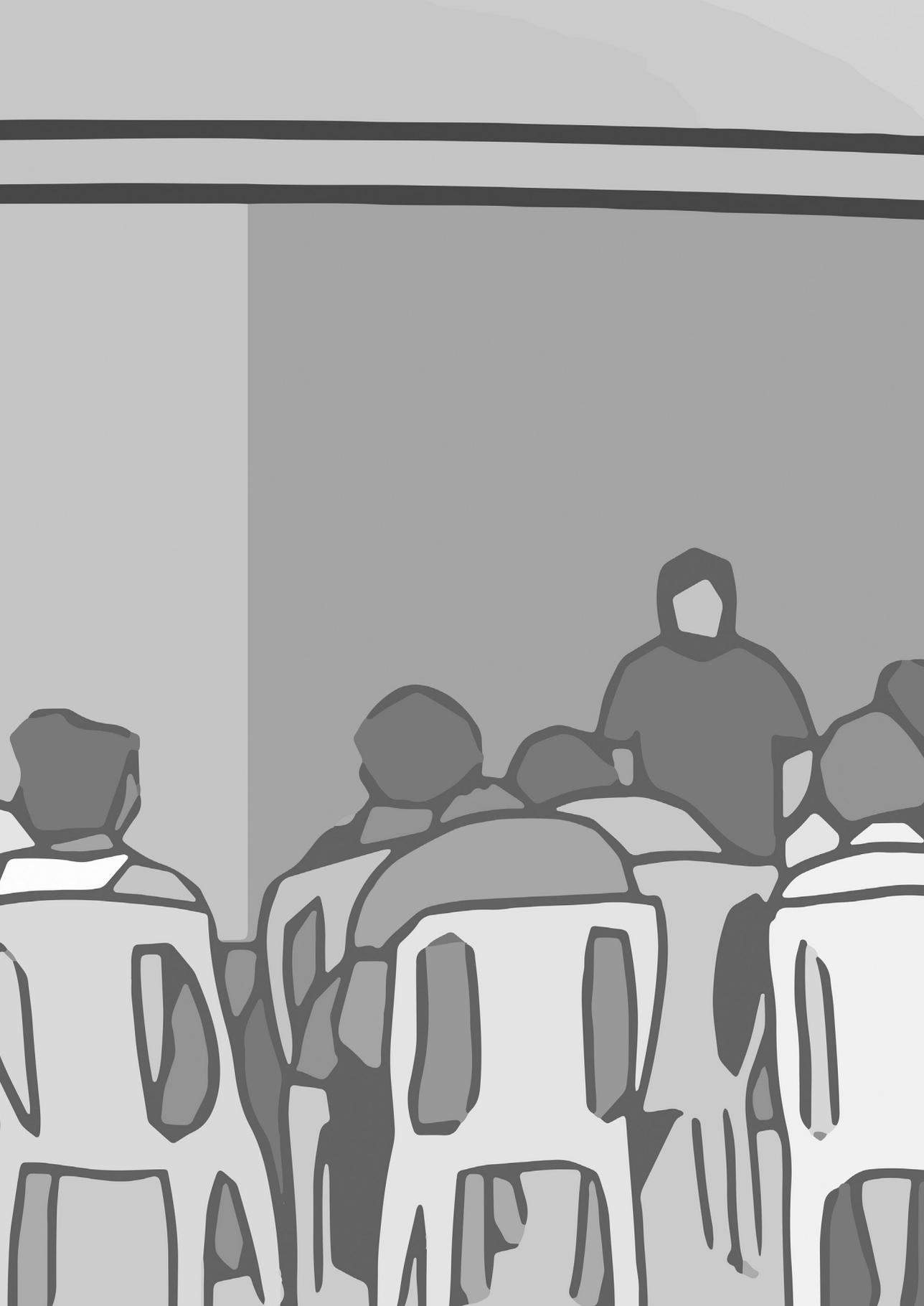
⁶⁸ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2015. “El 28 de Junio la poblacion definira si se entrega el Ayuntamiento de Ayutla, informan.” June 18, 2015. Accessed June 18, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/uncategorized/el-28-de-junio-la-poblacion-definira-si-se-entrega-el-ayuntamiento-de-ayutla-informan>.

Over the years, the exercise of power on the local level provoked political action and democratic experiments. Various groups took the electoral road to gain municipal power and democratize local politics and economic relations. But, in the face of electoral repression—similar to the POA in Acapulco in the 1920s, Vázquez's *cívicos* in the 1960s, and the PRD in the late 1980s—reformists were pushed toward direct action or even armed rebellion. By waging a war against the state, Cabañas sought to establish a political system in which rural communities could exercise more political and economic control. Other organizations employed the strategy of municipal office takeovers, where citizens experimented with direct popular rule. Overall, such attempts have been inspired by diverse ideologies of radical agrarianism, social democracy, Cardenista populism, and New Left ideals. In the last decades, struggles to rearrange political power have often been waged and diversified under the flag of indigenous rights and autonomy. Discussions arose about the most appropriate and feasible administrative levels for indigenous autonomy—the level of the community, municipality, or region? Indigenous organizations such as the CG500 and Crac-PC adopted strategies and visions to reconstitute local power in Guerrero in favor of indigenous autonomy. The CG500 attempted to forge autonomy on the community level and interacted with higher levels of governance to obtain access to decision-making bodies. The organization eventually disintegrated, among other reasons because it failed to gain an independent status from the state. In turn, the Crac-PC managed to obtain control over security and justice work by embedding community governance into a regional coordinating body in the midst of emerging external and internal tensions.

The contemporary conditions of multifaceted violence produced new dilemmas for the Crac-PC, and made other community policing groups emerge. These popular organizations built further on their predecessor's attempts to reconstitute local power. In the chapters about Upoeg, I examine the ways in which the municipality reappeared as the primary site of political contestation, and how the organization employed older strategies of (armed) direct action, elections, and upscaling to novel violent and multicultural contexts. The same applies to Unisur. The politicization of education is anything but new in Guerrero, ever since schools and education acquired special attention of revolutionary leaders such as Zapata and Cabañas. The emergence and experiences of Unisur must be understood along this line, but also as part of indigenous politics and the dilemmas caused by its trajectory of regional mobilizations, localist demands, and state dependency.

Neoliberal multiculturalism offered indigenous organizations new channels to express dissent, but it also limited and regulated indigenous claims. Cultural recognition can come at the expense of more systemic change, or may offer remedies for injustices to some groups over others. In this sense, indigenous and Afromexican activists faced similar dilemmas as preceding popular actors that had challenged class, ethnic, and gender hierarchies. In reference to postrevolutionary Guerrero, Bartra (1996, 12) referred to the failing links between diverse social groups and their claims. This had undermined

united struggles against the corporatist *cacique* political system, and “the march towards a new democracy” (Bartra 1996, 13). Even so, struggles converged at times. During the 1960s, when the ACG brought together a wide range of social actors, it unified demands for economic justice, political participation, and women’s rights. However, the dirty war drove previously aligned groups apart. I will examine how organizations such as Upoeg and Unisur deal with intersecting and divergent ethnic, class, and gendered demands and identities. I study how this affected the aspirations for the deepening of democracy under Guerrero’s contemporary conditions of multiculturalism and violence. In the following chapters, I examine how Upoeg and Unisur looked for new ways to forge coalitions, rethink cultural boundaries, bridge demands, and reconstitute local power.



PART II

4

Upoeg: Regional Policing Beyond Security

1. Introduction

The forced disappearance of forty-three Ayotzinapa students in late September 2014 pushed Mexico into a political crisis.⁶⁹ All over the country, thousands of people took to the streets to protest against impunity and violence under the slogan “we are all Ayotzinapa.” The slogan illustrated the broad sense of solidarity with the students’ parents and revealed the deep feelings of insecurity felt by many Mexican people: violence does not discriminate; it can happen to anyone. In Guerrero, the cities of Acapulco and Chilpancingo turned into permanent sites of mobilizations, including massive marches, roadblocks, and occupations of government buildings. Rural areas in Guerrero also joined in. In Cuajinicuilapa, people could hardly remember the last time a political protest had taken place in town, but now they marched through the streets, chanting revolutionary slogans such as “Ayotzi, hold on until Cuaji rises up.”⁷⁰

In the meantime, Guerrero’s PRD governor Aguirre faced a hard time keeping up appearances. The man accused of ordering the attacks, Iguala mayor José Luis Abarca, belonged to his political party. While the state governor was losing credibility and had trouble heading off the crisis, President Peña Nieto abstained from interfering for months by saying the state government should assume its responsibility. Meanwhile, civil society groups recalled the history of massacres in which state forces had played a role, thereby claiming that Mexico had a structural problem with violence. During a march in Mexico City, protesters held a banner with the following list: “Tlatlaya, Tlatelolco, El Charco, Apatzingán, Golonchan, Aguas Blancas, Acteal, Tanhuato, Ayotzinapa.”

While the governor of Guerrero and the president both dodged responsibility, an extraordinary caravan reached Iguala. On October 8, 2014, more than five hundred members of the community policing organization Upoeg left their communities in the Costa Chica region and drove four hours to Iguala to start a search party for the disappeared students. Local news reported, “almost all of them wear leather sandals,”

⁶⁹ The forty-three students were enrolled in Ayotzinapa’s rural teachers college, Escuela Normal Rural, a higher education institution located in the north of Guerrero. For more information on the forced disappearance, see chapter 3.

⁷⁰ This is a list of major massacres that have taken place in Mexico’s modern history. For instance, in 1968, state forces killed hundreds of student protesters in Mexico City, and, in 1997, forty-five members of a Christian pacifist group were murdered by a state-allied paramilitary group in the village of Acteal. The victims had pledged support to the Zapatista uprising.

indicating their peasant background.⁷¹ Upoeg was well received as teachers and students of the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (UAG) offered them a place to stay and local citizens brought them food, water, and coffee.

At a regional assembly a few days earlier, where an Ayotzinapa student who had survived the attacks shared his eyewitness account, Upoeg members had decided to go to Iguala. An Upoeg promoter had recalled a promise made when Upoeg had started: to go wherever people were killed in their territory. Another leader had talked with indignation about what had happened to “our youth” and proposed to go to look for the students in Iguala, “house-by-house.” After the majority of the assembly showed approval by a show of hands, people roared and chanted: “Fight peoples of the Costa Chica, long live the Costa Chica!”⁷²

In Iguala, Upoeg members roamed the city and its rural surroundings for weeks, in search of clues and witnesses that could lead them to the whereabouts of the students. A reporter asked whether they had come to chase away organized crime like they had done before: “we came as a civil movement, but if people want us to stay and teach them the system of community policing, we’ll do it because extortions and kidnappings are occurring here, just like in the Costa Chica and in the Montaña.”⁷³ Upoeg promised to chase away the criminal groups that operated in the city, like its members had done in other places, if Iguala’s inhabitants would provide support. For now, Upoeg members had left their rifles at home to avoid problems with the military and Guerreros Unidos, the criminal group accused of involvement in the disappearance of the students. Although the students were not found during the daily searches, Upoeg discovered numerous clandestine graves. It turned out that the hills surrounding the city were hiding chronicles of terror. State police forces stationed in Iguala had never drew attention to these crimes. Local news quoted a community police member in reference to the state police: “Look at all of them, with their bulletproof vests, weapons and armored vehicles. But us . . . we go out to look for those young boys with just a machete, like out in the fields. They just go around wasting gasoline, they don’t want to get their uniforms dirty.”⁷⁴

Upoeg asserted its authority with the massive entrance of five hundred of its members into the city of Iguala. By means of investigative practices, Upoeg and family members of disappeared people took control over the conditions that shaped their lives rather than awaiting state action. I accompanied Upoeg members on one of these searches a couple

⁷¹ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Llegan 500 policías ciudadanos a Iguala a buscar a los estudiantes de Ayotzinapa desaparecidos.” October 8, 2014. Accessed October 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/llegan-500-policias-ciudadanos-a-iguala-a-buscar-a-los-estudiantes-de-ayotzinapa-desaparecidos>

⁷² Fieldnotes, October 5, 2014.

⁷³ Rosagel, Shaila. 2014. “600 autodefensas se unen a la búsqueda; otras caravanas llegan a Iguala mañana.” *SinEmbargo*, October 7, 2014. Accessed September 4, 2018. <http://www.sinembargo.mx/07-10-2014/1137644>.

⁷⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Va la autodefensa de Iguala a Cocula para buscar a los 43 normalistas desaparecidos.” October 9, 2014. Accessed October 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/215488>.

of weeks after Upoeg appeared in Iguala. Although the vast majority of Upoeg members had already returned home, where plots of land awaited to be cultivated, some stayed behind. Together with family members of disappeared people, Upoeg leaders organized the Comité de Búsqueda los Otros Desaparecidos de Iguala (Search Committee of Other Disappeared people in Iguala). Almost every day, committee members searched the hills around Iguala from dawn until dusk for their lost family members, dressed in T-shirts that read “Child, we will continue searching until we have buried you.” They worked by what was referred to among Upoeg members as community intelligence (*inteligencia comunitaria*), in reference to the local knowledge of the countryside. As we walked through the barren hills, committee and Upoeg members indiscriminately poked the earth with wooden sticks to detect loose earth as a possible sign of recent digging. When human remains were found, committee members would place a flag to mark the spot and inform the public ministry, in the hope they would investigate further.

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The collective search party of Upoeg members produced an unusual image: the response to a profound drama had to come from organized citizens rather than from state institutions. Upoeg worked without the professional knowledge or the required equipment to investigate such crimes. Why did Upoeg engage in tasks usually carried out by the state? The military and federal police were also present in Iguala, but citizens involved in the search parties expressed doubts about their capabilities and trustworthiness. After all, state forces were suspected to be involved in the forced disappearance of the forty-three students.

Here, and elsewhere in Latin America, state authorities have increasingly been challenged by a wide range of individuals, groups, organizations, and communities that make political and legal claims to authority (Sieder 2011, 172). I study how Upoeg represents itself and legitimates its actions with the help of the concept of political authority. As mentioned in chapter 1, I turn attention to Upoeg’s aspirations to locate legitimate authority in acts of governance of “last resort.” Smith (2003, 108) explains the latter as an authoritative political apparatus that gains “varying degrees of ascendancy over all other social relations.” I will study Upoeg’s security practices as not only being about matters of safety and insecurity, but also about generating new processes of local governance.

On this subject, Upoeg’s involvement in Iguala unearths various clues. Upoeg members spoke of community intelligence to express the value of peasant communities and their rural knowledge. As such, the Upoeg police made claims of legitimacy on the basis of local peasant identities. What is more, they contrasted their actions to those of the state police, whom they ridiculed for only worrying about messing up their uniforms. This evidences the relational dimension of political authority (Smith 2003, 110). First, there is

the relationship between Upoeg and the citizens on whose behalf it claimed to exercise legitimate authority. Second, there are the relations to other (sovereign) authorities. In settings where different state and non-state actors make claims of authority to produce a particular social order, non-state actors may undermine the authority of the state, such as when Upoeg members claim to be better prepared to provide security. But, according to Diphoorn (2016, 20), non-state actors also “seek a degree of recognition from and partnership with the state,” something that holds true for the case of Upoeg, as further examined in this chapter. This brings us to the wider implications of organizations such as Upoeg and their part in transforming political relations and institutions. I contend that Upoeg’s policing must be understood as an effort that stands in a long history of struggles over rural democratization, and that happened at a time when Guerrero suffered a crisis of security, probably the worst since the dirty war of the 1970s.

In this chapter, I especially draw on the work of Smith (2003) and Gustafson (2011), who analyze the construction of authority through spatialized practices and politics. The importance of the spatial component in Upoeg’s activities is illustrated by its engagements in Iguala. The northern city is relatively far from the rural Costa Chica region, the birthplace of Upoeg. After its emergence, the organization broadened its scope by moving to Iguala and other regions in Guerrero. Regional organizing is understood as one of the key features of peasant organizations to boost rural interests vis-à-vis the state or federal governments (Fox 2007a, 530). Upoeg, too, extended its policing activities across conflictive communities and regions. Especially municipal seats, the places that host Mexico’s lowest level of governance, turned into sites of struggle.

In sum, Upoeg’s trek to Iguala serves as a starting point to examine the organization’s emergence and evolution, especially in terms of spatial ambitions. This chapter begins by exploring how the organization became a security force and developed into a regional armed actor. I assess the ways in which Upoeg’s assertions of legitimacy resonated in local communities, and how the organization subsequently moved beyond the sphere of policing. Furthermore, I examine how state and non-actors alike contested Upoeg, which gave rise to negotiations and conflicts on various scales. In the last section of this chapter, I turn to address violence. By zooming in on the Centro region of Guerrero, where deadly conflicts flared up after Upoeg emerged, I ask what we can learn from Upoeg’s strategies about the (im)possibilities of local political change in times of increased violence, and how my conceptual approach contributes to studies of community policing. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the outcomes of Upoeg’s legal activism in the Costa Chica region.

2. From Development to Security

The first mention of Upoeg dates back to January 14 in 2011, when leaders from various peasant and indigenous organizations came together in Tlapa, a northern city of Guerrero.⁷⁵ Bruno Plácido Valerio, one of the principal leaders of Upoeg, looked back at the beginnings: “It came out because lots of people said they robbed because they were poor; that’s why it [Upoeg] was set up, as a promoter to negotiate highways because the people were dying on the roads where it took 6 or 7 hours to make it to their towns.”⁷⁶ Upoeg presented a broad agenda of issues: healthcare, electricity, education, infrastructure, public transportation, socioeconomic projects, the right to consultation and cultural expressions, public security, justice, and land rights.⁷⁷ The overall aim of the organization was summarized as promoting integral development and infrastructure for rural communities. The objectives of Upoeg bear resemblance to those of the Consejo de Autoridades Indígenas (CAIN) in the 1990s, the organization that eventually converted into the community policing organization Crac-PC (see chapter 3). This was no coincidence, since Bruno was a former Crac leader. Whereas the Crac-PC had come to focus its efforts on security and justice, Upoeg attempted to reinvigorate CAIN’s past objectives with a more integral project.

In the beginning, the most significant work of Upoeg concentrated on the issue of electricity. The Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE) charged high fees in rural communities, often because of accumulated debts. Upoeg organized payment strikes and takeovers of CFE buildings to call attention to the burden of these electricity debts. In August 2012, the governor of Guerrero agreed to substantially relieve rural communities in the Costa Chica from their CFE debts.⁷⁸ Upoeg was also involved in defending the right of indigenous communities to hold elections according to *usos y costumbres*, that is, normative systems of indigenous community governance. In the run-up to the 2012 federal elections, Upoeg promoted the election of municipal mayors through assemblies in non-partisan elections rather than through political party competition. Upoeg requested the Instituto Electoral del Estado de Guerrero (IEEG) to hold citizen referendums in San Luis Acatlán and Ayutla de los Libres in the Costa Chica. Both home to large indigenous populations, the referendum asked whether local citizens agreed to hold elections

⁷⁵ Ferrer, Sergio. 2012. “Buscará la UPOEG convertirse en institución comunitaria de contraloría social, acuerdan.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, January 3, 2012. Accessed July 19, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/buscar-la-upoeg-convertirse-en-institucion-comunitaria-de-contraloria-social-acuerdan>.

⁷⁶ Cervantes, Zacarías. 2014. “Bruno Plácido fue mozo, preso y torturado antes de ser el líder de la UPOEG y su autodefensa.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, May 27, 2014. Accessed September 4, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/archivoelsur/archivos/151289>.

⁷⁷ Upoeg. “¿Quiénes somos?” Accessed July 19, 2017. <http://upoeg.blogspot.nl/p/quienes-somos.html>

⁷⁸ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2012. “Firma Aguirre compromiso para resolver los adeudos con la CFE de pueblos que están en huelga de pagos.” April 20, 2012. Accessed July 20, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/firma-aguirre-compromiso-para-resolver-los-adeudos-con-la-cfe-de-pueblos-que-estan-en-huelga-de-pagos>.

according to *usos y costumbres*.⁷⁹ Although these attempts were unsuccessful at the time, it marked the beginning of a longer struggle that I will examine in chapter 5.

Upoeg headed in new directions in January 2013 under the influence of increasing levels of violence in Guerrero. After the so-called “war on drugs” broke up large drug cartels, new and smaller criminal groups surfaced that employed unprecedented levels of violence (Kyle 2015, 20). In addition, Guerrero topped the list of states with high levels of impunity (Padgett 2015, 187). During a PAR session with Unisur students, they brought back memories from the times before Upoeg’s emergence: “Before this [Upoeg] existed, there were lots of killings, lots of rapes, kidnappings. No citizen’s or community’s rights were respected as such. For example, if you were going to the municipal town in Ayutla, you’d have to go out and make your purchases real early because at such and such a time you’d be assaulted. There was no peace because you’d be going around in the collective taxi thinking, ‘Oh no, am I next?’”⁸⁰

The city of Ayutla de los Libres operated as a center for many indigenous and rural communities. The city is the seat of local government (*cabecera*) of the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, home to 128 rural communities in the Costa Chica region.⁸¹ The road to the city had become unsafe. On their way to the city, women had fallen victim to sexual assaults by members of criminal groups, and armed robberies on collective transport vehicles had become frequent. Rural inhabitants who sold local products on Ayutla’s market had stopped coming. These experiences corresponded to the rising crime rates and violence in Guerrero that had mainly, but not exclusively, turned urban spaces into places of insecurity and fear. Indeed, students recalled the shootings in Ayutla’s public spaces, which made it dangerous to visit the city. This development disrupted the mobility between rural communities and municipal towns, centers of trade, and seats of local governance. Furthermore, students expressed how organized crime had been on the verge of entering their communities: “They began with the folks who had businesses, charging them protection money, and cattle-ranchers too. Sometimes people here start to look for a way to make a living, just making enough to get by, for the future, you know. We save up some money, even say ‘let’s not eat to save money,’ so it’s not fair for somebody to come along and just steal it from you.”⁸² Not only large-scale cattle ranchers, but also peasants and small business owners became targets of extortion.

In this context of increasing insecurity, Upoeg promoters began to approach communities with the idea of forming community policing groups. During community

⁷⁹ Cervantes, Zacarías. 2012. “Discutirá la UPOEG la negativa del IEEG para que los pueblos originarios voten por usos y costumbres.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, June 5, 2012. Accessed July 19, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivoelsur/archivos/23457>.

⁸⁰ Participatory Action Research session “Spiderweb,” December 10, 2014.

⁸¹ Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL). 2013. “Unidad de Microregiones. Cédulas de Información Municipal: Ayutla de los Libres.” Accessed August 25, 2018. <http://www.microrregiones.gob.mx/zap/datGenerales.aspx?entra=zap&ent=12&mun=012>.

⁸² Participatory Action Research session “Spiderweb,” December 10, 2014.

assemblies and house visits, Upoeg promoters called upon people to overcome their fears. In reference to the work of The Copenhagen School, Goldstein (2012, 14) writes about such processes of securitization. He describes it as “constructing a collective understanding of something as a particular kind of danger,” that requires specific action. This is usually done by states to strengthen their position (see Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde 1998). In some way, Upoeg engaged in securitization “from below.” For instance, a former Upoeg member remembered Upoeg promoters visiting his house, and encouraging him to stand up against organized crime: “He [Upoeg promoter] told us that we shouldn’t let our lives be dominated by criminals. And it was true. We only had to watch television, listen to the radio, read the newspaper, or go to Acapulco, to see what was happening. Every year, it became worse. Luckily, it was still calm here, still respectable. Of course, there are boys who use drugs, but it was still under control.”⁸³

With criminal groups operating especially in towns and cities, Upoeg encouraged rural communities to join forces and make the municipal seat of Ayutla de los Libres safe. Upoeg promoters played a leading role in this undertaking. Upoeg uses the term “promoter” rather than “leader” to refer to those individuals who organize, mobilize, and push the advancement of Upoeg’s agenda: “Leaders operate alone, promoters are guided by the *pueblos*.”⁸⁴ Like Bruno, these promoters often have a history in political and local struggles. Looking back on these days, one Upoeg promoter recalled the need for community policing organizations to go beyond “our communal territories.” It was dangerous for people to move outside their community, he said, and that was precisely the reason why they founded the *policía ciudadana* (citizen police), who were also *comunitarias* (community police). By presenting itself as a *policía ciudadana* rather than *policía comunitaria*, Upoeg expressed its changing approach. The promoter framed other policing organizations, such as the Crac-PC, as predominantly taking the community as their place of organizing and locality in need of protection.⁸⁵ In contrast, the category of *policía ciudadana* rather than *policía comunitaria* stressed the ideal of bringing security to rural people not only within their communities, but also beyond community borders, including municipal towns. Since security is socially constructed, the audiences of securitization processes need to accept the legitimacy of the (in)security claims (Goldstein 2012, 14). One of the most powerful effects of insecurity, according to Goldstein (2012, 122–23), is the way it individualizes local populations because it produces feelings of isolation that make people withdraw to their own homes and lives. Therefore, it can make collective action difficult. The way in which insecurity was framed by Upoeg drew

⁸³ Interview, October 6, 2015.

⁸⁴ Conversation, March 3, 2014.

⁸⁵ Conversation, March 23, 2014.

⁸⁶ Whereas the Crac-PC initially started off as a regional organization and was even officially recognized as such, over the years, its leaders came to dedicate more time to local issues instead. Critics argued that the struggle was about regional change, not local issues (Sandoval Cuevas 2010, 141).

upon people's experiences of spatial insecurity: there was increased criminality in cities, towns, and on roads, which was also on the verge of coming to rural communities. This generated sufficient solidarity among people to act collectively on the issue of insecurity.

With the looming threat of organized crime and no response from state police forces, various rural communities in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres took up arms at the start of 2013. This happened when members of the criminal group Los Pelones kidnapped the leaders of Ahuacachahue and Rancho Nuevo, both located in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres. Both leaders were affiliated to Upoeg. Even though Upoeg members managed to free them soon after, the provocation caused rural citizens to rise up in arms and track down organized crime in the town of Ayutla, the stronghold of Los Pelones. Within a couple of days, Upoeg imprisoned over fifty-four presumed criminals by sealing off the gateways to the city with roadblocks. An Upoeg member remembered these days as "a social explosion" and described how they had gone after the criminals, tipped off by locals.⁸⁷

The detainees were held captive in the community of El Mesón, which served as the temporary headquarters for the armed movement. On January 31, 2013, Upoeg held a popular tribunal to serve community justice. Unisur students from El Mesón and other departments helped out during the event by giving instructions to the dozens of visitors who had arrived to report on the event and by searching their bags. One of the students described her experiences: "Over there, they presented the victims, the criminals, and everything; what they did, so-and-so did this, that and the other. Everybody passed to the front. And a lot of people were watching, but they [criminals] just stood there looking." Her friend added: "The *pueblo* decided, you know, that they were going to be reeducated, because they offered money, they wanted to corrupt us with their money; the people said no, they aren't going to buy us off with their money, here we're going to re-educate so tomorrow they can improve."⁸⁸ As part of the community justice system, Upoeg adopted the notion of "reeducation" from the Crac-PC, which had the purpose of reintegrating prisoners into their communities.

The armed uprising in Ayutla de los Libres and the popular tribunal were performative practices of authority that put Upoeg in the spotlights. The story of the successful fight against organized crime circulated far and wide while the popular tribunal attracted international attention.⁸⁹ Over the course of the following year, similar armed interventions took place in other municipal towns in the Costa Chica and Centro regions. According to the National Commission of Human rights (CNDH), in 2013,

⁸⁷ Interview, October 5, 2015.

⁸⁸ Participatory Action Research session "Spiderweb," December 10, 2014.

⁸⁹ *El País*. 2013. "Arrancan los primeros juicios de los 'tribunales populares' del sur de México." February 2, 2013. Accessed September 6, 2019. https://elpais.com/internacional/2013/02/02/actualidad/1359768187_295378.html.

Upoeg was active in twenty-one municipalities in Guerrero.⁹⁰

Soon after what happened in Ayutla, the state prosecutor issued several investigations into Upoeg members because of alleged kidnappings and homicides.⁹¹ With regard to the fifty-four detainees, most were handed over to the state government, whereas a smaller group remained under Upoeg control.⁹² In fact, Upoeg signed an agreement with State Governor Aguirre to coordinate security matters,⁹³ and state officials acknowledged that Upoeg had significantly reduced violence in the region.⁹⁴ Goldstein refers to the state's inability or unwillingness to act on insecurity and violence as "one of the strongest sources of the delegitimation of the state" (Goldstein 2004, 23). In turn, Upoeg's successful fight against organized crime, such as in Ayutla, worked for the organization as one of its main sources of legitimacy.

Within two years, Upoeg had transformed from an organization involved in development and electoral projects in the Costa Chica region, to a regional armed movement. It had broadened its aspirations for socioeconomic justice and indigenous political rights to include the provision of security. By presenting the conditions of insecurity in towns and cities into a rural problem of mobility and as a forthcoming threat, they had forged legitimacy among rural communities by engaging in a distinct form of grassroots securitization. Soon after successfully reestablishing security, Upoeg announced their next step.⁹⁵ In March 2013, they gave a more formal structure to the policing organization by setting up the Sistema de Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana (SSJC; System of Citizen Security and Justice) to guarantee security and administer justice on the basis of collective community structures.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH). 2013. "Informe Especial sobre los Grupos de Autodefensa y la Seguridad Pública en el Estado de Guerrero." D.F Mexico. Accessed July 21, 2017. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/2016_IE_gruposautodefensa.pdf.

⁹¹ Zacarías, Cervantes. 2013. "Abre la PGJE averiguaciones por homicidio y secuestro contra los movimientos de Ayutla y Atliaca." *El Sur de Acapulco*, February 2, 2013. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/abre-la-pgje-averiguaciones-por-homicidio-y-secuestro-contra-los-movimientos-de-ayutla-y-atliaca>.

⁹² Upoeg. (date unknown) "Informe general de actividades llevadas a cabo por el sistema de seguridad y justicia ciudadana."

⁹³ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Acuerda el movimiento contra la delincuencia en Ayutla coordinarse con el gobierno estatal." January, 11 2013. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/principal/acuerda-el-movimiento-contra-la-delincuencia-en-ayutla-coordinarse-con-el-gobierno-estatal-2>; *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Formalizan el gobierno y las autodefensas su colaboración; les ofrece capacitación militar." April, 24 2013. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/formalizan-el-gobierno-y-las-autodefensas-su-colaboracion-les-ofrece-capacitacion-militar>.

⁹⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. "Bajó la violencia en el valle de Ocotito la policía ciudadana, reconoce Martínez Garnelo." September 28, 2014. Accessed July 25, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/bajo-la-violencia-en-el-valle-de-el-ocotito-la-policia-ciudadana-reconoce-martinez-garnelo>.

⁹⁵ Cervantes, Zacarías. 2013. "Ya no es autodefensa, ahora es sistema de seguridad y justicia comunitario, acuerdan." *El Sur de Acapulco*, March 11, 2013. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/principal/ya-no-es-autodefensa-ahora-es-sistema-de-seguridad-y-justicia-comunitario-acuerdan-2>.

⁹⁶ Before the foundation of its own institution, Upoeg reached out to the Crac-PC and requested to be incorporated into the legally recognized organization. However, the Crac-PC refused Upoeg into its ranks by arguing that only communities, not organizations, could be incorporated within the community system.

3. Sistemas Comunitarias

I started my fieldwork in 2014. In El Mesón, I observed how Upoeg's activities had become part of everyday community life. At the *cancha*, the ball court and community center, men hung around in green and beige T-shirts printed with symbols of Guerrero and the initials S.S.J.C. Some of the men were chatting with their rifles resting between their legs, others stood in front of the improvised prison where people were held captive. Two of the captives reached their heads through the barred windows while they looked out over the *cancha* indifferently. On the other side of the building was the community kitchen, where a woman was preparing food for the police and the *reguardados*, the term used for those held captive. A five-minute walk from the *cancha*, I found the House of Justice (*Casa de Justicia*), located on a corner, next to a row of houses. A paper taped on the wall read: "SSJC-PC; working days Monday, Wednesday, Friday; work panel 8:0 AM 4:0 PM." Bags of sand, which had one day served as a barricade but were now overgrown by plants, lay around. People arriving received a number and settled down in a plastic chair in the shadow while they waited to be attended. One could hear the people inside talking.

Oscar, a twenty-eight-year old peasant who lived in a village nearby, was one of the persons inside the House of Justice. Almost every day, he walked to El Mesón to fulfill his task to administer and impart justice together with other community leaders and councilors. One of the first things Oscar made me write down when we met was the following list:

retén (roadblock) = *puesto de control* (check point)

detenidos/presos (inmates, prisoners) = *resguardados* (protected)

justicia (justice) = *justicia tradicional, asunto de mayores* (traditional justice, matter for the elders)⁹⁷

The words on the left referred to the language of state institutions in reference to security and justice, whereas the right side were terms used by Upoeg. By differentiating between terms such as "sheltered" rather than "prisoners," or by using "reeducation" rather than "punishment" as general principles for justice, Upoeg distinguished their own practices from that of state institutions. Through these assertions of difference, Upoeg criticized the state from a specific position: as practitioners of communitarian systems (*sistemas comunitarias*).

Normative systems of local self-government take on a variety of forms and local meanings in Guerrero's rural communities. Important elements of these *sistemas comunitarias*, as Upoeg calls them, are the collective community work, usually called *tequio* or *fajina*, the rotating public responsibilities called *cargos*, and the community

⁹⁷ Fieldnotes, February 27, 2014.

assemblies that serve as collective decision-making bodies. Although these practices in a certain way make political life in communities distinct, they are not “vestiges of pre-conquest cultures but rather historically constructed forms that have been forged in relationships with the state and other social actors in particular contexts” (Speed 2008a, 89). Indigenous communities employ the term *usos y costumbres* to refer to such forms of community governance. The notion has often served as a way for indigenous movements to refer to their governance practices and make broader claims to cultural rights and autonomy (see Perreault 2008). However, not only indigenous communities were part of Upoeg, *mestizos* and Afromexicans were part of the organization as well. Non-indigenous communities affiliated to Upoeg more often used the term *sistemas comunitarias* to refer to the ways in which they governed their affairs locally. Consequently, Upoeg promoters alternated between *sistemas comunitarias* and *usos y costumbres* to speak to a range of ethnically diverse people about the way in which Upoeg was organized.⁹⁸

The policing and justice activities of Upoeg became integrated into local community structures. Members of the community police were elected during community assemblies on the basis of their antecedents and reputation, and those same assemblies held them accountable. Communities are to take care of their policemen, whose work is unpaid and carried out alongside rural work. In some places, community members arrange food for the police on a rotation basis, while, in other places, citizens contribute financially to pay for equipment and goods. Furthermore, the communities located alongside main roads tend to ask passersby for financial contributions to keep the roads safe. The same collective participation held true for Upoeg’s justice system, as Oscar explained. Small cases of misconduct—he gave the example of stolen chickens—were handled by the House of Justice, whose positions were elected by the assembly. In the face of more serious cases, the community assembly itself dealt with it: “The assembly is the maximum authority to decide.”⁹⁹ Bruno described community assemblies as “the mechanism” of Upoeg: “everything has to come out of the assembly, and all decisions must be taken by the assembly.”¹⁰⁰ These principles of collective decision-making and participation were being written down in internal regulations, which would become similar to Crac-PC’s internal rules. Just like the Crac-PC, Upoeg was to fall under the collective rule of communities through the practice of assemblies (see Sierra 2010, 36). Clearly, Upoeg attempted to locate its authority as security and justice provider in a specific mode of local legitimate governance.

With regard to his work as a justice promoter, Oscar never failed to mention that they had made multiple mistakes. In attempting to administer and procure justice, Upoeg had run into various problems. As noted by Speed for the case of the Zapatista governing

⁹⁸ In chapter 5, I further analyze the ethnic and cultural dynamics of Upoeg.

⁹⁹ Conversation with Oscar, October 10, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Bruno Plácido Valerio, December 1, 2015.

bodies, “on the ground their application and their results are uneven” (2008a, 170). To idealize or romanticize these forms of community governance would be unhelpful, because of the exclusions that occur as well (see Hernández Castillo 2016, 20). For instance, community assemblies can be vulnerable to the influence of local power groups and adolescents are often excluded from these spaces, something that I discuss more in-depth in chapter 7. With regard to women, customary forms of community governance can include gender ideologies that justify “localized, intimate and patriarchal forms of exclusion and control” (Sieder 2017, 7). Indigenous women are therefore engaged in a multidimensional struggle; they often seek inclusion into the nation-state but also aim to change gendered forms of exclusion within their own communities (Hernández Castillo 2016, 68). Many scholars have written about the ways in which indigenous women have been engaged in the remaking of *usos y costumbres* (Sierra 2017; Hernández Castillo 2016; Speed, Hernández Castillo, Stephen 2006). In the Crac-PC, for instance, women have questioned *usos y costumbres* that exclude women’s participation, and women have successfully been elected as leaders since 2006, even though female participation has not been constant (Sierra 2013a, 67–68). In Upoeg as well, women played a significant role in taking care of the organization’s logistics while a few women carried out leadership functions during my research. But, beyond guaranteeing their safety on roads, women’s rights were not often on Upoeg’s agenda (see also chapter 5). In this light, we may conclude that community assemblies are anything but unequivocal mechanisms to accommodate the diverse voices of rural peoples. Nevertheless, Upoeg’s direct democratic practices and the ideals articulated in the name of community political life did prove a powerful frame to mobilize people and reimagine politics.

Upoeg presented these local forms of governance as a critique of the state. For instance, one Upoeg promoter told me: “The government fails to do anything. The federal and state police, they know nothing. They don’t know because they come from other parts of Mexico. We asked the state police in Chilpancingo how many entrances the city had. They couldn’t tell us. We are used to run fast through the mountainous landscape, we know the numbers and entrances of the *pueblos*, we know the area by heart. They [state police] have no idea, that is why it doesn’t work.”¹⁰¹ Upoeg members celebrated their closeness to the communities because of their origins in the area and intimate knowledge of the territory and its people. In an interview, Bruno summarized this view: “There’s a saying that says, ‘For the wedge to fit right, it must be made from the same piece of wood.’”¹⁰² In other words, people providing security should be cut from the same cloth as those in need of protection. Upoeg criticized the distance between state institutions and local populations. Unisur students made similar comments: “Only the *pueblo* defends the *pueblo*, and it is true, only we ourselves protect us from others. The Upoeg is an example,

¹⁰¹ Conversation, March 3, 2014.

¹⁰² Loyola, Bernardo and Laura Woldenberg. 2013. “En Guerrero, México, han tomado la justicia en sus propias manos.” *Vice magazine*, May 26, 2013. Accessed September 4, 2018. <http://www.vice.com/es/read/el-estado-guerrero-00002119-v7n4>.

that's why everything else occurred, over time we saw it. The *policía ciudadana* were made up of citizens from the community itself, folks one knows.”¹⁰³

The Upoeg distinguished itself from state institutions with a sense of localism and peasant knowledge. When respected people from one's community are elected in assemblies as security providers and justice administrators, it triggers a sense of intimacy and trust. By accommodating Upoeg's policing and justice activities within community structures, Upoeg brought issues of insecurity back to a critique of the workings of Mexico's political system and foregrounded community assemblies as democratic alternatives and political potentialities. However, the self-representation as *policía ciudadana* rather than *policía comunitaria* made the organization go beyond the local. In the next section, I address how Upoeg organized on the regional level. I especially focus on the spatial significance of its activities.

4. Policing across Communities and Regions

One day in September 2014, I went off to visit one of the Upoeg members who I had come to know. Since I did not know exactly where he lived, I traveled to his community of Ahuacachahue and headed over toward the community hall to ask about his whereabouts. There, I met several *policías ciudadanas*. They were from a small community nearby. I asked what they were doing all the way up here. It turned out it was “their turn.” Every twenty days, each community affiliated to Upoeg sent a delegation of policemen to take a twenty-four-hour watch over Upoeg's collective prison in Ahuacachahue, which was set up inside the community hall.¹⁰⁴ All the communities in the region helped out to keep Upoeg's main prison well protected. The policemen told me they had been part of Upoeg since its beginnings. They used to travel around a lot, going to assemblies or helping out communities in need of police support. They went with hundreds then, they ensured me, but things had calmed down since. “What do you do now then?” I asked. Now and then they held watch in their community, but they could be called upon whenever something happened. Eventually, two policemen took me to the house of the person I was looking for. The next morning, the same policemen offered me a ride back to El Mesón, where I was staying at the time. Their twenty-four-hour shift was over and they headed home to work their plots.¹⁰⁵

Everyday security practices of the *policía ciudadana* thus imply regional mobility. Policemen helping out in Ahuacachahue to guard the prison is an example. Guarding festivities, attending regional assemblies, and participating in collective police operations also involved new movements and interactions between inhabitants of various

¹⁰³ Participatory Action Research session “Spiderweb,” December 10, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ When Upoeg was founded, the collective prison was located in El Mesón, but the prison moved to Ahuacachahue in 2014. In chapter 5, the relocation of the prison is further discussed.

¹⁰⁵ Fieldnotes, September 11, 2014.

communities. When I asked an Upoeg member what he liked best about being part of Upoeg, he stated:

What's beautiful for me here is that when I began to form part of the organization, I didn't understand, I didn't know anybody, but now yeah, I became another brother, another companion among the rest. We share, we know each other, we don't need money for things. I know somebody who will give me water, a taco, because they know me. Necessity makes us understand, to have compassion for our fellows. That's beautiful now, coming together, we go to the region of the Montaña, we go to the Costa Chica; I'm from the Montaña, you see, but I go along with those from the Coast.¹⁰⁶

The Upoeg promoter celebrated the new friendships with people from other places: "Back then, who would have imagined visiting those areas over there by the Coast? Me? No way, it's so far!" Upoeg's activities set in motion the regional circulation of people and, as such, the building of new networks and relations. An Upoeg member described how the latter worked in practice: "Look, when things got hot over here, they came over from other places to help out, here in the community. Once things calmed down, it was only us again. . . . When something happens to anyone, for instance, in El Espinal something happens, we all go there. When in La Reforma, something happens, one phone call, and let's go."¹⁰⁷ During a PAR exercise, a Unisur student brought up the same policing dynamic: "Now when you go out you don't feel so unsafe like before, to go to other communities or the city. Because we know the *policía comunitaria* has been growing and is in every community now, they communicate by radio. Because when something happens here, they come from Las Lagunas, Las Palmas to protect us, and they get here quick."¹⁰⁸

Radio communication and trucks facilitated communication and mobility between various communities and towns. According to their own rapport made in 2013, Upoeg—counted with six regional coordinators, twelve municipal commanders, eighteen commanders of routes, and 166 policing groups—was made up of 2910 people.¹⁰⁹ Upoeg could round up numerous policemen in a short time to confront problems such as criminal assaults, harassment by the military, or local conflicts. These new forms of cooperation between communities made it possible to mobilize large numbers of policemen and outnumber enemies. One Upoeg member described these police operations: "The

¹⁰⁶ Interview, November 26, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Interview, September 4, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Participatory Action Research session "Spiderweb," December 10, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Ramírez García, Rosalba. 2013. "Presentan la policía ciudadana de Tierra Colorada y exigen la renuncia de la alcaldesa." *El Sur de Acapulco*, April 22, 2013. Accessed August 31, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/principal/presentan-la-policia-ciudadana-de-tierra-colorada-y-exigen-la-renuncia-de-la-alcaldesa-2>.

operations, when you do not feel any fear. We set off altogether and felt powerful, full of strength, because you were with so many. It was exciting, an adventure, we went with full car tanks and without notifying the family.”¹¹⁰ The participant ascribed the emotion of feeling strong due to the experience of being with many others. The intercommunal cooperation offered a sense of power and constituted the medium through which Upoeg acquired authority. In this way, the organization assembled sufficient police to enter into towns such as Ayutla de los Libres, a criminal stronghold.

Forging cooperation between communities was of particular importance because of the difficulties experienced by the Consejo Guerrerense 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular (GC500) in the 1990s. One of the major obstacles of the CG500 had been its inability to mobilize beyond local level demands. Leaders affiliated to Guerrero’s CG500 began to prioritize petitions for development projects targeting their own community over more collective demands. The Crac-PC had also received criticism for focusing mainly on local issues (Sandoval Cuevas 2010, 141). This speaks to Gustafson’s concept of spatialization, which he defines as: “the discourses, practices and organizational forms through which social actors foreground referents of community, locality or region . . . and use these to mobilize collective engagements with or against existing relations of power or formal institutional order” (2011, 222). Rather than taking “the community” as the basic point of reference to mobilize, Upoeg’s policing practices set in motion a wider spatialized dynamic. Being mobile and in communication with many other policing groups across the area became the characteristic of Upoeg’s authority. In the face of insecurity, only intercommunal interactions could make Upoeg strong enough to confront criminal groups.

Upoeg extended the level of cooperation to different regions. After the armed intervention in Ayutla de los Libres, Upoeg not only spread to neighboring municipalities in the Costa Chica region, but also to the Centro region of Guerrero. On March 26th, 2013, Upoeg members from the Costa Chica region appeared in Tierra Colorada, the municipal seat of the municipality of Juan R. Escudero, to assist their companions in the center. Similar to what happened in Ayutla, Upoeg arrived in Tierra Colorada in search of the murderer of one of their police commanders, Guadalupe Quiñones Carvajal, from the community of San Juan del Reparo. With about two thousand community policemen, they detained the municipal chief of public security, Oscar Ulises Valle García, and eight of his policemen, whom they accused of the killing of their commander and of involvement in organized crime.¹¹¹ After negotiations with state officials, Upoeg handed Oscar Ulises Valle García over to the state and stayed in town to set up a *polica ciudadana*, events to which I return in the last section of this chapter. Upoeg appeared in a similar

¹¹⁰ Interview, December 11, 2014.

vein in the nearby towns of Xaltianguis, in the Acapulco region, and in El Ocotito, near Chilpancingo. I visited El Ocotito in 2014 when Upoeg had only recently emerged there. I witnessed civic participation in Upoeg and sensed relief among inhabitants for the absence of criminals. However, inhabitants were also uncertain and fearful about what could come next.

Especially the specific locations of towns such as El Ocotito in the spatial formations of power in Guerrero was a cause for concern. Situated in the Centro region, El Ocotito and other towns, such as Tierra Colorada and Xaltianguis, serve as gateways to the economic hub of Acapulco and the state capital and political center of Chilpancingo. They are also critical nodes in drug trafficking routes as they border the Sierra region. Journalists have reported how criminal groups, such as Los Ardillos, attempted to gain control over the gateway to Chilpancingo, and El Cartel de la Sierra was said to seek control over the communities of the valley of El Ocotito.¹¹² Organized crime had high stakes in these towns and rivaling groups disputed the territory. In his analysis of the connection between space and criminality in Guerrero, Peña (2017) shows how the municipalities with the highest crime rates and intensity of violence are located along the main highways of Guerrero, which departed from the port city of Acapulco. Criminality follows roads connected to the city of Acapulco, the logistical, commercial, political, and economic center and transnational gateway to Colombia and the United States (Peña 2017, 29). Acapulco scores highest as “hot spot” of homicides and kidnappings, followed by the municipalities of Juan R. Escudero and Chilpancingo (Peña 2017, 29). Located along the same highway but in the north of the state, Iguala also scores high.

The fact that Upoeg started to organize in these municipalities (Acapulco, Juan R. Escudero, Chilpancingo, and even Iguala) illustrated a change in strategy compared to other community policing organizations. In contrast to the Crac-PC, which mainly operated in the rural Montaña region of Guerrero, relatively distant from the political and economic centers of power in Acapulco and Chilpancingo, Upoeg’s style was to precisely move toward these areas from its base in the Costa Chica region. Upoeg promoters employed these achievements and their proximity to the two large cities as a warning. “The self-defense forces would come to Chilpancingo and Acapulco if the population there would get organized,” Bruno told the press.¹¹³ I often heard Upoeg members make plans to move into these cities: “Upoeg is already in Chilpancingo, fifteen minutes from the

¹¹¹ Cervantes, Zacarías. 2013. “Ocupan 2 mil policías de la UPOEG Tierra Colorada; buscan a asesinos de su comandante.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, March 27, 2013. Accessed September 2, 2016. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/ocupan-2-mil-policias-de-la-upoeg-tierra-colorada-buscan-a-asesinos-de-su-comandante>; Cervantes, Zacarías. 2013. “Sale la autodefensa de Tierra Colorada; se quedan 200 que buscan formar ahí una policía ciudadana.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, March 28, 2013. Accessed September 2, 2016. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/sale-la-autodefensa-de-tierra-colorada-se-quedan-200-que-buscan-formar-ahi-una-policia-ciudadana>.

¹¹² Chavez, Lourdes. 2016. “A casi dos años de su creación, fue desarticulado el FUSDEG; sólo mantiene un bloque de resistencia en Tierra Colorada.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, December 20, 2016. Accessed July 28, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/a-casi-dos-anos-de-su-creacion-fue-desarticulado-el-fusdeg-solo-mantiene-un-bloque-de-resistencia-en-tierra-colorada>.

center, and also close to Acapulco.”¹¹⁴ Another Upoeg promoter said Upoeg had warned the governor of Chilpancingo to get his ducks in a row within six months, or otherwise a surprise would be awaiting him. With these performances of authority, either in speech or action, Upoeg bargained with state officials as competing authorities. Already some time ago, Fox pointed out (2007a, 530): “the process of ‘scaling up’ collective identities and action from village to regional levels is at the center of the question of how the rural poor can change the balance of power vis-a-vis the state.” Upoeg combined the strategy of extending across regions with moving into economically important and conflictive towns. Through this new strategy, the organization laid the groundwork for its political project beyond the sphere of policing.

5. From Security to Governance

In November 2015, I visited a village in the Centro region of Guerrero, where a colorful mural painting caught my attention. A concrete cubicle situated alongside the main road was being turned into a piece of art. Only two years before, the cubicle had served as a lookout for the municipal police. After the inhabitants set up their *policía ciudadana*, they appropriated the cubicle as a storage room and checkpoint. When I arrived, an artist was making a mural on the cubicle in the run-up to a regional Upoeg assembly that would take place in the village. The *policía ciudadana* had collectively decided upon the mural’s design. It displayed symbols of Guerrero, animals of the region, and one part depicted a young man dressed in a community policing outfit, paying homage to the life of a community policeman who had recently been killed. On the day of the regional assembly, the mural was ready and Bruno and other Upoeg promoters came to see it. The artist started to explain the significance of the snake that crossed all the sides of the cubicle when Bruno interrupted his story: “Something is wrong here.” He pointed at the front of the cubicle where the words “*policía ciudadana*” were painted at the top, above the symbol of Guerrero, with the initials “S.S.y J.C. UPOEG” displayed below. While everyone stared at the mural to see what could be wrong, Bruno continued: “*Policía ciudadana* should not be positioned above Upoeg, it is the other way around. We are more than just police; we are the fourth level of governance. The police forms only one part of it.”¹¹⁵ The mural needed to be changed.

Bruno criticized the mural because it suggested to him that the citizen police formed the backbone of the organization, while the organization in fact represented what he called the “fourth level of governance.” Since its emergence in 2013, Upoeg had organized

¹¹³ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Entrará la autodefensa a Chilpancingo y Acapulco si la población se organiza: Bruno.” January 27, 2014. Accessed July 28, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/entrara-la-autodefensa-a-chilpancingo-y-acapulco-si-la-poblacion-se-organiza-bruno>.

¹¹⁴ Conversation, September 20, 2014.

¹¹⁵ Fieldnotes, December 1, 2015.

several forums and articulated demands on this topic.¹¹⁶ Mexico's political system has three levels of government: the federal, state, and municipal level. In addition, Upoeg demanded the official recognition of "the community" as a fourth level of governance. Notwithstanding the obvious significance of Upoeg's security branch, promoters often referred to security as a secondary theme: "Many believe that the movement has mostly a policing purpose; but the communitarian project has to do with the community. Its basic mechanism is the assembly in the communities. It's a project based on collective rights that constitutes the basis of the fourth level of community government."¹¹⁷

The claims and demands around the "fourth level of governance" in Guerrero are described by anthropologists María Teresa Sierra (2015a, 23) as follows: "they appeal to new forms of government, based on participatory democracy inspired by indigenous autonomies. At the same time, these could generate alternative structures of authority, and allow coordination with the State under citizen and community control, including security and justice." Sierra brings these claims back to indigenous experiments with forms of self-government in search of autonomy. When the EZLN emerged in 1994, the Zapatistas demanded the right to govern themselves according to traditional laws, to control resources and land, and enjoy the recognition of indigenous customs and traditions (see Baronnet, Mora Bayo, and Stahler-Sholk 2011). In the aftermath of the Zapatista uprising, various perspectives on indigenous autonomy developed across indigenous organizations. Autonomy was perceived as a territorial question, an issue of representation in governance, and a matter of local self-determination (Flores Félix 2000, 82). I situate Upoeg's demands and practices in these long-standing struggles over (indigenous) autonomy and democratization (see chapter 3).

As an Upoeg promoter explained, the notion of a "fourth level of governance" goes back to the municipal movement of the 1920s which sought to strengthen the institution of the municipality.¹¹⁸ Local governments are defined as "free municipalities" in Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. This is the result of long-standing struggles over whether the country was to have central rule or a federal structure with space for local autonomy. Notwithstanding, for most of the twentieth century, municipalities

¹¹⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Se pronuncian los pueblos en autodefensa por el impulso al cuarto orden de gobierno." March 2, 2013. Accessed July 30, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/se-pronuncian-los-pueblos-en-autodefensa-por-el-impulso-al-cuarto-orden-de-gobierno>; *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Exigen en foro de la UPOEG reconocimiento de la comunidad como cuarto orden de gobierno." March 19, 2013. Accessed July 30, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/exigen-en-foro-de-la-upoeg-reconocimiento-de-la-comunidad-como-cuarto-orden-de-gobierno>; *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Impulsa la UPOEG el "cuarto orden de gobierno" y prepara su asamblea general en Xaltianguis." October 20, 2013. Accessed July 30, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivoelsur/archivos/115271>.

¹¹⁷ *El Faro de la Costa Chica*. 2015. "Alista UPOEG tercer aniversario, aprovechará para deslindarse del crimen organizado." December 12, 2015. Accessed July 30, 2017. <http://www.elfarodelacostachica.com/Region/nota53.html>.

¹¹⁸ *Acapulco News*. 2015. "Cuarto orden de gobierno, opción para pacificar a Guerrero." September 22, 2015. Accessed September 22, 2015. <http://noticiasacapulconews.com/reportajes-especiales/item/6660-cuarto-orden-de-gobierno-opcion-para-pacificar-a-guerrero>.

governed with limited resources and were subjected to rules set by state governments (Selee 2011, 41).¹¹⁹ Moreover, municipal governments were often controlled by *caciques*, making local governments unresponsive to the needs of the communities (Wallenius 2009, 368). Neoliberal reforms of the last decades substantially changed these dynamics. Decentralization of administrative responsibilities and resources from the state to the municipal level empowered municipal seats as entities of local governance (see chapter 3).

Rural communities, however, often fail to benefit from the political openings and increased resources available on the municipal level, which heightened tensions between them and municipal seats. Power and resources often remain confined to municipal seats, leading to conflicts between municipal headquarters and surrounding villages. In a variety of ways, civil society groups in Guerrero have attempted to change the power relations between rural communities and municipal governments. One of the ways to shift the balance was by bringing the demands and responsibilities of citizens closer to municipal administrations. This was done by making claims for remunicipalization, where a group of villages splits off from its initial municipal administration to start a new one (see chapter 3). Raúl Olmedo Carranza, a political scientist and founding director of the National Center of Municipal Studies for the Ministry of Interior Affairs, has been advocating remunicipalization in Mexico for years, and was a frequent guest speaker at Upoeg events.¹²⁰

Upoeg's assertion to recognize the "fourth level of governance" was another approach in the struggle of rural inhabitants for participation in decision-making and the redistribution of resources. When Bruno stated "we are the fourth level of governance," it reflected Upoeg's aspiration to represent rural interests. Similar to uniting rural communities through the issue of insecurity, Upoeg promoted the union of community governments as the representation of the "fourth level of governance." Upoeg thereby connected insecurity to issues of socioeconomic justice and democratization on the local level. Upoeg also attempted to consolidate these connections through new political institutions such as the Council of Authorities (*Consejo de Autoridades*).

In September 2015, I attended a regional assembly of Upoeg communities in the Centro region of Guerrero, where such a council was formed. Policemen, commanders, villagers, and *comisarios* of fourteen communities were present. When the assembly started, the Upoeg promoter spoke words of welcome, especially recognizing the presence of the *comisarios*. *Comisarios*, or submunicipal leaders, are the persons who serve as elected leaders of local communities. The Upoeg promoter introduced the assembly as the first step to reorganize the *pueblos* in the region and asked all to bring in ideas. He expressed how Upoeg had become disorganized, with every *pueblo* fending for itself.

¹¹⁹ Even though the municipality was to become the basis of political organization in Mexico as prescribed by the 1917 Constitution, when the PRI came to power in 1929, they implemented various policies to rather centralize power in the hands of the president (Meyer 1994, 251).

¹²⁰ The personal website of Raúl Olmedo Carranza: <https://raulolmedocarranza.com>.

Another Upoeg promoter stated that they had to make an effort to become an example for other regions, like the Costa Chica. He suggested concrete steps to “clean the house.” First, the assembly needed to elect a commander in charge of the coordination between policing units in the area. The assembly responded positively to the candidacy of señor Agustín, who was duly appointed for half a year. After the new commander introduced himself and thanked the participants for their confidence, the Upoeg promoter who facilitated the assembly proposed to move on: “Let’s move to the next one, naming the Council of Authorities. There’s no problem with these appointments. Why? Because they will be given to all the *comisarios*. All *comisarios* have responsibilities, they are in charge of coordinating their communities in every sense of the word, to represent their community, its problematics, its administration of all types. The *comisario* will be present in the struggle, and the *comisario* is the one we want to represent this circle as well, to represent this movement.” The Upoeg promoter called upon all the community leaders to become part of the Council of Authorities. The assembly only needed to select a representative of the Council, responsible for the coordination between the *comisarios*. Somebody in the assembly proposed the community leader of Coapilla, who said: “I won’t have the chance. It’s not that I don’t want to, . . . one part of my community goes for another organization, but the majority is with Upoeg. Some folks are with the other. Today, they’re giving me a lot of problems.” In turn, he proposed the community leader of Acalá: “I don’t know her well but she has a good way to express herself, I’d like to get to know her, have her set the example, as a woman. I don’t know if she’ll accept.” The *comisaria* wanted to decline but the assembly voted in favor of appointing her by raising hands. Commanders and *comisarios* promised: “You’ll have our full support.” She accepted while joking: “That’s what they told me in my community, but now I’m here all alone.” Afterwards, two other community leaders were appointed to help her out as secretaries of the Council of Authorities. The assembly then set the date for the next meeting in a fortnight.¹²¹

In this assembly, Upoeg promoters attempted to set up a governing body for the Centro region, made up of all the community leaders affiliated to Upoeg. This was anything but a smooth process, as the hesitant responses of the community leaders revealed. In their communities, they needed to cope with the waxing and waning of Upoeg support and emerging conflicts further discussed below. Upoeg promoters had the task of inspiring and advising these *comisarios*. Across Upoeg’s territory, attempts were made to found these councils, sometimes representing a municipality and sometimes an entire region. To my knowledge, only the Council of Authorities in Ayutla de los Libres evolved into a relatively stable institution. Others, like the one just described, remained more or less unstable. With respect to stable and unstable institutions, Lund (2006, 698–

¹²¹ Fieldnotes, September 6, 2015.

700) makes a point of studying the potential longevity of more unstable forms, and the way in which they gradually restructure existing formulas of authority. For the case of Upoeg, these emerging institutions were a way to upscale legitimate authority from the community level to the regional level, in which community leaders were foregrounded as key players. By law, *comisarios* represented the community voice, so they could be vehicles for legitimacy on a higher, regional scale as well. As described by Fox (2007a, 550), “their officially recognized, territorial base makes it very difficult for opponents to question the legitimacy of their representation—a frequent political vulnerability of more informal social movements.” In Upoeg’s view, the *comisarios* in the Councils were the “fourth level of governance” and truly represented local interests, in contrast to municipal administrations. The question that followed was: How to transform Councils of Authorities, presumptively legitimate bearers of authority, into recognized political institutions with actual governing capacity on the municipal or even regional level? In other words, how to actually change local structures of governance for *comisarios* to gain authority? To examine Upoeg’s approach, I turn to the ways state actors responded to Upoeg’s regional upscaling activities.

6. Between Upscaling and Downscaling

Military checkpoints, mostly situated alongside highways, limited the possibilities for armed *policía ciudadana* to travel the region. At the checkpoints, soldiers stopped and searched cars and passengers. Nobody was allowed to be armed. Ever since the emergence of guerrilla groups in the 1970s and the foundation of community policing organizations in the 1990s, parts of the Montaña and Costa Chica regions had become increasingly militarized. Upoeg policemen often complained about soldiers who stopped them from moving around freely. An Upoeg member recounted his conversation with soldiers stationed at a checkpoint: “Can you give permission to let two pick-ups, maybe three, with armed police go through?” he asked the soldiers, who answered: “No. Because nobody passes through here.”¹²² In his community, the groups of *policía ciudadana* therefore avoided main roads and resorted to dirt roads not patrolled by the military. In other places, agreements were made with the army and the police was allowed to pass more freely. Nevertheless, the mobility of the *policía ciudadana* on highways in the regions was still limited. Ever since its emergence, Upoeg has been engaged in negotiations with the state about freedom of movement. It remained a source of tension.

After Upoeg’s armed intervention in Ayutla de los Libres, Upoeg promoters met with Governor Ángel Aguirre Rivera and agreed on what Randería (2007, 5) calls soft laws,

¹²² Interview, October 4, 2015.

that is, “rules without binding legal force that have practical effects,” such as conventions, agreements and protocols. Bruno often emphasized the shared interest with the state: “because insecurity is a problem that affects everyone, from families, to local government, state governments and the federal government.”¹²³ On other occasions, he declared his willingness to collaborate: “state officials report violence is getting worse every day, so government and society must walk together to get better results,”¹²⁴ and “this organization does not seek confrontation with the government, but to work in a coordinated way with respect, as equals.”¹²⁵

The state government also employed a conciliatory approach when Governor Aguirre visited Ayutla in 2013. One Upoeg member remembered very well when Aguirre congratulated them and said “you have shown once more that you are a historic *pueblo*,”¹²⁶ referring to Ayutla’s history of political struggle in the 19th century.¹²⁷ On several occasions, Governor Aguirre donated materials to Upoeg.¹²⁸ At the same time, state officials laid out the conditions for their continued support by calling for Upoeg’s incorporation into official state structures. The governor proposed a policy to regulate the *policía ciudadana*. In July 2013, the governor decreed that Upoeg was to be incorporated into the Rural Police. This new policing body was part of long-standing plans to reorganize and centralize police forces in Mexico in the form of a *mando único*. Initially proposed by President Felipe Calderón in 2010 but carried out by President Enrique Peña Nieto, the reform centralizes municipal police units into a single statewide department (i.e., *mando único*), limiting the autonomy of local police.¹²⁹ Aguirre planned to institutionalize the *policía ciudadana* by including them in these single command state departments.¹³⁰

The state government not only made proposals for Upoeg’s regulation, it also limited

¹²³ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. “Acuerda el movimiento contra la delincuencia en Ayutla coordinarse con el gobierno estatal.” January 11, 2013. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/principal/acuerda-el-movimiento-contra-la-delincuencia-en-ayutla-coordinarse-con-el-gobierno-estatal-2>.

¹²⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2015. “Son para desprestigiar a la UPOEG las narcomantas en su contra, dice Bruno Plácido.” December 22, 2015. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/son-para-desprestigiar-a-la-upoeg-las-narcomantas-en-su-contra-dice-bruno-placido>.

¹²⁵ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2015. “En tres años han sido asesinados 15 integrantes del sistema de seguridad de la UPOEG: Bruno Plácido.” December 10, 2015. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/en-tres-anos-han-sido-asesinados-15-integrantes-del-sistema-de-seguridad-de-la-upoeg-bruno-placido>.

¹²⁶ Interview, December 11, 2015.

¹²⁷ In 1854, General Juan Álvarez drew up the Plan of Ayutla in Ayutla de los Libres, calling for the overthrow of the centralist and conservative rule of Mexican president Antonio Lopez Santa Anna. See chapter 3.

¹²⁸ Upoeg received \$5,447,709.47 pesos: Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH). 2013. “Informe Especial sobre los Grupos de Autodefensa y la Seguridad Pública en el Estado de Guerrero.” Pp:62. D.F Mexico. Accessed July 21, 2017. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/2016_IE_gruposautodefensa.pdf; *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. “El gobierno le dio radios, dos máquinas repetidoras y 2 mil playeras “para eficientar su trabajo”, informa la autodefensa.” June 29, 2013. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/el-gobierno-le-dio-radios-dos-maquinas-repetidoras-y-2-mil-playeras-para-eficientar-su-trabajo-informa-la-autodefensa>.

the organization's space for operation. The governor tolerated the policing organization, "but I repeat that the community police must not leave their territorial limits."¹³¹ Military officials also said they would respect the Upoeg police, "as long as they don't leave their communities."¹³² The 48 Battalion of Infantry in Ayutla informed Upoeg and the Crac: "as of this Thursday June 27 [2013] no organization may circulate on federal and state highways bearing arms... any kind of firearms, long or short, will be confiscated. They can only carry arms inside their communities."¹³³ The state appeared only willing to permit "the local community police," just as the state had exclusively permitted localized indigenous identities in response to indigenous claims in the 1990s (see Overmyer-Velázquez 2010). As such, the local community police remained confined to their rural communities, in contrast to becoming a regional force that would be more able to challenge the political and economic order. Since mobility between communities and regions was precisely what Upoeg was all about, confrontations seemed inevitable.

In August 2013, Upoeg and state forces clashed. Soldiers arrested and disarmed a group of *policías ciudadanas* on a highway close to a community called El Pericón. The policemen were on their way to a meeting with the federal police when soldiers stopped them and confiscated two pistols, two rifles, and one machine gun. According to the army, the *policía ciudadana* were not allowed to move around armed outside their own communities.¹³⁴ In reaction, a crowd of *policía ciudadana* and citizens of nearby communities soon appeared on the scene, and held about a hundred soldiers confined for several hours until the soldiers were forced to withdraw. Stories about what happened that day often came up in later conversations. People remembered the day as "legendary," and described the scene as: "You haven't seen the goddamn number of people, that's what the government is afraid of, that society will take it out to the streets."¹³⁵ Furthermore, references were made to an army captain accused of collusion with organized crime, who

¹²⁹ As a way of addressing the lack of coordination between different police forces and eliminate corruption on the local level, *mando único* aimed to replace Mexico's 1,800 municipal police units with thirty-two centralized state police forces.

¹³⁰ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Busca Aguirre supeditar a las policías de la Crac y de la UPOEG al mando unico." July 2013, 2013. Accessed July 25, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/busca-aguirre-supeditar-a-las-policias-de-la-crac-y-de-la-upoeg-al-mando-unico>.

¹³¹ Misael, Damian. 2013. "Tolerará a grupos de autodefensa, pero en su jurisdicción, replica el gobernador." *El Sur de Acapulco*, May 7, 2013. Accessed June 23, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/1/tolerara-a-grupos-de-autodefensa-pero-en-su-jurisdiccion-replica-el-gobernador>.

¹³² Labastida, Mariana. 2013. "Respetará el Ejército a las policías comunitarias mientras no salgan de sus comunidades, dice el jefe de la 27 Zona Militar." *El Sur de Acapulco*, May 15, 2013. Accessed June 23, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/respetara-el-ejercito-a-las-policias-comunitarias-mientras-no-salgan-de-sus-comunidades-dice-el-jefe-de-la-27-zona-militar>.

¹³³ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Hay un pacto con el 48 Batallón del ejército para que los deje circular informa la autodefensa." June 29, 2013. Accessed July 23, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/hay-un-pacto-con-el-48-batallon-del-ejercito-para-que-los-deje-circular-informa-la-autodefensa>.

¹³⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Retienen ciudadanos y la autodefensa a 100 militares; los vinculan con el crimen organizado." August 6, 2013. Accessed August 3, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/retienen-ciudadanos-y-la-autodefensa-a-100-militares-los-vinculan-con-el-crimen-organizado>.

flew from the scene in a helicopter. The events in El Pericón were celebrated as a triumph of Upoeg over the military.

The state's response was fierce. Arrest warrants were issued for Bruno and other Upoeg members and the cooperation between Upoeg and the state formally ended.¹³⁶ The situation became difficult as Upoeg members were not able to move around as before. The federal state became involved as well and demanded a formal apology from Upoeg for allegedly having detained soldiers. Furthermore, Peña Nieto made it clear that the federal government would not tolerate self-organized armed groups: "We're battling these groups that have resorted to carrying weapons because they're outside the law. Despite the recognition we offer groups that wish to participate in the security of their communities, this does not mean that the government supports or authorizes them to act on the margins of, or outside, the law."¹³⁷ The federal government's approach to the self-organized armed groups in Guerrero was similar to its response to developments in the neighboring state of Michoacán. In February 2013, self-defense groups there rose up in arms against organized crime and complicated the violent landscape (Pansters 2015). In May of the same year, President Peña Nieto sent hundreds of troops to Michoacán to reestablish state order. Although the federal government employed similar language to denounce Upoeg, Nieto withheld from carrying out such drastic measures in Guerrero.

One of the reasons for this was Upoeg's immersion in Guerrero's sociopolitical landscape. Especially Bruno spent his days circulating in diverse networks to build alliances that were trans-classist and multi-sectoral (cf. Bartra 2014, 430). In November 2014, I accompanied him some days in his black and bulletproof car, recognizable by its white dove and the text "UPOEG movement of peace." One day, we had breakfast with two politicians who were running for mayor. Both the PRI and PRD candidate pledged to support the *policía ciudadana*. Thereafter, we continued our journey toward the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (UAG). In a large auditorium, I watched Bruno appear before a public congress of the Frente Popular para el Desarrollo del Estado (Frente Popular; Popular Front for State Development).¹³⁸ Hours later, I found myself in a restaurant alongside Chilpancingo's main highway. On the outside porch, Upoeg's lawyer assembled with members of the city's taxi sector, whereas Bruno retreated into a private room to discuss emerging conflicts with a mayor and council members. Night had fallen when we headed off to the last stop. In a cafe in downtown Chilpancingo, Upoeg leaders

¹³⁵ Interview, September 4, 2015.

¹³⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Rompen relaciones con la UPOEG los gobiernos estatal y federal tras la retención de militares." August 9, 2013. Accessed August 20, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/rompen-relaciones-con-la-upoeg-los-gobiernos-estatal-y-federal-tras-la-retencion-de-militares>.

¹³⁷ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Están las autodefensas fuera de la ley, reitera el Presidente." September 5, 2013. Accessed August 20, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/6/estan-las-autodefensas-fuera-de-la-ley-reitera-el-presidente>.

¹³⁸ The Frente Popular para el Desarrollo del Estado is a platform of politicians, technicians, unions, indigenous organizations, and Upoeg that attempted to set a common development agenda.

met with the state secretary of Indigenous Affairs until closing time.¹³⁹

Bruno interacted with a variety of actors, including state government officials, civil organizations, and the business sector. In these meetings and encounters, Upoeg aimed to broaden its support base and increase its political leverage. For instance, Bruno made agreements with the officials of Mexico's business association Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana (Coparmex) in Chilpancingo. During a meeting with these men, all dressed in business suits, Bruno explained the necessity to form a coalition against organized crime. After all, criminal groups threatened their businesses as well. One of the men urged Bruno to tone down by saying that the times of Emiliano Zapata were over. Even so, the businessmen did agree to a shared statement about fighting insecurity.¹⁴⁰ Business representatives also joined the caravan organized by Upoeg in August 2014 toward Mexico City to promote "a development policy for Guerrero by which it may move out of the highest indicators of marginalization."¹⁴¹ At the initiative of Upoeg and Fundación Progresá, a development organization affiliated to political parties, the earlier mentioned Frente Popular for State Development was launched, which was made up of Guerrero's business sector, agricultural and ranchers associations, and indigenous and women organizations.¹⁴² About this alliance, Bruno commented: "it is necessary to walk together respecting ideological and political differences."¹⁴³ The Frente Popular pressured the state and federal government to discuss the development budget and public policies, including demands for the recognition of the *policía ciudadana* and the fourth level of government. Upoeg's participation in the Frente Popular brought the organization back to its origins in advocating "integral development" while it, at the same time, mitigated the more militant activities of policing. Partnering with a multitude of sectors brought political leverage and legitimacy in the face of the state.

After Upoeg's clash with the army in El Pericón, the organization strengthened its ties with partners from various sectors to appease the tense relations with the state.

¹³⁹ Fieldnotes, November 23, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. "Conforman empresarios, transportistas y médicos de Tixtla y Chilpancingo un consejo de seguridad; siguen con la UPOEG." May 22, 2013. Accessed May 13, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/conforman-empresarios-transportistas-y-medicos-de-tixtla-y-chilpancingo-un-consejo-de-seguridad-siguen-con-la-upoeg>; *La Jornada Guerrero*. 2013. "Se alian Upoeg y Coparmex de la capital vs. extorsiones." June 18, 2013. Accessed consulted on August 4, 2018. http://www.congresogro.gob.mx/files/Sintesis-2013/junio/18_junio_13_sintesis_local.pdf.

¹⁴¹ Chávez, Lourdes. 2014. "Se suman organizaciones y empresarios de la capital a la UPOEG para la caravana a México." *El Sur de Acapulco*, August 1, 2014. Accessed August 31, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/se-suman-organizaciones-y-empresarios-de-la-capital-a-la-upoeg-para-la-caravana-a-mexico>.

¹⁴² Among others, the following organizations participated: Fundación Progresá, Upoeg, La Central Campesina Independiente, El Congreso Agrario Permanente, Comité de Desarrollo Social Indígena, and El Partido Verde Ecologista de México.

¹⁴³ Chávez, Lourdes. 2014. "Se suman organizaciones y empresarios de la capital a la UPOEG para la caravana a México." *El Sur de Acapulco*, August 1, 2014. Accessed August 31, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/se-suman-organizaciones-y-empresarios-de-la-capital-a-la-upoeg-para-la-caravana-a-mexico>.

Bruno also promised the incorporation of the *policía ciudadana* into the Rural Police.¹⁴⁴ However, this plan was rejected in a general assembly. The Rural Police force was not elected by communities, so incorporation into this system would end community control. Upoeg promoters rather came up with an alternative proposal. They proposed to formalize the *policía ciudadana* by the mandate of municipal governments. In fact, they made claims on Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution, which made municipalities, not states, in charge of providing public security.¹⁴⁵ The state governor accepted this, laying the responsibility of the dealing with and regulating of Upoeg on the municipal level (see also chapter 5).¹⁴⁶ Upoeg agreed that policing groups would stay within their municipal boundaries from then onward. Accordingly, both the state government and Upoeg had changed their “scaling” politics. The state accepted policing activities on the municipal level, going beyond earlier attempts to confine *policía ciudadana* to their local communities only. Likewise, Upoeg downscaled its regional ambitions to the municipal level. At certain moments, however, such as when the Ayotzinapa drama happened in September 2014, the organization returned to its original strategy of regional policing and moving toward politically important and conflictive areas.

After Ayotzinapa, Upoeg headed toward Iguala, as described in the introduction. The organization demonstrated its capacity to carry out a mass search party in an area where organized crime groups Los Ardillos and Guerreros Unidos were violently disputing business territory. After Governor Aguirre was forced to step down, Upoeg promoters approached Guerrero’s interim governor in search of negotiations about their project.¹⁴⁷ This rapprochement to the state was denounced by other social organizations such as the Asamblea Nacional Popular (ANP), since the latter held the state accountable for the forced disappearance of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students. Even so, Upoeg stuck to its strategy of balanced antagonism by oscillating between challenging and negotiating with the state, as it had done ever since its beginning.

Upoeg’s continuous “push and pull” with the state was a hallmark of rural social mobilization in Mexico more generally (see Foweraker and Craig 1990). For the case of

¹⁴⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. “Promoverá la entrada del SSJC de la UPOEG a la policía rural de Aguirre: Bruno Plácido.” September 2, 2013. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/promovera-la-entrada-del-ssjc-de-la-upoeg-a-la-policia-rural-de-aguirre-bruno-placido>.

¹⁴⁵ Mexico Const. Art. 115.

¹⁴⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Se reestructurará la autodefensa de la UPOEG antes de su reunión con la SEGOB informa Bruno.” September 2, 2014. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/se-reestructura-la-autodefensa-de-la-upoeg-antes-de-su-reunion-con-la-segob-informa-bruno>; *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Rechaza la UPOEG en Costa Chica a la policía rural el ssjc se registrará por usos y costumbres.” March 3, 2014. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/rechaza-la-upoeg-en-costa-chica-a-la-policia-rural-el-ssjc-se-regira-por-usos-y-costumbres>.

¹⁴⁷ In February 2015, interim Governor Rogelio Ortega recognized and celebrated Upoeg in a mass event in Ayutla de los Libres: Morales Antonio, Jacob. 2015. “Se forma la Comisión de Armonía; que no sea para someter a nadie, pide Bruno Plácido.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, February 16, 2015. Accessed August 21, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/se-forma-la-comision-de-armonia-que-no-sea-para-someter-a-nadie-pide-bruno-placido>.

Upoeg, regional mobility remained an everlasting source of conflict between Upoeg and state forces. One of the ways to deal with this tension, as I described earlier, was partnering with societal actors. To that end, insecurity turned out to be a useful mobilizing issue. It could bridge class divides and broaden Upoeg's support base. Both the state government and Upoeg had made compromises during their negotiations and conflicts. As such, Upoeg had created favorable conditions to continue its project beyond policing on the municipal level. In the next chapter, I study Upoeg's attempts to restructure municipal governments in the Costa Chica region through legal activism. First, however, I focus on the Centro region, where Upoeg's struggles over municipal control took a different turn.

7. Contestation within Municipalities

In September 2015, I stayed in a village in the Centro region. From the veranda of the house, I could hear the buzzing and beeping of walkie-talkies and chatter of the *policía ciudadana* on the hill across the street. Before Upoeg was founded here, the violence of criminal groups had mainly occurred in larger towns nearby. "To me it seemed important that we didn't stay isolated as a *pueblo*," said the local Upoeg commander when I asked why his community had joined Upoeg.¹⁴⁸ While initially bringing security to the area, the *policías ciudadanas* of this community became part of conflicts within the municipality that emerged in 2015.

In January 2015, several Upoeg leaders in the Centro region distanced themselves from the organization and formed a new community policing organization called Frente Unido para la Seguridad y el Desarrollo del Estado de Guerrero (Fusdeg; United Front for the Security and Development of the State of Guerrero). Some communities and towns switched allegiance to Fusdeg, such as the larger towns of Tierra Colorada, El Ocotito, and Xaltianguies. However, several other communities in the area continued to support Upoeg. Rivalries between the organizations escalated into violent deaths. In March, the first clash between Upoeg and Fusdeg resulted in the killing of a Upoeg policeman and five Fusdeg members. Some months later, Upoeg was accused of orchestrating the murder of a female coordinator of Fusdeg.¹⁴⁹ In August, a Upoeg promoter known for his work in Iguala was killed in Xaltianguies.

In this tense context, the Upoeg-affiliated community where I stayed reinforced its security provision by asking inhabitants to help out the *policía ciudadana*. Inhabitants carried out nocturnal rounds (*guardias*), making two rounds at night (at two and four

¹⁴⁸ Interview, November 24, 2015.

¹⁴⁹ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2015. "Matan en el Cortes a una coordinadora del Fusdeg y hieren a su hija acusan a policas de la UPOEG." July 27, 2015. Accessed July 14, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/principal/matan-en-el-cortes-a-una-coordinadora-del-fusdeg-y-hieren-a-su-hija-acusan-a-policas-de-la-upoeg>.

a.m.) patrolling the community and its surroundings. One night during my stay, Fusdeg members had been observed close to the border between Fusdeg and Upoeg territories. The news put the *policía ciudadana* in a state of alert: “They [Fusdeg] know, if they come here and we see them, it’s over. Also if they see us, they’ll shoot us. It’s like that now.”¹⁵⁰ Villagers feared Fusdeg coming into their community. Apart from that, Upoeg members and their families did not travel to the nearby municipal town any longer. They feared for their lives. The same held true for the *comisario* of the community. For instance, he did not attend the event when the new municipal mayor was sworn into office in 2015. The detachment of the community leader from the municipal government was highly problematic. The local Upoeg promoter stated: “It can’t be that you, that we, or you as *comisario*, can’t enter your municipal town to work on behalf of your people. That’s what you were elected for, right?; named as a *comisario* so you can go and negotiate. But how can you go if you know that your life’s in danger if you do?”¹⁵¹

In concordance with the promotion of the fourth level of government, Upoeg aimed at strengthening the position and influence of rural communities vis-à-vis municipal seats. In the meantime, the opposite had occurred in these communities in the Centro region. In the community where I stayed, access to the municipal government and its resources by the community leader had been cut off. All the while, insecurity for those involved in Upoeg had increased, two years after the *policía ciudadana* had been formed in the community. What had happened?

As mentioned earlier, three months after the takeover of Ayutla de los Libres in 2013, Upoeg moved into the municipal seat of Tierra Colorada in “Ayutla style.” However, the interactions with the municipal governments were different in these places. In Ayutla, Upoeg reached out to the mayor, who agreed to support the organization by covering its gasoline expenses in exchange for security work. In Tierra Colorada, Upoeg accused the mayor of involvement in the criminal group Los Rojos, just like her husband, the municipal head of public security.¹⁵² In Tierra Colorada, located along the road from Acapulco to Chilpancingo, an important drug trafficking route, Upoeg more directly challenged the links between criminal groups and municipal governments.

The situation in Tierra Colorada fitted a broader pattern in Guerrero. Several reports show the increased ties between some municipal offices and organized crime.¹⁵³ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal handed over a list of twenty-five mayors and ex-mayors in Guerrero with

¹⁵⁰ Interview, November 25, 2015.

¹⁵¹ Interview, September 4, 2015.

¹⁵² Cervantes, Zacarías. 2013. “Ocupan 2 mil policías de la UPOEG Tierra Colorada; buscan a asesinos de su comandante.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, March 27, 2013. Accessed August 31, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/ocupan-2-mil-policias-de-la-upoeg-tierra-colorada-buscan-a-asesinos-de-su-comandante>.

presumed links to organized crime to the state prosecutor in 2014.¹⁵⁴ It were mainly the municipal administration's security and public policy branches that had come under criminal control. The Human Rights Center Tlachinollan reported that municipal policemen offer security to organized crime rather than protect citizens.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Mexico City based magazine *Proceso* revealed how organized crime in Guerrero forced mayors to hand over about fifteen percent of its federal funding for public policies.¹⁵⁶

When Upoeg became involved in Tierra Colorada, it openly called out the alleged bonds between the municipal office and organized crime. Initially, Upoeg called for the resignation of the mayor while more communities throughout the municipality set up groups of *policía ciudadana*.¹⁵⁷ The mayor eventually reached an agreement with Upoeg although relations remained tense. The police of Upoeg acquired the position of tolerated security force, in parallel to the municipal police. What was more, the mayor was said to reserve part of the municipal security budget for the *policía ciudadana*. Meanwhile, Upoeg pledged to not disturb any drug trafficking business, as long as there were no casualties.

This reflected a more general approach of Upoeg. In reference to organized crime, Upoeg members spread the message articulated by Bruno: "I don't get involved with anything to do with drugs; as long as they don't use them to kill, kidnap and extort, then I say, go ahead."¹⁵⁸ Similar messages were circulated during Upoeg assemblies as well: "To those people in our communities who used to go around robbing and kidnapping people, we say, calm down. If they calm down, they may stay."¹⁵⁹ While some criminals had been chased away or detained, as claimed by Upoeg, most of them seemed to have retreated from the public eye. Upoeg members said the following about Ayutla: "It has calmed down. They [criminals] still walk around in Ayutla, but they keep a low profile. They no longer hang around openly or work in clear daylight, like before."¹⁶⁰ The situation in Tierra Colorada initially seemed similar, but the tranquility did not last long.

¹⁵³ Flores Contreras, Ezequiel. 2012. "Guerrero: contagio narco de autoridades." *Proceso*, October 23, 2012. Accessed January 27, 2017. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/323285/323285-guerrero-contagio-narco-de-autoridades>.

¹⁵⁴ *Proceso*. 2014. "Entregan a la PGR lista de 25 narcoalcaldes de Guerrero." December 2, 2014. Accessed January 27, 2017. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/389647>.

¹⁵⁵ González Benicio, Carmen. 2014. "Instalan en Tlapa la Asamblea Popular que elegirá al Concejo; funcionará por usos y costumbres, acuerdan." *El Sur de Acapulco*, December 1, 2014. Accessed January 27, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/234978>.

¹⁵⁶ Cervantes, Jesus. 2015. "El Ramo 33, para la delincuencia organizada." *Proceso*, November 28, 2015. Accessed January 27, 2017. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/421974/el-ramo-33-para-la-delincuencia-organizada>.

¹⁵⁷ Ramírez García, Rosalba. 2013. "Presentan la policía ciudadana de Tierra Colorada y exigen la renuncia de la alcaldesa." *El Sur de Acapulco*, April 22, 2013. Accessed August 31, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/principal/presentan-la-policia-ciudadana-de-tierra-colorada-y-exigen-la-renuncia-de-la-alcaldesa-2>.

¹⁵⁸ Interview, November 14, 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Fieldnotes, October 5, 2014.

Upoeg tolerated criminal authority and its economic activities as long as it did not have social consequences or disrupted Upoeg's political project. However, the economic weight of drug trafficking in Tierra Colorada heavily impacted local governments: the same municipal structures that Upoeg aspired to restructure in favor of rural communities. Entering into conflictive and economically important towns such as Tierra Colorada had initially offered Upoeg bargaining power to negotiate with the state government to continue its political project. Now, this strategy precisely backfired in these municipalities.

In the Centro region, leadership struggles had emerged soon after Upoeg was set up. During my first contact with Upoeg, I encountered Bruno in the company of Felipe, a middle-aged man from the Costa Chica region. Felipe introduced me to his work as promoter, when he was co-responsible for organizing the Centro region. He had held speeches during the first Upoeg assemblies in towns in the Centro region and he remembered how Bruno had urged him to take the stage. "I asked the villagers if they wanted to stop being afraid."¹⁶¹ They did, and Felipe guided them in setting up groups of *policía ciudadana* and community assemblies. When I came back for my second fieldwork period some months later, I quickly learned that Bruno had fallen from grace in some places in the Centro region. Felipe and others denounced him for not taking action on complaints about certain Upoeg members, and for not having shown up in the area for quite some time. On the other hand, Upoeg leaders accused Felipe of intentionally dividing the organization. Factionalism had emerged and Felipe became one of the founders of Fusdeg in the Centro region.

Both Fusdeg and Upoeg accused each other of being part of organized crime. Upoeg members and inhabitants recounted how the organization experienced an influx of "*gente sucia*," that is, criminals. One man narrated how people with *compromisos* (commitments) had joined the movement, people who were said to be more committed to other interests than that of the *pueblo*. According to him, it was Upoeg's own fault, as they had not paid enough attention to who or what joined their ranks. An Upoeg promoter was quoted in the local news: "He made sure to distinguish among those who were fighting for the people, those who fought for organized crime and those that just go along without even knowing why. However, he recognized that conflicts of interest exist: 'some defend one delinquent group, others defend a different one; some defend one party, others one with different colors; family feuds, disputes over money, they all get mixed in together,' he expressed."¹⁶²

In Tierra Colorada, the financial support from the municipal government to Upoeg especially had attracted attention from local political networks and criminal groups.

¹⁶⁰ Conversation, October 13, 2014.

¹⁶¹ Conversation with Felipe, March 16, 2014.

According to my participants, this funding became an object of dispute as groups rivaled for access to these resources. When Fusdeg emerged, the mayor sided with Fusdeg. From then onward, Fusdeg rather than Upoeg received financial support for its policing activities.¹⁶³ The result was a conflict between armed organizations vying over municipal resources and political and territorial control. In this setting, Upoeg's authority came to rely more on its capacity to act violently than on legitimate governance or regional mobility. What had happened with the political dimension of Upoeg's policing?

During assemblies and public statements, Upoeg promoters lamented the involvement of criminals within their ranks and announced to take measures.¹⁶⁴ In reference to its conflict with Fusdeg, Upoeg called upon the citizens of the municipality in and around Tierra Colorada to decide in assemblies which organization would be responsible for their security. However, the rapid expansion of Upoeg and the spread across regions had its limits. The speed with which Upoeg emerged had prevented all *policía ciudadana* from having been properly elected in assemblies, which were supposed to serve as accountability mechanisms by choosing respected citizens as police and holding them accountable in the case of misconduct. The conflicts between Upoeg and Fusdeg raised questions about the level of community control that guided Upoeg. This is related to another tension that grew out of the organization's upscaling activities. While the *policía ciudadana* had obtained legitimacy in name of its proximity and local knowledge, it sat uncomfortably with the organizations' regional aspirations. At times, Upoeg members and citizens expressed concerns about groups of *policía ciudadana* from other communities when they had entered into their territories without notification. For community members, the *policía ciudadana* from other communities were often just as unknown as official police forces. In sum, bringing security provision under the control of community structures faced problems that had to do with speed, scale, factionalism, and mostly, the weight of drug trafficking on local politics.

Communities in the Centro region faced the consequences of these frictions. Rather than strengthening the position of community governments or broadening the spaces of political participation in municipal seats, they became involved in factional struggles

¹⁶² Meza Carranza, Francisca. 2014. "Los disidentes de Upoeg están al servicio del crimen: comandante Jiménez Blanco." *La Jornada Guerrero*, September 2, 2014. Accessed August 30, 2018. <https://en.calameo.com/read/00231475373ecf1ad7694>.

¹⁶³ Chávez, Lourdes. 2015. "Hay acuerdo para que el FUSDEG haga funciones de seguridad en Tierra Colorada, confirma la alcaldesa." *El Sur de Acapulco*, March 2, 2015. Accessed August 30, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/hay-acuerdo-para-que-el-fusdeg-haga-funciones-de-seguridad-en-tierra-colorada-confirma-la-alcaldesa>.

¹⁶⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*, 2017. "Algunos policías de la UPOEG tienen nexos con la delincuencia organizada, reconoce Bruno Plácido." January 30, 2017. Accessed August 1, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/algunos-policias-de-la-upoeg-tienen-nexos-con-la-delincuencia-organizada-reconoce-bruno-placido>; *El Sur de Acapulco*, 2017. "El sistema de seguridad de la UPOEG fue infiltrado por la delincuencia organizada, reconoce Bruno Plácido." January 4, 2017. Accessed August 1, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/el-sistema-de-seguridad-de-la-upoeg-fue-infiltrado-por-la-delincuencia-organizada-reconoce-bruno-placido>.

among multiple violent actors. The rivalry between Upoeg and Fusdeg resulted in more deadly confrontations. On October 25, 2016, six Upoeg members and one Fusdeg member lost their lives.¹⁶⁵ One month later, one Fusdeg member died when Upoeg unsuccessfully attempted to take back control over the town of Tierra Colorada.¹⁶⁶ In response to these events, Governor Héctor Astudillo threatened with disarmament and radical measures in cooperation with the federal government. In what followed, the state government established a reconciliation commission that settled a fragile truce between the organizations in December 2016.¹⁶⁷ At the time of writing, Upoeg regained control over most of the region, while Fusdeg seemed to have slowly disintegrated.¹⁶⁸

8. Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I studied Upoeg's political aspirations and strategies with the help of the concept of political authority. I concentrated on the political dimension of Upoeg's policing and its distinct characteristics of authority making and activism. In the conclusion, I first reflect on Upoeg's spatialized practices, the conditions under which these took shape, and its consequences for local politics. Second, I contend that studies of the pluralization of authority should pay specific attention to interactions and strategies on multiple scales.

Upoeg introduced a specific type of activism by politicizing the new conditions of insecurity with attention to space. Leaders made the fight against spatialized insecurity into a top priority. Upoeg members encouraged community members to take up arms and carry out policing interventions in municipal towns, whose centers and connecting roads had become unsafe. This created a new dynamic between rural communities and municipal towns, which had long been chartered by the redistribution of power and resources. This political dimension of Upoeg's policing was further accentuated when insecurity was addressed through a specific notion of legitimate governance of community assemblies. The reconstitution of communities as security providers on the municipal and even regional level asked for new mechanisms of political representation, such as the

¹⁶⁵ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2016. "Chocan policías del FUSDEG y la UPOEG se habla de 6 y 8 muertos." October 25, 2016. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/principal/chocan-policias-del-fusdeg-y-la-upoeg-se-habla-de-6-y-8-muertos>.

¹⁶⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2016. "Se enfrentan a balazos y los de la UPOEG matan a uno del Fusdeg en Colorada." November 25, 2016. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/principal/se-enfrentan-a-balazos-y-los-de-la-upoeg-matan-a-uno-del-fusdeg-en-colorada>.

¹⁶⁷ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2016. "Pactan silencio y crean una comision para resolver el conflicto Fusdeg UPOEG." December 4, 2016. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/1/pactan-silencio-y-crean-una-comision-para-resolver-el-conflicto-fusdeg-upoeg>.

¹⁶⁸ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2016. "A casi dos anos de su reacion fue desarticulado el FUSDEG solo mantiene un bloque de resistencia en Tierra Colorada." December 30, 2016. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/a-casi-dos-anos-de-su-creacion-fue-desarticulado-el-fusdeg-solo-mantiene-un-bloque-de-resistencia-en-tierra-colorada>.

Councils of Authorities installed by Upoeg. Through these, Upoeg linked insecurity to questions of socioeconomic justice and democratization, which, for long, had been the subject of local grievances. The struggle against organized crime created new openings to engage in long-standing struggles over the reorganization of local governance.

This opening was created by the distinctive authority practices of the organization: the regional scale of Upoeg policing, including its spread toward economically and politically important urban centers in Guerrero. By looking at these processes not merely as policing activities but as part of Upoeg's attempt to transform local understandings and institutions of authority, a particular dynamic came to light. As I have shown, when Upoeg engaged with state and non-state authorities on different levels, it was precisely the interplay between its actions on the state and municipal level that worked against Upoeg's political ambitions. Upscaling policing to conflictive municipalities worked to establish an unsteady relation of mutual respect with the state government and military, which more or less tolerated Upoeg policing on the municipal level. But, the same conditions in the municipalities in the Centro region became a source of trouble for Upoeg's project beyond policing. In these municipalities, where boundaries between organized crime, politicians, and security forces were porous, Upoeg's efforts depoliticized. I therefore argue that studies of community policing should pay specific attention to questions of scale: how local authority practices play out at the crossroads of local, regional, state, and, perhaps, federal levels. The authoritative practices of Upoeg generated openings to renegotiate state relations on the one level, while complicating the political landscape on another.

This chapter shed light on the temporal and flexible dynamics of Upoeg's authority making. In parts of the Centro region, the violent confrontations with other community policing groups and troubles among Upoeg members eventually raised serious questions about whether assemblies functioned to control the policing organization, and if Upoeg had lost sight of its political goals. Even so, policing groups continued their work in communities across the regions and the organization made efforts to "clean up" the organization through assemblies. The politicization and depoliticization of Upoeg's policing are therefore not separate processes but take place simultaneously, and its dynamics differ across regions and time. In the next chapter, I take a closer look at the specific process by which Upoeg took its politics one step further. While violent confrontations with Fusdeg defamed the organization and its political possibilities in the Centro region, things turned out differently in the Costa Chica region.

5

Upoeg: Legal Activism to Redirect Multiculturalism

1. Introduction

The federal government will do everything in its power to disarm us, they say we are self-defense forces. I say, I'm Bruno, not of the self-defense forces. They will do everything to disarm us, but we will protect ourselves with laws. We will all be reading laws, you can all start reading laws. Because that people like Merel come here is fine, but not as replacement. You yourselves can do it, we have to participate.¹⁶⁹

This is an excerpt of a speech given by Bruno Plácido Valerio at a regional Upoeg assembly. He encouraged rural citizens to learn about the law and not depend on intellectuals or academics to know about their rights. Upoeg promoters were already setting the example. When the Sistema de Seguridad y Justicia Ciudadana (SSJC) was founded in 2013, an Upoeg promoter was quoted in the local press: “we’re based on article 39, 701 and protected by article 684 with the faculty to organize our communities.”¹⁷⁰ The Upoeg promoter made claims to Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution, which states that “the national sovereignty resides essentially and organically in the *pueblo*,”¹⁷¹ Law 701 of the state constitution concerning Recognition, Rights and Culture of Indigenous Pueblos and Communities of the State of Guerrero,¹⁷² and Law 684 about “Citizen Participation of the Free and Sovereign State of Guerrero.”¹⁷³ Upoeg also had its own communitarian lawyer (*abogado comunitario*), who represented the organization in legal affairs and brought cases to court. Notwithstanding, Bruno urged everyone to study the law. Where Upoeg had previously encouraged rural citizens to take care of their own security, they were now called upon to become experts in law.

Oscar, a peasant introduced in chapter 4 who worked at the House of Justice in El Mesón for some time, took Bruno’s advice to heart. In his small adobe house, among his

¹⁶⁹ Fieldnotes, December 1, 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Cervantes, Zacarías. 2013. “Ya no es autodefensa, ahora es sistema de seguridad y justicia comunitario, acuerdan.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, March 11, 2013. Accessed July 21, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/principal/ya-no-es-autodefensa-ahora-es-sistema-de-seguridad-y-justicia-comunitario-acuerdan-2>

¹⁷¹ Mexico Const. art. 39.

¹⁷² Guerrero Const. Law 701 “Reconocimiento de derechos y cultura de los pueblos y comunidades indígenas del Estado de Guerrero.”

¹⁷³ Guerrero Const. Law. 684 “Participacion Ciudadana del Estado Libre y Soberano de Guerrero.”

scarce belongings, such as a bed, a table, and some barrels of corn stashed in the corner, a small desk with piles of papers stood out. He proudly showed me his documents, such as his copy of Law 701, the Internal Regulations of the Crac-PC, and a legal case filed by Upoeg in 2012 to request the state government and the Instituto Nacional Electoral to carry out a referendum in the municipality of San Luis Acatlán.¹⁷⁴ Even though Oscar had only finished secondary school, others referred to him as the community academic:

We are not familiar with laws, we are peasants. We have made multiple mistakes, we learned from each other. We started out from scratch, we wrote an announcement, and started to question people. When we started here in the House of Justice, there was no single paper to be found. . . . Nobody knew the law, then we started to study, the laws for indigenous communities, the political constitution of Mexico, Article 2, Article 39, that we have the right to change the mode of government of communities, Law 201 in Guerrero about public security. It was difficult, we also had to sustain our family. It took us a long time, studying, humbly.¹⁷⁵

Upoeg promoters such as Oscar and Bruno studied law and introduced rights discourses into community life. When activism reflects and appropriates legal discourses, this is often called the juridification of activism (Sieder 2017, 1). In Latin America, scholars have noted a growing importance of legal discourse and institutions in social and political struggles, and hence studied “the repertoires of legal ideas and practices that accompany, cause, and are a consequence” of such politics (Couso, Huneeus, and Sieder 2010, 4). I draw on this work when exploring the ways in which Upoeg employs the law in the field of policing and to accomplish its aspirations beyond security and restructure the functioning of municipal governments. Cultural-ethnic considerations play a key role in Upoeg’s language of rights and in taking its demands to courts. Upoeg is active in diverse indigenous, Afromexican, and mestizo communities. Inter-ethnic organizing is therefore another component of the regional policing that I examined in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, I study the political dimension of Upoeg’s policing by taking a closer look at the local appropriation of rights discourses, or “vernacularization” (Levitt and Merry 2009; Hernández 2016; Engle Merry 2006). This happens in the context of an “ever-expanding toolkit of legal language, instruments, and institutions available for use in social and political struggles” (Couso, Huneeus, and Sieder 2010, 10). I explore how Upoeg legitimates its actions by drawing on rights and turning to the law, and the local and broader political effects of its strategy for the multicultural state. First, I

¹⁷⁴ Bruno Plácido Valerio. Consejo General del Instituto Electoral del Estado de Guerrero. “Jucio para la protección de los derechos político-electorales del ciudadano.” SUP-JDC-1740/2012.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Oscar, March 20, 2014.

analyze Upoeg's efforts for the *policía ciudadana* to become legally recognized. I describe Upoeg's unsuccessful attempts to mobilize indigenous rights discourses and its appeal to municipal legislation. These experiences draw attention to certain regulatory effects of (multicultural) rights. To pursue its project beyond security and extend the political rights of rural communities, Upoeg took its demands to tribunals. I analyze the run-up and unfolding of two referendums about indigenous governance. These referendums not only made indigenous and women's rights the center of public debates, they also became vehicles to renegotiate local mechanisms of political representation. To conclude, I draw upon Upoeg's experiences to look at the appeal of indigenous rights models for plural ethnic organizations such as Upoeg. I also link Upoeg's legal activism to discussions about political authority, and reflect on the variations between the Centro and Costa Chica regions. I start with the debates about the possibilities and frictions of the juridification of indigenous activism.

2. Legal Activism and Indigenous Struggles

Studies of the juridification of activism point to how civil society groups use the law and appropriate discourses of rights. This speaks to the broader trend described by Comaroff and Comaroff (2008, 22) as "the fetishism of the Law," where the law has become *the* medium through which conflicts and politics are disputed. Although the use of rights language and courts by marginalized groups has a long tradition in Latin America including Mexico, the emergence of human rights discourses has offered a new legal framework and idiom for social protest and political change (Couso, Huneeus, and Sieder 2010; Goodale 2017). In the case of Mexico, indigenous rights are among the most prominent human rights discourses. It served as the basis of new forms of indigenous people's demands of collective rights and autonomy (Speed and Sierra 2005, 3). I refer to these political mobilizations around rights and legality as legal activism.

Since the 1990s, indigenous rights have become a powerful tool for collective empowerment and political reform. Across Latin America, constitutional reforms granted recognition and collective rights, such as the use of customary law and bilingual education by indigenous peoples (Sieder 2010, 164). As such, indigenous movements started to expand the legal domain to defend the practice of their collective rights and they defined new issues. Engle Merry (2006, 39) believes that "human rights are remade in the vernacular." Through (inter)national litigation or the political usage of discourses on rights, indigenous rights struggles became a platform from where to challenge official state politics and change the relationship between indigenous peoples and states (Rodríguez-Garavito and Santos 2005; Sierra 2015b; Speed 2008a; Hernández 2016; Sieder 2010). At the same time, however, scholars have pointed to the regulatory dimensions of the legalization of indigenous struggles, and how they are linked to governing regimes such

as neoliberalism (Hale 2002; Loperena 2016; Sieder and Barrera 2017).

Indigenous rights activism emerged in parallel with neoliberalism in Latin America (Yashar 2005). The neoliberal agenda reduced the role of the state and promoted the self-regulation of different social sectors. The latter was soon understood as being in a compatible relationship with emerging indigenous demands for self-determination and autonomy (Hernández 2016, 4). In 1991 and 2001, the Mexican government implemented constitutional reforms to recognize indigenous rights. At the same time, however, these reforms also restricted indigenous people's territorial and resource autonomy and political rights (Speed 2005, 39; see also chapter 3). To understand this process, Goodale (2017, 113) distinguishes between soft and hard markers of indigenous rights promotion: "Soft markers, like support for cultural heritage and . . . bilingual education, allows governments to appear to meet the claims of indigenous rights activists, while at the same time drawing attention away from the fact that hard markers, like land distribution and political self-determination, will always be off the table." It leads to the paradox of cultural affirmation and economic marginalization. Rights discourses could then become a means of regulation to obstruct more radical and diverse demands. Sieder and Barrera (2017, 10) call this the central tension of the legalization of indigenous rights. They refer to how the institutionalization of acceptable and recognized categories of cultural difference can lead to new forms of exclusion.

To access rights, indigenous people are challenged to prove to lawmakers that they and their practices fit into the state parameters with regard to culture, identity, or belonging. This type of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1988) runs the risk of limiting the groups that might be entitled to protection. The divisive potential in the legal concept of "indigenous" could produce social conflicts between those who benefit and those who are excluded and left unprotected (Goodale 2017, 114). For instance, it can reinforce the exclusion of peasants who do not identify themselves in terms of ethnicity (Sieder and Barrera 2017, 17). In this light, Speed (2005, 32) asked whether struggles for identity-based rights unsettle unified class-based struggle against larger political-economic structures of oppression.

This goes back to the discussion about the relationship between the politics of redistribution and recognition. Fraser (1995) points to the dilemmas of connecting a redistributive politics to the tackling of socioeconomic inequalities, with demands for the recognition of difference on the basis of identity. In discussions about ways to integrate various forms of social justice, the usage of multicultural laws remains contested. In this regard, Goodale (2015, 452–53) has called for a critical reappraisal of cultural rights struggles, especially when they have not been connected to a politics of equality. However, Hernández (2016, 9–11) criticizes scholars such as Goodale for making false dichotomies. She shows that cultural rights demands of indigenous movements have often included class and territorial demands, hence highlighting the interconnected nature of cultural and material struggles. In sum, while legal activism has created a powerful outlet for

indigenous dissent, discussions continue about the contradictions it may bring about. This is why Sierra, quoting Julieta Lemaitre, refers to rights as a fetish, “bestowed with the power to deceive, and at the same time, generate hope” (2015b, 148). My study of Upoeg’s engagements with legal activism is framed by these broader discussions. I especially address how Upoeg’s multi-ethnic identity opened and closed doors for its constituency.

3. Law 701 and (II) Legality

Upoeg’s armed emergence in Ayutla de los Libres in 2013 stirred public and academic debates about how to categorize and make sense of this new armed actor, especially in terms of the legal status of their demands and methods. The press reported on the stance of the federal state: “The postures known at the federal level are that the House of Representatives [*Cámara de Diputados*] exhorted the Ministry of Government [*Secretaría de Gobernación*] and the governors of six states, including Guerrero, to “persuade and dissuade” the self-defense forces, and that the Attorney General of the Republic, Jesús Murillo Karam, [said that] the State should disarm the self-defense forces and then fill the vacuums of power, because “they break with justice and the rule of law.”¹⁷⁶

While the federal government saw Upoeg as a self-defense force (*autodefensa*) and security threat that undermined the rule of law, others compared self-defense forces with the tradition of *policía comunitaria*. For instance, Jesús Ramírez Cuevas, journalist and intellectual affiliated to the left-wing political party MORENA, argued: “If authorities act illegally, violate rights and despoil communities, then citizens have the faculty to exercise their sovereignty and uphold the Constitution. Indigenous peoples’ right to autonomy allows them to assume [functions of] security and justice. The *policía comunitaria* and guards operate under the rule of law and respond to collective and democratic decisions and controls in their communities. In contrast, the armed self-defense forces are manifestations of vexation that could be framed in acts of legitimate citizen defense, but are not accountable to anyone, and so act under their own logic.”¹⁷⁷

To make sense of the numerous armed groups that recently appeared in Mexico, scholars and journalists distinguished the long-standing tradition of indigenous community policing from armed citizen responses to violence, the latter called self-defense forces.¹⁷⁸ While community policing was framed as controlled by indigenous communities and responsive to indigenous rights, self-defense forces were presented

¹⁷⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2013. “Espera línea federal sobre la legalización de las policías ciudadanas, dice el gobernador.” April 2, 2013. Accessed July 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/1/espera-linea-federal-sobre-la-legalizacion-de-las-policias-ciudadanas-dice-el-gobernador>.

¹⁷⁷ Ramírez Cuevas, Jesús. 2013. “Policías comunitarios, grupos de autodefensa y paramilitares.” *La Jornada*, May 18, 2013. Accessed May 1, 2014. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2013/05/18/cam-grupos.html>.

¹⁷⁸ See, for instance, the work of Vélez (2014).

as lacking such accountability mechanisms and legal grounds, as argued by indigenous scholar Francisco López Bárcenas (2014, 132–33): “The self-defense forces are distinct. First, they are groups whose goals are to defend themselves and, in some cases, defend communities from aggression by the State or groups linked to it, but they do not form part of the organizational structures of communities, they are not elected by them and are not accountable to them for their acts, because they are governed by their own norms.”

Upoeg promoters positioned their organization within these public discourses about categories of (il)legality. They became what Engle Merry (2006, 39) calls “intermediaries or translators” between (inter)national law, legal institutions, and specific situations. By integrating the organization into local community structures and establishing the SSJC, Upoeg distanced itself from being labeled a self-defense force. As they enjoyed indigenous support and came to operate under community control, Upoeg claimed the same legal status as its indigenous sister organization the Crac-PC, which was recognized through Law 701.

Ten years after the federal government introduced the Law on Indigenous Rights and Culture, the state of Guerrero adopted Law 701 Recognition, Rights and Culture of Indigenous Pueblos and Communities of the State of Guerrero in 2011. The federal law had been the result of complex negotiations between the state and indigenous organizations triggered by the 1994 Zapatista uprising. Compared to the federal legislation, Guerrero’s Law 701 was innovative because it included the recognition of the Crac-PC’s security and justice system (Sierra 2013b, 26). In the footsteps of the Crac-PC, Upoeg promoters made claims to the same multicultural legislation. After all, part of the communities and the people participating in Upoeg were of indigenous origin.

During a meeting between Upoeg and students at a university in Mexico City, an indigenous Upoeg promoter addressed the audience in Mixteco, before continuing in Spanish: “Briefly, I told you in my native language Mixteco – what you guys really don’t understand – that we want you to know, we preserve the original language and the law protects us, shelters us. We’re within the legal framework and remain in that framework that defines our faculty to struggle.”¹⁷⁹ The Upoeg promoter stressed his indigenous identity and referred to legal protection. However, the geographic locations of Upoeg’s activities raised questions about the expediency of indigenous laws. Guerrero’s Montaña region, where the Crac-PC operated, is officially considered to be an indigenous region, with twenty-four indigenous municipalities.¹⁸⁰ A region is characterized as “indigenous” on the basis of the spatial distribution of indigenous peoples, who are identified by speaking indigenous languages and their widespread recognition as a group that holds

¹⁷⁹ Roundtable discussion “Guerrero: Organización Popular, Violencia y Protesta” at the Social Sciences department of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) Azcapotzalco, October 22, 2015.

¹⁸⁰ CDI. 2014. “Programa Especial de los Pueblos Indígenas.” Accessed September 11, 2018. <https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/32305/cdi-programa-especial-pueblos-indigenas-2014-2018.pdf>.

distinctive characteristics.¹⁸¹

The Costa Chica and Centro regions range second and third in statistics about indigenous populations in the state of Guerrero, respectively.¹⁸² However, they do not qualify as indigenous regions. Following this logic, one politician commented: “All my solidarity with the original *pueblos* that organize around the protection of their territory, their family, their patrimony and, above all, that respect their *usos y costumbres*. It is important that Law 701 is not abused, it has a very clear target population: for original peoples, not the general population (*mestizos*). The issue here is that many raise the banner of Law 701 to organize in community assemblies and elect their own police, though they are not really competent to do so because they do not belong to the (indigenous) target population.”¹⁸³

Mestizos affiliated to Upoeg thought otherwise: “I speak of the indigenous *usos y costumbres*, that allow them to elect, indeed, where they have already elected their mayors by *usos y costumbres*. We’ve been putting this into practice for many years because the *comisarios* are named by *usos y costumbres*, they’re not elected by voting urns or anything like that, it’s by *usos y costumbres*.”¹⁸⁴ Even though *usos y costumbres* are mostly associated with indigenous communities, mestizo Upoeg members pointed out that their ways of election and assembly practices resemble those of their indigenous neighbors. In fact, rural communities across the region apply similar forms of community governance. These governance structures made community policing beholden to the collective, *the* accountability mechanism that distinguished community policing from self-defense forces (see López Bárcenas 2014; Ramírez Cuevas 2013). In this logic, Upoeg made claims to Law 701 by drawing on *usos y costumbres* rather than ethnic identity per se. However, this was met with opposition.

The head of the Comisión de Defensa de los derechos Humanos de Guerrero (Codehum), for example, rejected Upoeg’s claims. After Upoeg appeared in the Centro region, head of the Codehum Ramón Navarrete Magdaleno stated: “He indicated that the members of the self-defense forces expressed their willingness to free the detainees, but that it would be the assembly’s decision; though El Ocotito can’t apply the concept of *usos y costumbres* because it’s not considered an indigenous community.”¹⁸⁵ According

¹⁸¹ CDI-PNUD y Censo de Población y Vivienda, 2006. “Regiones indígenas de México.” Accessed September 11, 2018. http://www.cdi.gob.mx/regiones/regiones_indigenas_cdi.pdf.

¹⁸² Dr. Humberto Santos Bautista, M.C. Alfredo Méndez Bahena, Dr. José Joaquín Flores Félix, Lic. Bulmaro Muñoz Olmedo, Dr. Rodrigo Pimienta Lastra. 2006. “Estudio de factibilidad - Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur,” Chilpancingo, Guerrero.

¹⁸³ Javier Flores, Francisco. 2016. “Respalda Sofio Mando Único estatal; Ley 701, sólo para pueblos indígenas.” *Rebelde*, February 8, 2016. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://rebeldeguerrero.blogspot.nl/2016/02/respalda-sofio-mando-unico-estatal-ley.html?m=1>.

¹⁸⁴ Interview, November 24, 2015.

¹⁸⁵ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “No corresponde a las autodefensas hacer detenciones como las de El Ocotito: Codehum.” January 29, 2014. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/no-corresponde-a-las-autodefensas-hacer-detenciones-como-las-de-el-ocotito-codehum>.

to him, the concept of *usos y costumbres* can only be used by indigenous communities. This points to an understanding of the links between indigenous identity and *usos y costumbres* as conclusive factors for the legal foundation of security and justice systems. Notwithstanding its substantial indigenous constituency and practice of *usos y costumbres*, Upoeg failed to fit the parameters of the law because of its heterogeneous constituency. This type of reasoning can be seen as an example of multicultural politics that obscure the heterogeneous composition of social relations and organizations, and constrain the possibility of class-based political organizing across ethnic groups (Muehlmann 2009, 476). Other scholars refer to the way in which processes of legalization of certain subjects and practices can lead to the illegalization of others by excluding and marginalizing them from the moral-legal community (Thomas and Galantar 2013, 211). Through reifying difference, Law 701 limited Upoeg's possibility of inter-ethnic organizing. All the while, the law was called into being to accommodate diversity in society. Unsuccessful in claiming the same legal protection as the Crac-PC, Upoeg turned to other laws.

4. The Organic Law of the Free Municipality

I did a trick, because according to Law 701 only indigenous people can set up their own system. That's why they [state officials] say, only indigenous people can set up their own police. And you are not indigenous, right? But there's another law, the law of the autonomous municipalities. That is the one that we'll use for you, it says that every municipality is autonomous. It's a juridical trick that we're preparing with our group of lawyers. We're from the Montaña, but that doesn't mean we don't know about laws, right?¹⁸⁶

During a regional assembly in the Centro region, Bruno explained the possibility to legalize policing groups through the laws that regulate municipal administrations in Mexico, which includes sections on security. He referred to the Organic Law of the Free Municipality of Guerrero (*Ley Orgánica del Municipio Libre del Estado de Guerrero*). As described in the previous chapter, Guerrero's state governor approved this form of regulation after a long trajectory of conflicts and negotiations. In Mexico's political system—with its three levels of government: federal, state, and municipal—the municipal level was made responsible to deal with Upoeg. Municipal administrations were to decide whether Upoeg would be allowed to secure their towns and communities. This was enabled by Article 115 of the Mexican Constitution, which makes municipalities in charge of providing public security on the municipal level.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, both federal and state

¹⁸⁶ Fieldnotes, December 1, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ Mexico Const. art. 115.

officials stayed involved in the issue of Upoeg's regulation. For instance, Bruno promised to hand over municipal council minutes and proceedings (*actas de cabildo*) to federal state officers to show that the organization "now found itself within the legal framework."¹⁸⁸ These council minutes documented the authorization of Upoeg's policing groups by municipal administrations. Lund (2006, 690) calls items such as official documents, stationery, rubber stamps, registers, and court books "administrative regalia" that serve as signifiers for state recognition. For Upoeg, documents such as council minutes also constituted tools for obtaining a legal status. By June 2014, the municipal administration of Ayutla de los Libres recognized the *policía ciudadana* and other municipalities followed suit, such as Tecoaapa, Juan R. Escudero, San Marcos, Cruz Grande, Cuautepex, and Marquelia.¹⁸⁹

Apart from municipal council minutes, Upoeg agreed upon another set of "administrative regalia." During an internal Upoeg meeting, Bruno announced: "Assembly minutes and documents [*actas de asamblea*], everyone has to bring those. The Upoeg policemen who don't live up to that, sorry . . . too many people walk around armed these days, without us knowing who they are."¹⁹⁰ In a meeting with the marines, the attorney general, and the military, Upoeg had agreed that only policemen with formalized documents are considered legal. The assembly minutes, carried around by Upoeg's policing groups, registered the appointment of each police member by majority vote in community assemblies, including *comisarios* (submunicipal community leaders), *comisariados ejidales*, and *comunales* (agrarian leaders). These documents thus obtain legitimacy because of what Fox (2007a, 550) calls "certifiable majority rule": "submunicipal leaders are literally the official holders of the 'seal' that empowers them to sign official documents in the name of their communities." In this logic, Upoeg promoters incorporated such bureaucratic requirements into the everyday life of the organization. During Upoeg assemblies, promoters informed all attendees about the importance of their registration: "Only through a registration, with your signature, you can let your voice be heard. If we reach an agreement in the assembly, we can show that we were with many, that we have a powerful assembly." Furthermore, community leaders were reminded to "always take your stamp, because it is the way to legalize the process: with your stamps and signatures."¹⁹¹

Notwithstanding the official documents and other administrative regalia collected

¹⁸⁸ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. "Se reestructurará la autodefensa de la UPOEG antes de su reunión con la SEGOB informa Bruno." September 2, 2014. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/se-reestructura-la-autodefensa-de-la-upoeg-antes-de-su-reunion-con-la-segob-informa-bruno>.

¹⁸⁹ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. "Lleva la UPOEG al gobierno actas de siete ayuntamientos que reconocen a la Policía Ciudadana, pero no los reciben." July 18, 2014. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/lleva-la-upoeg-al-gobierno-actas-de-siete-ayuntamientos-que-reconocen-a-la-policia-ciudadana-pero-no-los-reciben>.

¹⁹⁰ Fieldnotes, November 23, 2014.

¹⁹¹ Fieldnotes, October 5, 2014.

by Upoeg members, the organization never escaped the sphere of legal ambiguity. Despite existing legal grounds for Upoeg's recognition, state officials remained hesitant to validate Upoeg's legal status. For instance, the state secretary did not show up for the meeting scheduled to receive the council minutes collected by Upoeg.¹⁹² As described by Sierra (2015b), legal ambiguity always prevails in the margins of the state. The Crac-PC, recognized by Law 701, also faced this reality. As a consequence, Upoeg could not count on municipal authorization alone to secure its position as a security force. Aside from Upoeg's self-proclaimed and unsteady status within the legal framework of the municipality, it was just as much the scope of Upoeg's popular legitimacy and actual policing force that determined whether Upoeg members could carry out their work.

Upoeg promoters not only voiced their demands in this legal framework to assert legality. The legalizing language and practices also expressed the organization's aspirations beyond security. Upoeg promoters made claims on the Organic Law of the Free Municipality to provide legal foundation to the project of reorganizing politics within municipalities. They distributed a flyer called: "Some faculties and attributions of municipal *comisarios*," which contained an excerpt of the Organic Law, listing the numerous responsibilities of community leaders.¹⁹³ Those included tasks such as implementing municipal regulations, assisting the public prosecutor, taking care of public order, dealing with issues of public health, and arresting criminals. The document featured the many tasks that community leaders were assigned to by law. By highlighting these particular passages of the law, Upoeg promoters expressed their aspirations: "A *comisario* should be like a minor congressman, recognized and with economic resources, who can perform labors for the community, and receive municipal resources, who should be recognized as a fourth level of government; the municipal *comisario* should be recognized for what he is."¹⁹⁴

Upoeg promoters thus considered the law a foundation upon which to legitimately increase the authority of community leaders. To legitimize the union of community leaders in new forms of political association, Upoeg used Article 196, which mandated community leaders to form a Municipal Advisory Council.¹⁹⁵ Upoeg leaders evoked this article to formalize and justify the creation of the Councils of Authorities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these Councils were an attempt to generate new mechanisms of political representation to give more voice to what Upoeg called the fourth level of government.

¹⁹² *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. "Lleva la UPOEG al gobierno actas de siete ayuntamientos que reconocen a la Policía Ciudadana, pero no los reciben." July 18, 2014. Accessed October 17, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/lleva-la-upoeg-al-gobierno-actas-de-siete-ayuntamientos-que-reconocen-a-la-policia-ciudadana-pero-no-los-reciben>.

¹⁹³ Upoeg. (date unknown) "Algunas facultades y atribuciones de los comisarios municipales."

¹⁹⁴ Interview, November 24, 2015.

Upoeg's use of the law illustrates Goldstein's statement about legality in the hands of people in the margins of the state: "people draw on all their resources, forces of imagination, spontaneity, and a kind of juridical creativity, as they struggle to control the uncertainty in which they live" (Goldstein 2012, 31). However, while Upoeg drew upon the law and bureaucratic practices to reinforce emerging institutions, they also experienced limitations. In reference to the aspiration to increase decision-making powers and control over resources by community governments, Bruno acknowledged that: "there's no juridical order that community governments should have, the entire juridical area needs to be rethought."¹⁹⁶ In fact, the same law worked against them. The Organic Law describes community leaders as "municipal auxiliaries," who significantly lack political rights to govern municipal affairs (Fox 2007b, 180). What is more, with regard to the Municipal Advisory Councils, the Organic Law only assigned them advisory powers and not the decision-making authority needed to actually have influence over municipal affairs. While Upoeg promoters detected and attempted to make use of dormant laws, there seemed to be no sufficient juridical basis to stake their claims. Upoeg could use the Organic Law of the Free Municipality of Guerrero to provide a legal basis for its security provision, but the same law failed to be beneficial for Upoeg's project beyond policing. Upoeg again encountered the limits of using legal tools such as laws in activism. The law limited the type of political change envisioned by Upoeg. In the case of the Council of Authorities in Ayutla de los Libres, it operated with legitimacy—the community leaders represented their communities—but without a legal basis grounded in political rights. What is more, the Council operated as an alternative institution, alongside the official municipal government that continued as usual and remained the authoritative political apparatus of "last resort" (Smith 2003, 107–108). To realize its aspiration to strengthen the fourth level of governance, Upoeg turned to other strategies. In the next section, I trace Upoeg's short-lived participation in the 2015 electoral politics in combination with the organization of referendums.

¹⁹⁵ Ley Organica del Municipio Libre del Estado de Guerrero. Art. 196. "To ensure the best functioning of the Municipal government and its most efficacious territorial deconcentration, it shall have the following organs: I. Police stations and Delegations; II. Advisory Councils (*sic*) of Municipal *Comisarios*; III. Advisory Councils (*sic*) of Citizens of the Municipal Delegations; IV. Advisory Councils (*sic*) of Presidents or Commissioners of Ejidal and Communal Resources; V. Councils (*sic*) for Municipal Collaboration; V BIS.- Councils of Neighborhood Presidents. (ADDED, P.O. 9 JUNE 1992) VI. Advisory Councils (*sic*) of the City; VII. Councils (*sic*) on Urbanism; VIII. On the Social Fund for Public Works; IX. Municipal Chronicler, and (*sic*) X. Committees for Indigenous Development. XI.- Microregional Center for Public Services. (ADDED, P.O. 9 FEBRUARY 1993). The present Law and other ordinances shall establish the requirements for creating these organs, and shall define their integration, faculties [and] responsibilities." Accessed August 28, 2017. <http://www.ordenjuridico.gob.mx/Publicaciones/CDLeyes/pdf/Guerrero.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Bruno Plácido, December 1, 2015.

5. Contested Municipal Elections

Just before I returned to the Netherlands in December 2014, I attended a Upoeg meeting in a coffeehouse in Chilpancingo. While Upoeg promoters discussed their plans for the coming months, Bruno wanted everyone to direct their efforts to the referendum about *usos y costumbres* in San Luis Acatlán, scheduled for February 2015: “San Luis will be our calling card, with this, we will make an impact.”¹⁹⁷ Several international conventions and laws in Mexico recognize the right of indigenous pueblos to hold elections according to *usos y costumbres*.¹⁹⁸ In general, inhabitants of a community nominate and elect individuals for particular positions in large assemblies. These persons are not affiliated to parties and actual elections can take place in various ways, such as by show of hands, vocal expression or *desfiles*, that is, using lines of people standing together (Grindle 2007, 39).

One of Guerrero’s intellectuals and Upoeg supporters, Carlos Reyes Romero, described the difference between *usos y costumbres* and partisan elections: “By *usos y costumbres*, the people shall designate, in Assembly, the positions to be elected and shall maintain continuous supervision of their performance and may remove or destitute them at any time. The principle aspect of a party system is competition among party candidates and independents to achieve the popular representation that everyone of them seeks. Party militants and the candidate’s promoters (volunteers or paid) will also participate actively. But the *pueblo-pueblo* shall only participate actively on the day of the election, to emit their votes.”¹⁹⁹ Reyes Romero highlighted citizen participation and participatory decision-making in the model of *usos y costumbres*, and so did a Unisur teacher: “What they are trying to do is set out from something they are already familiar with, all these forms of community organization based on indigenous councils [*cabildos*], the Assembly as the maximum decision-making organ. Decisions are not taken by small groups, but collectively based on rescuing those forms they know so well, beginning a process of re-founding the state from the local level and from a completely distinct perspective.”²⁰⁰

These assertions can be understood as part of an indigenous redignification effort, “which draws its force from the active and collective participation and grassroots commitment of community members” (Sierra 2005, 60). Such discourses radically challenge official discourses of democratization based on liberal representative democracy. In organizing elections according to *usos y costumbres*, Upoeg followed

¹⁹⁷ Fieldnotes, November 23, 2014.

¹⁹⁸ See Mexico Const. Art. 2; ILO Convention 169 Art. 6, Art. 8; UN General Assembly, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/61/295) (September 2007), Art. 18-Art. 20.; Guerrero Const. Art. 8, Art. 9.

¹⁹⁹ Upoeg. 2015. “¿Por Usos y Costumbres o Por Partidos Políticos?” September 14, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://upoeg.blogspot.mx/2015/09/por-usos-y-costumbres-o-por-partidos.html>.

²⁰⁰ Roundtable discussion “Guerrero: Organización Popular, Violencia y Protesta,” second session “Violencia y Respuesta Comunitaria,” at the Social Sciences department of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) Azcapotzalco, October 29, 2015.

the discourse of the Crac-PC, which foregrounds indigenous participatory models of governance as a counterweight to party politics. But, unlike the Crac-PC, Upoeg took the same course as Cherán, the Purépecha municipality in the neighboring state of Michoacán. In 2011, Cherán set a precedent by banning political parties and only holding elections according to *usos y costumbres*. In fact, the state of Oaxaca, where 418 of the 570 municipal administrations are governed according to *usos y costumbres*, served as the real forerunner.

Already in 2012, Upoeg launched a campaign in the municipality of San Luis Acatlán to elect municipal authorities by way of *usos y costumbres* based on the rights of indigenous people. Located in the Costa Chica region, forty-eight percent of the San Luis Acatlán population speaks an indigenous language.²⁰¹ By drawing upon the authority of law to promote social change, Upoeg engaged in strategic litigation. According to the international human rights NGO Interights, strategic litigation is “taking or defending legal proceedings in a court or tribunal where the primary aim is not to promote the interests of a particular person or organization who might be a formal party to the case, but to obtain a judgment which promotes or protects the human rights of a wider group of people.”²⁰² In her study of the relationship between courts and rights in Mexico, Ansolabehere (2010, 80) writes about the potential of strategic litigation for the active promotion of citizens’ rights by the judiciary: new avenues of law interpretation can be opened up. For instance, strategic litigation by indigenous women’s organizations has resulted in legislative reforms and it has set legal precedents for fighting sexual violence and discrimination (Hernández 2016, 165). To explain successful litigation cases, Ansolabehere (2010, 80) draws on the work of Epp (1998), who viewed the determinant factor for successful litigation the capacity of civil society: “It is civil society, rather than the nature of the law or of the justice system, that produces this kind of change.” Cummings and Rhode (2009, 615) concur that the act of situating litigation within broader political campaigns is key to successful litigation.

Upoeg engaged in awareness raising campaigns. On its website, Upoeg wrote about the referendum as a rights claim: “What is the consultation about? To recover the power that has been wrested from us but that by right and tradition belongs to all *Pueblos* and Communities. Why the referendum? It seeks to achieve that the opinions of the communities of the state of Guerrero on their systems of *usos y costumbres* be taken into account to define and conduct public programs and policies that will be of collective

²⁰¹ SEDESOL. 2010. “Catálogo de Localidades.” Accessed July 10, 2017. <http://www.microrregiones.gob.mx/catloc/LocdeMun.aspx?tipo=clave&campo=loc&ent=12&mun=052>.

²⁰² Klaas, Jelle (Dutch Public Interest Litigation). 2015. “Strategic Human Rights Litigation.” November, 18–19, 2015. Accessed June 13, 2019. <https://pilpnjcm.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Sarajevo-strategic-litigation-Jelle-Klaas.pdf>.

²⁰³ Upoeg. (date unknown) “¿Qué es la consulta?” Accessed July 19, 2017. <http://upoeg.blogspot.nl/p/quienes-somos.html>.

benefit.”²⁰³

Alongside the campaign, Upoeg promoters filed an official petition to claim the right to a citizen referendum. The Instituto Electoral del Estado de Guerrero (IEEG) dismissed the request because it doubted whether communities in San Luis Acatlán actually employed normative systems such as *usos y costumbres*.²⁰⁴ With the support of indigenous communities from seventeen other municipalities in Guerrero, Upoeg filed a law suit against the IEEG and took the case to the Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación (Trife).²⁰⁵ The latter called for the IEEG to investigate the pertinence of *usos y costumbres* in San Luis Acatlán. When the IEEG received the results of the study conducted by Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS), which concluded that communities in San Luis Acatlán do practice normative systems and elect their authorities by means of *usos y costumbres*, the IEEG still did not proceed with the referendum.²⁰⁶ Two other lawsuits, both won by Upoeg, were needed for the referendum to eventually be held.

In February 2015, Guerrero’s Instituto Electoral y de Participación Ciudadana (IEPC), the institute that replaced the IEEG, organized a referendum with the leading questions: “Who agrees that the municipal government [*ayuntamiento*] of San Luis Acatlán should be elected by the normative internal systems with which we traditionally elected municipal *comisarios*? Who agrees that the *ayuntamiento* of San Luis Acatlán should be elected by the party system?”²⁰⁷ According to the IEPC, the majority of San Luis’s inhabitants voted in favor of party politics. However, less than ten percent of all voters participated in the referendum.²⁰⁸ After years of campaigning, filing requests, and lawsuits, the outcome of the referendum was a deception for Upoeg. Most importantly, they lost the chance to use *usos y costumbres* during the upcoming elections.

In the run-up to the federal and municipal elections in June 2015, the social movement that had emerged in response to the forced disappearance of the forty-three Ayotzinapa students, the Asamblea Nacional Popular (ANP), called for an election boycott. For the ANP, participation in the electoral process meant legitimizing the political system responsible for the forced disappearance of the students. Therefore, the ANP took over

²⁰⁴ Bruno Plácido Valerio. Consejo General del Instituto Electoral del Estado de Guerrero. “Juicio para la protección de los derechos político-electorales del ciudadano.” SUP-JDC-1740/2012.

²⁰⁵ Reyes Romero, Carlos. 2015. “Histórica decisión.” *4 vientos, periodismo en red*, February 9, 2015. Accessed September 21, 2018. <http://www.4vientos.net/2015/02/09/historica-decision>.

²⁰⁶ Méndez Lara, Marcos. 2015. “Histórico triunfo de los usos y costumbres.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, September 27, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/9/historico-triunfo-de-los-usos-y-costumbres>.

²⁰⁷ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Votarán mujeres de San Luis Acatlán aún donde por usos y costumbres no se les permite, acuerdan IEPC y UPOEG.” November 6, 2014. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/223805>.

²⁰⁸ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Rechazaron habitanted de Acatlán usos y costumbres en las elecciones informa el IEPC.” February 19, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/1/rechazaron-habitantes-de-acatlan-usos-y-costumbres-en-las-elecciones-informa-el-iepc>.

numerous municipal town halls across Guerrero, spreading the message that citizens were taking back control over their communities.²⁰⁹ Upoeg joined this movement in some municipalities, such as Ayutla de los Libres and Tecoanapa, where popular assemblies were temporarily installed to take over municipal administrations.²¹⁰ These initiatives could be steps to Upoeg's aspirations to strengthen the fourth level of governance. At the same time, however, Upoeg rejected the election boycott, and even ran its own candidates for aldermen, councilors, mayors, local, and federal deputies for the Humanista Party in thirteen municipalities in the Costa Chica region. It did not do so in San Luis Acatlán. Notwithstanding the referendum outcome, Upoeg still claimed the right to elect the latter's municipal government according to *usos y costumbres*. The electoral candidacy raised questions about Upoeg's previous claims because it contradicted its organizing principle according to *sistemas comunitarias*. Bruno was quoted about this matter in the local newspaper, saying that: "he clarified that those [candidates] will be chosen by the people in an assembly, and not 'by just a few,' as occurs in political parties."²¹¹ Upoeg's attempts to become politically engaged on the level of municipal governments failed twice. The referendum generated disappointing results, just like the short-lived move into party politics. Upoeg never gained any political seats as the PRI came out as the winner of the 2015 elections.

When I returned to Guerrero in August 2015, Upoeg was already concentrating its efforts on another referendum. A year before, twenty-five communities and twenty-two neighborhoods of the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres presented a formal petition to the IEPC to hold the next municipal elections through *usos y costumbres*.²¹² About forty percent of Ayutla's population is indigenous. Just as had happened in San Luis Acatlán, Upoeg started a legal process to hold the referendum.²¹³ In July 2015, the IEPC responded

²⁰⁹ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. "Están tomados 40 ayuntamientos, informa la CETEG." November 30, 2014. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/estan-tomados-40-ayuntamientos-informa-la-ceteg>.

²¹⁰ *La Jornada Guerrero*. 2015. "Presenta la Upoeg el Plan de Tecoanapa en busca de recuperar la soberanía popular." January 6, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/2015/01/06/index.php?section=politica&article=004n1pol>; *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2015. "Instalan Consejo popular Municipal de Ayutla para sustituir funciones de alcalde." May 17, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivo-instante/instalan-consejo-popular-municipal-de-ayutla>.

²¹¹ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2015. "Se manifiestan en asambleas a favor de elecciones por usos y costumbres en 40 comunidades de Ayutla." March 16, 2015. Accessed July 10, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/2/se-manifiestan-en-asambleas-a-favor-de-elecciones-por-usos-y-costumbres-en-40-comunidades-de-ayutla>.

²¹² See Instituto electoral y de participación ciudadana del estado de Guerrero. 2016. Acuerdo 023/SE/15-04-2016. Accessed August 21, 2018. <http://www.iepcgro.mx/PDFs/Avisos/2016/Tres%20Ext/Acuerdo%20023.pdf>.

²¹³ CDI. 2000. "Indicadores sociodemográficos de la población total y la población indígena por municipio." Accessed July 10, 2017. <http://www.cdi.gob.mx/cedulas/2000/GUER/12012-00.pdf>

²¹⁴ See Instituto electoral y de participación ciudadana del estado de Guerrero. 2016. Acuerdo 023/SE/15-04-2016. P. 3 Accessed August 21, 2018. <http://www.iepcgro.mx/PDFs/Avisos/2016/Tres%20Ext/Acuerdo%20023.pdf>.

negatively to the request on the ground of the electoral process.²¹⁴ In response, Upoeg turned to the Trife once more. El Trife gave the IEPC three months to verify and determine the existence of *usos y costumbres* in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, for which several universities and government institutions were consulted.²¹⁵ In September 2015, the existence of normative systems in Ayutla de los Libres was confirmed and the IEPC planned the referendum for October 2015.²¹⁶

As the new referendum approached, I interviewed José Luis, Unisur student and Upoeg supporter, about what had happened during the last referendum. He had watched the referendum closely:

We belong to the municipality of San Luis Acatlán, one that is pluri-ethnic, where Tlapanecos, Mixtecos, mestizos and Afro-descendants live together. Hence, when we mention the issue of *usos y costumbres*, the Afro-descendant peoples don't want them. They say that election by *usos y costumbres* is only for indigenous peoples, but we say no, that election by *usos y costumbres* is for everyone, not only the indigenous. This is what the political parties took advantage of to convince mestizo society to defend, you see, that election by *usos y costumbres* is only for the indigenous; so this led to lots of fighting.²¹⁷

José Luis pinpointed the problem of Upoeg's claim to indigenous rights in an ethnically-heterogeneous territory. More specifically, he attributed the referendum's failure to the notion of *usos y costumbres*, which was unable to appeal to *mestizos* and Afromexicans. This speaks to general debates about identity politics, and the difficulties it might produce to build political alliances. I asked José Luis about Upoeg's plans to overcome this challenge in Ayutla de los Libres, and he laid out Upoeg's attempt to appeal to broader groups of people: "The idea is to modify the term *usos y costumbres*. Perhaps, 'collective government,' 'government of the people, of the municipality.' I don't know, but we need to look for a term so that they [*mestizos* and Afromexicans] will enter."²¹⁸

In sum, Upoeg tapped into the possibilities made available by the 2015 elections, but yielded disappointing results. Alongside regional policing and the setting up of Councils of Authorities, the organization engaged in electoral politics to get a foot in the door of municipal administrations. At the same time, Upoeg asserted the rights of indigenous people and engaged in strategic litigation to put multicultural laws in effect on the municipal level. This takes us back to the question of how social movements can

²¹⁵ The National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH), the Department of Indigenous Affairs (SAI), the municipal administration of Ayutla de los Libres, Guerrero's state congress, and the social anthropology department of the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (UAG).

²¹⁶ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2015. "En Octubre la consulta sobre elecciones por usos y costumbres en Ayutla." June 28, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/1/en-octubre-la-consulta-sobre-elecciones-por-usos-y-costumbres-en-ayutla>.

²¹⁷ Interview with José Luis, September 25, 2015.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

put representative democracy and the rule of law, also called “tools of liberalism,” to work in favor of projects for more systemic change (Postero 2017, 16: in reference to Boaventura de Sousa Santos 2010). In the case of the San Luis Acatlán referendum, the appeal to indigenous rights seemed to have had alienating effects on the non-indigenous population. In a news report, Bruno commented on the problem: “[Bruno] reported that they are soliciting that not only indigenous communities can participate in this model for choosing municipal authorities, but that mestizo peoples can also do so, to learn to walk in plurality.”²¹⁹

For the second referendum, Upoeg started to organize the municipal population more carefully. Rather than looking at ethnic minorities, as often done in multicultural settings, the organization specifically engaged with the majority population as the subjects for mobilizing change (cf. Meer and Modood 2012, 188). In addition, this time the strategic litigation campaign unfolded in the heart of Upoeg’s political mobilization and policing area, Ayutla de los Libres. In the next section, I explore the way in which Upoeg members and inhabitants of the predominantly mestizo community El Mesón experienced this “walk in plurality” in the run-up to the referendum in Ayutla.

6. Vernacularization in El Mesón

During my first fieldwork period, El Mesón was the place where people were held captive who had committed serious crimes. Wherever the Upoeg police arrested people across the region, they were sent to be guarded and reeducated in El Mesón, a community in the municipality of Ayutla de los Libres. During my absence, however, Upoeg’s prison and House of Justice had been moved to Ahuacachahue, a Mixteco community located deeper in the mountains. Don Emilio, a former Upoeg councilor, shared his thoughts about the move:

The inmates were walking around freely [in El Mesón]. They went to dances, and some community members asked them to become godfathers. With Christmas, they were invited for dinner. Why did they get so many privileges? That was unacceptable. And more and more of them were released, buying their way out. Slowly the prison emptied out [he makes a hand gesture by pointing his thumb and forefinger ten centimeters apart and twisting his wrist upwards, indicating money]. . . . The *pueblo* did not accept it and held assemblies where it was decided to move the prison and House of Justice to Ahuacachahue. Over there, they are stricter.²²⁰

²¹⁹ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Hostigan al Ayuntamiento de Marquelia para que desconozca el aval que le dio a la UPOEG, denuncia Bruno.” September 9, 2014. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivoelsur/archivos/204779>.

²²⁰ Conversation with Don Emilio, September 11, 2014.

The unrestricted nature of the reeducation program, alongside accusations of corruption, made villagers lose faith in the capability of Upoeg members in El Mesón. Like others, Don Emilio saw the indigenous people higher up in the mountains as better equipped to withstand corruption and suited for the task of reeducation. Unisur student Sara had a different view and told me that the prison had been moved because, unlike the people in El Mesón, inhabitants of Ahuacachahue speak an indigenous language. Only indigenous community policing groups are considered legal, she said in reference to Law 701: “Well, the House of Justice is over there [Ahuacachahue] in case the ministerial or other police want to accuse us, they [the community police in Ahuacachahue] satisfy all the requirements so as not to affect us; that’s why the House of Justice was moved farther up the mountain.”²²¹ According to Sara, the move was strategic. When Upoeg just emerged as security force, the state prosecutor filed several investigations against Upoeg members from El Mesón for illegally imprisoning people. Moving Upoeg’s security and justice institutions from the mestizo community of El Mesón toward the Mixteco community of Ahuacachahue limited the risks of state prosecution. After all, people who speak an indigenous language enjoyed protection by Law 701. In her view, the indigenous constituency of Upoeg in Ahuacachahue could protect their fellow mestizo Upoeg members in El Mesón.

Both explanations for the move reflected more general discourses present among my participants in El Mesón. The idea that indigenous people gave the organization a legal status was often accompanied by assertions that attributed positive stereotypes to indigenous people. Don Paciano, one of the village elders, said: “The *pueblos* further up [in the mountains], they are like this [making a hand gesture by pulling his fingertips together: united]. If they want to accomplish something, they go for it. They knock on doors and won’t rest until they get what they came for. United, they get things done. What happens here, if we want something, a commission travels to Chilpancingo, they come back, yes, we have a date for a new meeting, and after that, nothing. [Merel: How so, what makes the difference?] Indigenous *pueblos*, they are more intelligent, more civilized, more awake.”²²² This portrayal of indigenous people as successful organizers reflects ideas of “indigenous redignification.” Such assertions by *mestizos* stand out because they go against historically rooted forms of discrimination in contemporary Mexico. Although multicultural reforms have changed institutional positions of indigenous people since the 1990s, the history of exclusion and institutional assimilation still marks everyday social relations. For instance, the first national survey about discrimination conducted in 2005

²²¹ Participatory Action Research “Spiderweb,” December 10, 2014.

²²² Conversation with Don Paciano, October 17, 2015.

²²³ CONAPRED. 2005. “Primera Encuesta Nacional sobre Discriminación en México.” Accessed December 4, 2018. https://www.conapred.org.mx/userfiles/files/Presentacion_de_la_Encuesta_final.pdf.

shows that indigenous people still face discrimination.²²³

My mestizo participants expressed other views on indigenous people. Undoubtedly, the recent history of indigenous organizing appealed to the imagination. The 1990s were marked by mass demonstrations, an armed uprising in Chiapas, and civil disobedience that made state officials sign indigenous demands into legislation (see chapter 3). No wonder that *mestizos*, themselves involved in social struggles, often spoke in admiration about indigenous people, or “those up in the mountains,” and their activism. The emergence of Upoeg also fueled images of indigenous peoples as determined political mobilizers. Middle-aged mestizo teacher Rodrigo, who had been involved in setting up Upoeg in El Mesón, described the beginnings of Upoeg: “We went to assemblies of nearby communities, La Libertad, Tumbalá, but we got negative responses. . . . The communities around El Mesón told us ‘No.’ Only the people from the mountains, the indigenous *pueblos*, they were all in favor [of setting up a community police]. And they say . . . civilized people, they feel superior over indigenous *pueblos*, but they [*mestizos*] don’t take action. And we are all indigenous [laughter].”²²⁴

I obtained similar information from an indigenous Upoeg promoter when he talked about Upoeg’s initial struggle over electricity rates and debts: “We began to organize, joined by those from the Montaña Alta and Baja and the Costa Montaña. The ones from the Costa Chica said, ‘where are you sandal-wearing guys [*huerachudos*, derogatory term for indigenous people] going?’ Because the issue we bring concerns us all. I remember that we began to go through Marquelia, Cuaji, all the municipalities [of the Costa Chica], today the Upoeg is present in forty-two municipalities in the state of Guerrero, because the needs are the same all over.” The promoter hinted to the way indigenous peoples in the Montaña started the electricity campaign, and had to reach out and convince non-indigenous people in the Costa Chica of their common cause: “They [people in the Costa Chica] saw that indigenous people are not as closed as they used to say, so when they realized this, the Afro peoples and fellows from other sectors started to get more unified.”²²⁵ For the case of the referendum in San Luis Acatlán, such unification was not reflected in the results. With the upcoming referendum in Ayutla de los Libres, however, Upoeg supporters such as Don Daniel had their hopes up.

Don Daniel was a cheerful man in his late forties who lived in El Mesón. Relaxing in his hammock, he told me about the time he went to Acapulco. When people heard he was from El Mesón, they congratulated him on the work of Upoeg, he proudly said. He was a former Upoeg member and one of the promoters of the referendum in El Mesón. I experienced the run-up to the second referendum in his company and that of Unisur students. To inform citizens about the referendum, the Instituto Nacional Electoral

²²⁴ Interview with Rodrigo, October 5, 2015.

²²⁵ Round-table discussion “Guerrero: Organización Popular, Violencia y Protesta” at the Social Sciences department of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) Azcapotzalco, October 22, 2015.

(INE) organized assemblies. As documented in the records, specialists visited all the communities in Ayutla de los Libres to provide information about the referendum.²²⁶ People inquired about what would happen if they opted for *usos y costumbres*. If it would not work out, could they go back to the political party system? The INE personnel assured them they could. Oaxacan authorities also visited El Mesón to share their experiences during community assemblies.

Don Tomas, a former Upoeg member, encouraged his fellow villagers to partner with indigenous people and, together, win the vote for *usos y costumbres*: “It’s the disadvantage of being mestizo, the Law 701 gives indigenous *pueblos* the right to work with a referendum, but we are *pueblos mestizos*. Ayutla has lots of communities and fifty-five or sixty percent are indigenous, that is why we need to join them, make ourselves one. In that way, the law also counts for us.”²²⁷ Geographical closeness to indigenous communities was beneficial for *mestizos*, also according to Don Daniel. It offered the possibility for mestizos to fall under indigenous jurisdiction. With municipal elections according to *usos y costumbres*, Don Daniel predicted, he could vote people from his community into municipal office: “Political parties are one big mafia. Purely rich people. Now the wife of the former mayor is in power, it is always the same family. With *usos y costumbres*, we can choose people from the pueblo.”²²⁸ Along the same line, a Unisur student argued that political parties only help their family. He believed that, with *usos y costumbres*, if somebody fails to do the job adequately, they can kick them out more easily and choose someone new. Upoeg promoters spread similar messages. Upoeg’s lawyer was reported in the local press to have said that “the current electoral system by political parties has been utilized to improve the life of some municipalities but not communities.”²²⁹

From their specific subject position as mestizo peasants, Don Daniel and others viewed municipal elections through *usos y costumbres* as a mechanism for communities to obtain more political rights and unsettle the power balance between rural communities and the *caciques* of the head town. In a way, Upoeg vernacularized the legal mechanism of the referendum grounded in indigenous rights: take the ideas and practices of one group and present them in terms that another group will accept (Engle 2006, 42). In places where both indigenous and non-indigenous rural communities alike usually elected community authorities through assemblies, the notion of *usos y costumbres* became de-ethnicized.

²²⁶ See Instituto electoral y de participación ciudadana del estado de Guerrero. 2016. Acuerdo 023/SE/15-04-2016. P. 22 Accessed August 21, 2018. <http://www.iepcgro.mx/PDFs/Avisos/2016/Tres%20Ext/Acuerdo%20023.pdf>.

²²⁷ Conversation with Don Tomas, December 12, 2015.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Morales Antonio, Jacob. 2016. “Hay 146 órdenes de aprehensión contra policías ciudadanos de la UPOEG, informa un comandante de la organización.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, May 23, 2016. Accessed May 27, 2016. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/2/hay-146-ordenes-de-aprehension-contra-policias-ciudadanos-de-la-upoeg-informa-un-comandante-de-la-organizacion>.

The assertions of Don Daniel and other Upoeg members draw attention to statements by scholars who argued that multiculturalism can lead to new divisions and frictions between ethnic groups. For instance, Law 701 offers only those organizations that fit the category of “indigenous” the possibility to found their own justice and security system, not multi-ethnic organizations. However, rather than producing opposition between those who can and those who cannot lay claim on the law, Upoeg members in El Mesón perceived their indigenous companions as valuable partners in struggle. After all, indigenous people made it legally possible to hold a referendum that promised new municipal arrangements, and the previous achievements of indigenous political activism made such a partnership appealing.

While these assertions set the stage for arriving at other results than in San Luis Acatlán, not everybody shared the enthusiasm. Unisur student Jorge told me that most of his fellow villagers did not understand the notion of *usos y costumbres* and hence misunderstood Upoeg’s campaign: “You might know what it means, but the people here don’t. They will say, it’s a raise of hands and that’s it. It means nothing more.”²³⁰ He also saw another liability. Some of the local Upoeg supporters of *usos y costumbres* were also PRD members. When the same kind of people were to be elected into office, it would not change a thing, he believed. To get a sense of the appeal of *usos y costumbres* to the rest of the community, I now turn to my observations during the referendum in El Mesón in October 2015.

7. The Referendum and its Aftermath

I arrived in El Mesón the night before the referendum. One week before, half of Ayutla’s 143 communities had already held referendums. On the 17th and 18th of October, the other half of the communities would carry out a referendum, including El Mesón. When I visited the house of Unisur student Daniela, she told me about a meeting of the Prospera committee that had caused turmoil. Prospera is a federal social assistance program designed to alleviate poverty with cash payments to families in exchange for regular school attendance, health clinic visits, and food support. These payments are predominantly made to the female heads of families. Two days before the referendum, the local committee overseeing this program in El Mesón had called for a meeting that many women attended. During the meeting, it was suggested that a vote for *usos y costumbres* would mean losing access to Prospera. Many women were alarmed. Prospera is a crucial source of income for these women. Daniela believed local politicians were responsible for

²³⁰ Conversation with Jorge, October 8, 2015.

²³¹ Conversation Daniela, October 16, 2015.

spreading this false message: “*Usos y costumbres* aren’t in their best interest.”²³¹

In the run-up to the referendum, a folder was distributed that said: “This 10th and 11th of October of 2015, NO to *usos y costumbres* because women do not participate in the decisions of the *pueblos*, because it turns back the clock on 200 years of history, because they violate human rights and those of women and the young, because there are already citizen candidates.”²³² The local press wrote that the folder was presumably signed by a local women’s organization. According to Upoeg, they were distributed by local PRD and PRI politicians in the name of non-existing organizations: “Because [people] are fed up with the fact that candidates are always imposed and always people from the municipal head-town [*cabecera*], even though there are capable people in the communities as well; that’s why politicians go around promoting the vote in favor of the parties so they can go on stealing from the people.”²³³

In public and political debates about the recognition of indigenous rights and autonomy in Mexico, women’s rights have often been deployed in a way to move the debate in disfavor of recognition. Hernández (2016, 19) writes about scholars who never before promoted women’s rights but nevertheless tapped into the discussions about indigenous rights to discuss the negative effects for women. At the same time, the concerns about gender inequalities cannot be downplayed. Like in other sectors of society, *usos y costumbres* include forms of exclusions along gendered lines. This debate about the alleged tension between women’s and indigenous rights also influenced the referendum in Ayutla de los Libres.

In meetings with the IEPC, Upoeg had promised to secure the rights of women to vote, also in case it would go against local *usos y costumbres*.²³⁴ However, women’s rights were not often presented as part of Upoeg’s general agenda, even though there were female Upoeg promoters, also in Ayutla de los Libres. This opened the way for political parties to act as protectors of women’s rights. In this context, the information shared in El Mesón’s Prospera meeting produced much confusion among women, even more so because they were not properly informed about the referendum. Community assemblies were mostly attended by males in El Mesón, as was probably the case for the informative assemblies about the referendum.

On the morning of the referendum, Don Daniel and I headed off toward the cancha where the referendum would start at 8:00 a.m. When we arrived, the place was already crowded with mainly women and children. I sat down among some Unisur students, as

²³² Navarrete Romero, Carlos. 2015. “Hay una campaña sucia contra la consulta sobre usos y costumbres en Ayutla, denuncia la UPOEG.” *El Sur de Acapulco*, October 10, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2015. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/311874>.

²³³ Abarca, Sonia. 2015. “Sigue oposición de elección por usos y costumbres en Ayutla.” *El Faro de la Costa Chica*, October 2015, 2015. Accessed October 15, 2015. <http://www.elfarodelacostachica.com/Region/nota32.html>.

²³⁴ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2014. “Votarán mujeres de San Luis Acatlán aún donde por usos y costumbres no se les permite, acuerdan IEPC y UPOEG.” November 6, 2014. Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://suracapulco.mx/archivos/223805>.

Don Daniel went into the local administrative office to discuss the ongoing commotion about the supposed loss of federal benefit programs. After a while, an INE official came out of the administrative office and asked attention from the crowd:

I heard that information was shared about [social] programs, and that you were told that, if you vote for *usos y costumbres*, you'll lose Prospera and Procampo. This is false, these programs come from the federal government and have nothing to do with this referendum. I don't know who spread this information, but we [she held her badge in the air] are the only ones who organized two informative assemblies, and we invited an attorney from Oaxaca who shared his experiences about how it works over there. The man told you that some communities went back to the political party system, because they had many problems after having chosen for *usos y costumbres*, while other communities were very satisfied with their choice for *usos y costumbres*. If you all decide for *usos y costumbres*, the only thing that changes is that we won't be guiding the process any longer. You yourselves, the *pueblos*, will organize the process and we will legally validate your chosen representatives. You will decide how to carry out the elections. Some *pueblos* make use of *desfiles* [performing votes by standing together in lines], this needs to be discussed. Every *pueblo* knows different *usos y costumbres*, the *costumbres* here are not the same as in Tumbalá. And when you will choose a representative, everybody wants someone from their own community, how will you deal with that? That all needs to be discussed. So, it is not only a choice of today, it is a whole process. Any questions or doubts?

After some discussion, the INE official returned to the procedure of the referendum. The people elected a local committee to oversee the referendum, the so-called negotiation table (*mesa de diálogo*). One of its members announced: "First, we need to decide about the process, do we want to hold the referendum by raising hands, or with personally registered votes?" The question caused some commotion as people voiced their preferences. "Or who wants to hold the referendum through *desfiles*?" A large majority raised hands in agreement to the latter proposal. Shortly after, people started moving. The human row on the left side of the table meant a vote for "political parties," while the row on the right side visualized a vote for "*usos y costumbres*." The overwhelming majority of women moved toward the left side and formed a messy line. On the other side, a small group of mainly adult and senior men were grouped together. The *desfiles* made it crystal clear who had won. Soon after, the negotiators announced the outcome of the referendum: 205 people voted for political parties and forty in favor of *usos y costumbres*. We listened to a loud applause. The INE official confirmed the counting and everyone slowly started to withdraw. Only some community authorities stayed behind as I watched

²³⁵ Fieldnotes, October 17, 2015.

them draft an official record.²³⁵

Don Daniel was deeply disappointed about the result. Somebody had scolded him and called him “goddamn Indian” (*pinche indio*) because of his vote for *usos y costumbres*. However, he argued a victory was imminent in any case: “They are with more, those above [in the mountains], and they are more united.”²³⁶ Unisur student Víctor responded calmly as well: “We will win anyway, all the communities around us will vote in favor [of *usos y costumbres*], the indigenous *pueblos*. What happened here, the political parties that spread false information only occurs here, and in Bella Vista, Las Rosas, the largest communities in the area, not everywhere.”²³⁷ According to my participants, indigenous and remote rural communities would vote for *usos y costumbres* and compensate the results of El Mesón.

On October 18, the INE announced the results of the referendum held in all of Ayutla’s communities and city neighborhoods. The municipality of Ayutla de los Libres would become the first municipality in Guerrero to elect its municipal authorities according to *usos y costumbres*. Official reports stated that 5987 citizens had voted in favor of *usos y costumbres*, while 5521 had voted for the political party system. Four hundred seventy-six people had abstained from voting. It was announced that eighty-six communities were in favor of *usos y costumbres* and forty-seven communities had voted in favor of party politics. Furthermore, the IEPC reported the participation of 6429 citizens who self-identified as indigenous, and 5555 citizens who self-defined as mestizo.²³⁸

Why had Upoeg succeeded in Ayutla de los Libres, although with a narrow victory, while it had failed in San Luis Acatlán? In the aftermath of the referendum, I visited one of the main figures promoting the vote for *usos y costumbres*, Upoeg member Guillermo. He had spent the last months visiting communities in Ayutla to convince them of the benefits:

We moved into the communities with the security system, to make them see that this is a way to be free. Now we’re going to take the second step, it’ll take hard work to put this into practice. The security system, how much does it cost to have a police force, maybe twelve of them? How much? It costs the people, but it’s up to each one’s conscience, you have to do your part to live well. That’s how we succeeded in planting the idea of *usos y costumbres*. For us to be free, we have to name the authorities by *usos y costumbres*. How will we name them? We’re already naming them. When you name a *comisario* are you really going to have to mount a campaign? No. The only issue is that all of us, the residents, have to come together.²³⁹

²³⁶ Conversation with Don Daniel, October 17, 2015.

²³⁷ Conversation with Víctor, October 17, 2015.

²³⁸ It is unclear how this conclusion was drawn, since the referendum vote did not include questions about ethnicity. See Instituto electoral y de participación ciudadana del estado de Guerrero. 2016. Acuerdo 023/SE/15-04-2016. Pp: 65–67. Accessed August 21, 2018. <http://www.iepcgro.mx/PDFs/Avisos/2016/Tres%20Ext/Acuerdo%20023.pdf>.

²³⁹ Interview with Guillermo, November 25, 2015.

In Guillermo's description of conversations with citizens, he refers to the connection between Upoeg's security project and its activities on the legal terrain. The groups of *policía ciudadana*, established in even the smallest and remote communities throughout the municipality, served as a platform from which Upoeg engaged citizens in other issues. In San Luis Acatlán, Upoeg did not have the same groundwork for organizing, nor a Council of Authorities. In fact, many communities in San Luis Acatlán are affiliated to the Crac-PC. In addition to the nexus between policing and legal activism, Upoeg promoters had employed a different language after the referendum in San Luis Acatlán. Making *usos y costumbres* appealing to non-indigenous citizens, either by playing into the advantages of indigenous partnership or by de-ethnicizing *usos y costumbres*, opened the way for non-indigenous people to accept an electoral process often associated with being indigenous. However, this strategy was not successful in El Mesón. As we saw, especially women's rights worked against the appeal of *usos y costumbres* in that community. Although the general vote for *usos y costumbres* had won, mestizo communities such as El Mesón had not supported it and the referendum outcome was a close call. For Upoeg, this was a cause for concern. The organization needed support because their struggle to generate change on the municipal level was anything but over.

Those opposing *usos y costumbres* did not easily give in. A nine-month legal procedure followed as different parties attempted to dismiss the results on a variety of accounts. Several political parties, such as the PRI, PRD, and the Green party, as well as Crac-PC members and other citizens, went to court. In the first ruling, the Tribunal Electoral del Estado de Guerrero (TEE) ruled in favor of a new referendum. In response, Upoeg's lawyer appealed once again to the Trife, which confirmed the validity of the referendum.²⁴⁰ In fact, the Trife ordered state Congress to develop legislation and guidelines for the people of Ayutla de los Libres to hold the next municipal elections according to *usos y costumbres*.²⁴¹

As stated earlier by the INE official during the referendum in El Mesón, Ayutla's communities and neighborhoods themselves needed to work out a viable scheme for the election. As could be expected, Upoeg came forward to guide this process. Bruno stated: "The model of governance has to be originally from the *pueblo* Ayutleco, rather than imitating the model of Cherán, Michoacán or from municipalities in Oaxaca."²⁴² To

²⁴⁰ *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2016. "El Trife reconoció la consulta sobre elección por usos y costumbres en Ayutla: UPOEG." July 31, 2016. Accessed August 29, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/1/el-trife-reconocio-la-consulta-sobre-eleccion-por-usos-y-costumbres-en-ayutla-upoeg>.

²⁴¹ *El Faro de la Costa Chica*. 2016. "Valida el Trife la consulta de Ayutla; habrá elecciones por usos y costumbres." August 2, 2016. Accessed August 29, 2017. <http://www.elfarodelacostachica.com/Region/nota01.html>.

²⁴² *El Sur de Acapulco*. 2016. "Posponen comisarios, delegados y asistentes el análisis sobre los usos y costumbres en Ayutla." November 21, 2016. Accessed August 29, 2017. <http://suracapulco.mx/1/posponen-comisarios-delegados-y-asistentes-el-analisis-sobre-los-usos-y-costumbres-en-ayutla>.

discuss the next steps, Guillermo was once again going around the municipality to invite all the *comisarios* and inhabitants to an assembly. He showed me the invitation:

After the people of Ayutla, the past 10th, 11th, 17th and 18th of October, by means of a consultation with citizens in every neighborhood and community, demonstrated what a real popular democracy should look like, the need to construct a new government for the municipality emerged and revealed the discontent with the work that political parties had been doing – municipal indebtedness that grows daily, a real low percentage of public works and, moreover, works of poor quality but with budgets that inflate costs by as much as 100%, [and] reduced job creation for citizens, and other arbitrariness are the reasons for political parties to stubbornly hang on to what up to now has been the patrimony of the *cacique* families in this town. We're calling for . . . a meeting to contribute to the people's decision and to defend the revolutionary system of *usos y costumbres*; as well as to organize the route, an action plan and reach more agreements that may arise to guide the construction of a new model of government by the *pueblo* for the benefit of the *pueblo*.²⁴³

Upoeg presented the outcome of the referendum predominantly in terms of a triumph for democratic modes of governance of communities. Upoeg members employed terms such as “popular democracy” or “government of the *pueblo*” to give meaning to the referendum results and the subsequent implementation.

After my last research period ended in December 2015, I followed the developments around the changing model of municipal elections in Ayutla de los Libres from the Netherlands. Upoeg promoters made ongoing attempts to have the referendum outcome speak to ethnically diverse peoples. The press reported on this topic: “[Bruno] asked all those present to work in an organized manner to push forward with the project of election by *usos y costumbres*, that now [people] say it is incorrect to typify it in this way . . . that it should be called participatory democracy, because all communities will participate if their citizens decide how their municipality should be governed.”²⁴⁴ Upoeg's lawyer made references to his choice of wording as well: “However, when we say by *usos y costumbres* the *mestizos* get upset, so we'll look for another name to make this model more integrative, one in which all sectors participate, to demonstrate that the voice of the people can, indeed, govern.”²⁴⁵ Upoeg focused on broadening mestizo support for their plans. With regard to Upoeg's engagement with women, another part of Ayutla's constituency where Upoeg could still win support, the press reported about Upoeg's participation in an

²⁴³ Upoeg. November 15, 2015. “Asunto: Convocatoria.”

²⁴⁴ *El Faro de la Costa Chica*. 2016. “Sin acuerdos, culmina el primer congreso de la UPOEG.” November 22, 2016. Accessed August 29, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/ElFaroCostachiquense/photos/pcb.759783737492998/759783650826340/?type=3>.

encounter between women in Ayutla and Bolivian feminists. The Comunitarian Feminist Movement Abya Yalawho publicly showed support to Upoeg's plans: "*usos y costumbres* can offer hope to Guerrero and Mexico."²⁴⁶ To assess the achievements of Upoeg's efforts to expand its support base, I will fast-forward to mid-2018.

In July 2018, Mexicans voted for a new president and elected candidates for the local, state, and federal government. The municipality of Ayutla de los Libres did not participate in the local elections on the 1st of July. Instead, on July 16, the municipality held its first election by way of *usos y costumbres* under strict security measures and in the presence of IEPC, INE, and federal observers. Almost all community authorities were present at the assembly of representatives: 275 of the in total 280 community and agrarian leaders who, together with 260 deputy delegates, represented 140 communities and neighborhoods of the municipality. Reporters divided them into two groups. A small group, "the first group," was affiliated to the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), PRD, and the former municipal administration. The majority of the assembly representatives, "the second group," was aligned to Upoeg.²⁴⁷ Together, they had to decide over the organizational structure of the new municipal government and the members of the new governing body. Votes were made by raising cardboards. The same reporters described the election of the governing structure:

Rutilo Espíndola (first group) proposed that the structure of the organ of government be a hierarchical municipal council, made up of a council president, a president of justice and eight councilors, a total of 10 members.

While the president of the debates table (second group) proposed a communitarian municipal council represented by one member for each ethnic group: Mixteco (ñu savi), Tlapaneco (me phaa) and *mestizos*, with their respective deputies. In this case, there would be no hierarchy, he explained, all would be equal and would function only as coordinators, since the maximum authority would be the assembly of representatives.

²⁴⁵ *El Faro de la Costa Chica*. 2016. "Valida el Trife la consulta de Ayutla; habrá elecciones por usos y costumbres." August 2, 2016. Accessed August 29, 2017. <http://www.elfarodelacostachica.com/Region/nota01.html>.

²⁴⁶ Morales, Antonio Jacob. 2015. "Los usos y costumbres son una esperanza para el estado, dicen feministas de Bolivia." *El Sur de Acapulco*, November 4, 2015. Accessed August 29, 2017. <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/1/los-usos-y-costumbres-son-una-esperanza-para-el-estado-dicen-feministas-de-bolivia>.

²⁴⁷ Cervantes, Zacarías. 2018. "Representantes eligen en Ayutla a las primeras autoridades por usos y costumbres indígenas." *El Sur de Acapulco*, July 16, 2018. Accessed August 30, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/2018/07/16/representantes-eligen-en-ayutla-a-las-primeras-autoridades-por-usos-y-costumbres-indigenas>.

The second proposal won with 203 votes to 63 for the first.²⁴⁸

As a result of the outcome, the community and agrarian leaders of Ayutla's communities and neighborhoods together became "the maximum authority" responsible for governing the municipality. They formed the Communitarian Municipal Council. Afterwards, three coordinators and delegates were elected to make up the Communitarian Municipal Coordination to represent each ethnic-cultural *pueblo*. Longino Julio Hernández was elected as the Mixteco representative. He was an Upoeg member and *ex-comisario* of Ahuacachahue. Patricia Ramírez Bazán from El Mesón became the mestizo representative. She was a Unisur student at the time of my research, actively engaged in women's and Afromexican rights activism. And, lastly, Isidro Remigio Cantú represented Tlapanecos.

The majority of community leaders had voted for a municipal governance model that redistributed influence and control over municipal affairs and resources to the community level. Upoeg had worked toward this goal since its beginning, for which the Councils of Authorities served as a preamble. Whereas the Councils had served as alternative institutions alongside official municipal administrations, the Communitarian Municipal Council and Coordination in Ayutla de los Libres became the local political authority of "last resort." As a result, Upoeg altered the official notion of legitimate governance. In the next three years, the new governance design will have to show its potential benefits for community, indigenous, and women's rights.

Returning to discussions about legal activism and indigenous rights, some scholars have argued that the legalization of indigenous cultural rights has generated difficulties in addressing issues of socioeconomic inequality and autonomy (Engle 2010, 2). The aftermath of Upoeg's second referendum shows an alternative trend. Although the outcome of the referendum in Ayutla de los Libres was a victory in terms of indigenous rights, it also served as a way to change the political and economic position of community governments, the fourth level of governance, vis-à-vis municipal administrations. Non-indigenous rural population of the municipality could also reap the benefits of multicultural legislation. This outcome sheds new light on discussions about the capacity of the municipality to serve as the institutional framework from where to exercise indigenous rights. As described in chapter 3, the legal design of the municipality has been criticized for its lack of legal grounds for the diversity of indigenous governance models that exist, and for multi-ethnic governance models (Burguete Cal y Mayor, 2013, 57–58). Through strategic litigation, however, Upoeg managed to open up legal space for new mechanisms of multi-ethnic political representation on the lowest level of governance.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

8. Concluding Comments

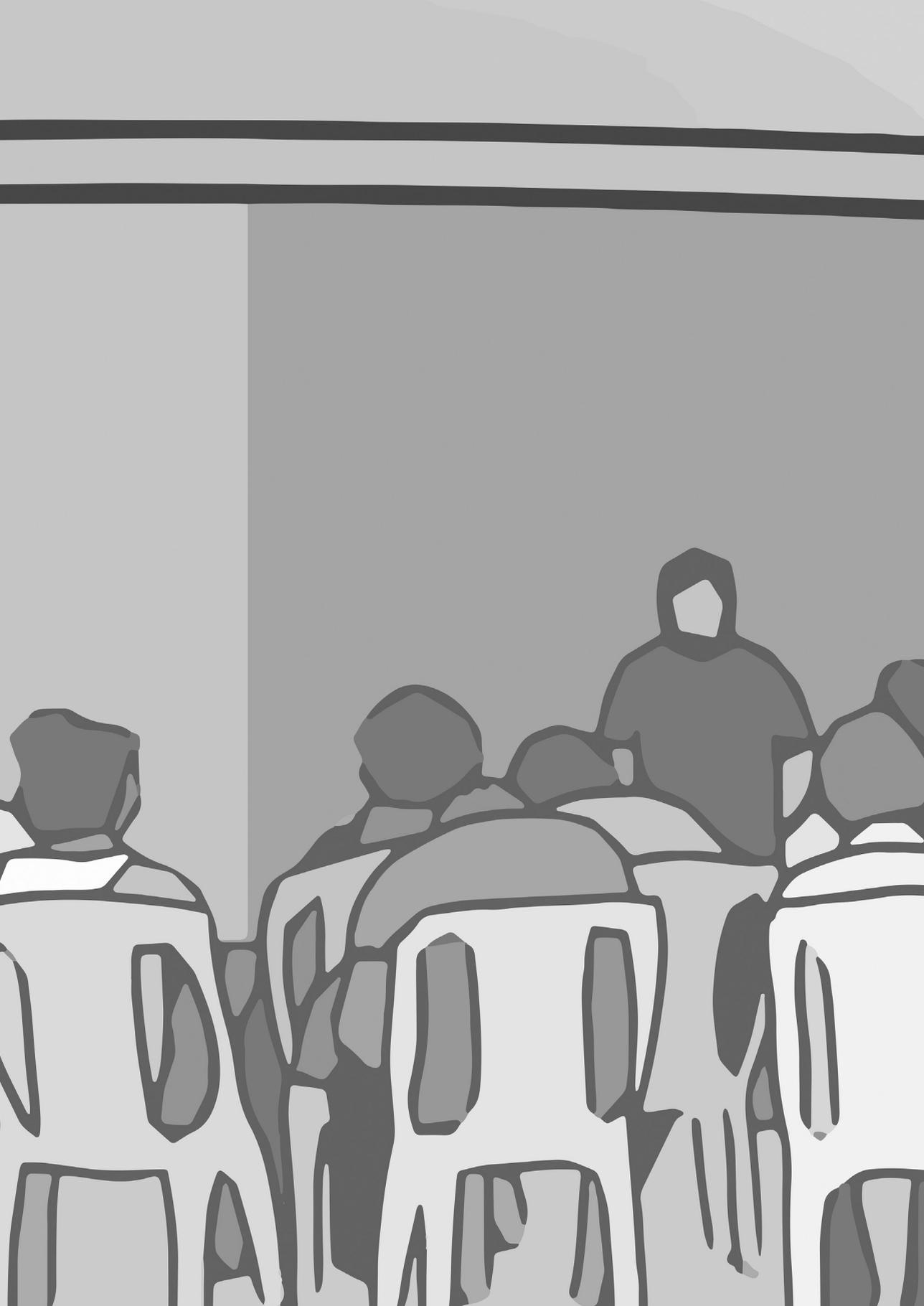
In this chapter, I studied Upoeg's legal activism to examine the community policing organization's engagements in transforming local institutions and political relations. In the conclusion, I first continue discussions started in the previous chapter about the role of Upoeg in rearranging forms of local governance. Second, I address what we can learn from Upoeg's usage of the law as tool of social struggle in a multi-ethnic setting. By drawing the main conclusions from my analysis of Upoeg, I set the stage for the next chapters on Unisur.

In the previous chapter, I showed how Upoeg's authority in parts of the Centro region became more grounded in policing rather than community structures. In this chapter, I studied parallel processes evoked by legal activism. I examined the specific process of how Upoeg attempted to locate its policing authority in acts of governance of "last resort." In general, the Councils of Authorities, the bodies that were supposed to become new political institutions, posed little challenge to official municipal administrations. In Ayutla de los Libres, however, Upoeg ultimately succeeded in altering the notion of legitimate authority within the municipal administration. By means of strategic litigation, Upoeg helped to restructure Ayutla's municipal government. Since indigenous movements have often experienced difficulties to satisfy demands beyond cultural inclusion, to more radically restructure the hierarchic relationships between ethnic groups in society, I reflected on how Upoeg dealt with the possibilities and risks of multicultural laws.

In adopting an indigenous rights discourse to claim the same legal status and self-determination as its indigenous sister organization (the Crac-PC), Upoeg forms part of a Latin American trend of employing the law in social struggles. But, because of its multi-ethnic social base, Upoeg did not fit the available multicultural framework. The organization also felt the limits of legal activism when Upoeg promoters attempted to pursue its goals within the framework of the Organic Law of the Free Municipality. Since no jurisdiction existed for Upoeg's aspirations to expand the political rights of communities, the limits of the law for more structural political change became clear. Upoeg, however, also followed a different route. Its engagement in strategic litigation succeeded in the birthplace of Upoeg's police forces, Ayutla de los Libres. The referendum was part of a broader political campaign and the *policía ciudadana* groups served as platforms for legal mobilizations. Furthermore, Upoeg vernacularized the legal discourse about the referendum to reach out to *mestizos*. By making indigenous rights effective for its multi-ethnic support, Upoeg counterbalanced the so-called menace of multiculturalism. Upoeg redeployed laws for indigenous people and put them at the service of a political project that expanded the recognition of cultural difference. The new municipal government responded to long-standing demands for the recognition of indigenous rights as well as the redistribution of political and economic control more generally. This is reflected in its institutional design: the municipal government of Ayutla de los Libres operates under

the authority of all community leaders in the municipality, and is coordinated by multi-ethnic representatives, including a woman. However, the organization largely neglected the matter of gender inequality. The place for gender (in)justice in the new governance model requires attention. I therefore argue that the organization made important steps but is still confronted with one of the challenges of multiculturalism: whether it offers remedies to some groups at the expense of others or to the benefit of all (Gledhill 2016, xvii). Upoeg struggles with potential contradictions between community, indigenous, and women's rights in its efforts to push multiculturalism into new directions. Sieder and Barrera (2017, 20) point out another problem with indigenous consultation processes. They draw attention to the possibility for it to yield new state interventions in previously autonomous spaces, such as rural communities, through legal and administrative procedures. Time will tell whether this holds true for the case of Ayutla de los Libres.

To restructure municipal arrangements, Upoeg drew creatively on the cultural rights bearers among its support base. This caused dissimilar experiences in the Costa Chica and Centro regions. While some communities in the Centro region experienced increased violence and isolation from its municipal government, community leaders in the Costa Chica region had acquired a vote in decisions over the distribution of federal resources and other municipal affairs. This draws attention to the conditions that have shaped Upoeg's activism: its geographic presence in regional nodes of state and criminal power in the Centro region, and the legal possibilities made available by multicultural laws in the Costa Chica region. These dynamics have come to the fore as a result of my focus on the political dimension of policing and by studying Upoeg's distinct practices and strategies rather than by looking at what the organization resembles. Although policing seems to be about security and indigenous referendums suggest that they concern indigenous rights only, it was the combination of both strategies that enabled Upoeg to transform political relations in a specific area. A Unisur student is among the representatives leading this process in Ayutla de los Libres. In the next two chapters, I study the way in which similar struggles over authority, democratization, recognition, and redistribution play out in university governance and education.



PART III

6

Unisur: Struggles over University Governance Beyond Intercultural Education

1. Introduction

In March 2014, I had only recently come to Cuajinicuilapa and was gradually becoming acquainted with the routine of Unisur. Twice a month, students and teachers gathered at the university for an extended weekend of classes. On one of those Saturdays, news arrived from Santa Cruz del Rincón, a Tlapaneco community that hosted another Unisur department. The community leaders of Santa Cruz invited all Unisur staff to an assembly. Teachers and students in Cuajinicuilapa reacted with excitement and unease. I learned that the Santa Cruz community authorities planned to settle a dispute among the university staff. This would be critical for the future of Unisur.

During the past eight years, Unisur had negotiated to no avail with state officials to register the university. As a result, the university operated without state funding and Unisur graduates did not obtain formal recognition of their academic degrees. The precarious financial and administrative conditions of the university produced tensions among the staff. Conflicts had emerged over financial accountability, the organizational structure of the university, and what course to follow in the search for recognition. These tensions had caused for a division of the university staff, with the rector and general secretary holding contrary visions for Unisur. The general secretary was considering to make Unisur a private institution, whereas the rector believed that only a state-funded public university could do justice to the right to education of indigenous, Afromexican, and rural communities. The community authorities, who now brought the university staff together in an assembly to resolve the issue and discuss the future, had played an important role in founding Unisur together with the Crac-PC.

When I arrived at the assembly in Santa Cruz del Rincón, the place was already crowded. After the community leader introduced the agenda, the assembly started with comments from several inhabitants. One man expressed his distress about the dispute and pleaded for the teachers to reconcile. He feared the future of the university was at stake. Someone else stressed the urgency for students to obtain valid degrees: "Don't they [Unisur teachers] themselves have diplomas?" he asked provocatively. Another person argued against the necessity of diplomas, since none are needed to become a community leader.

After some initial discussions, the university rector took the stage. Normally soft-spoken, his tone of voice was loud this day. He informed the assembly about the many

times he had approached state officials to plea for university recognition. He mentioned his meeting with Guerrero's deputy minister of higher education the week before. "I never said it would be easy," he reminded the assembly and handed them over the documentation of all his meetings. The university secretary was next to speak. He looked back at the beginnings of Unisur, when it was decided that the university project was "from the *pueblos*, directed by the *pueblos*." "Where are the *pueblos*?" he asked during his speech. He criticized the university for having become a project of academics, rather than a project promoted by communities. Furthermore, he presented his future perspective for the university: "We do not see any political will [from the state government to recognize Unisur]. We want to look for other ways, for instance, to register the institution as a private university." In response, several community members expressed criticism. Registration as a private university would be a way of denouncing the rights of the *pueblos*. It is their right to have a public university, autonomous, with state resources, someone in the assembly said.

After discussions between the general secretary and rector, the assembly sent all Unisur staff members, including me, away to find a solution to the situation. After an hour or so, the community leaders called everyone back in and presented the twelve points agreed to by the assembly. As a first point, the community leader presented the wish to continue the search for university recognition from the state government. Second, the community endorsed the position of the rector: "The assembly authorizes the teacher Joaquín to continue working as rector; he will strive to obtain the best form of recognition." In the following points, the community prescribed institutional regulations the university staff needed to comply with. For instance, every teacher needed to present their educational background and teaching plans, and show respect to other teachers and local *usos y costumbres*. Lastly, the community decided to keep the Crac-PC out of university affairs. After all the decisions were presented, I sensed an air of relief among the teachers who supported the rector. After all, the community had sided with the rector's course of action and mandated him to increase his efforts to turn Unisur into a publicly funded and recognized university.²⁴⁹

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This assembly revealed relevant tensions enclosed in the university project. Why was official registration of Unisur still pending, and what made the assembly reject the option of a private institution? And, how come the community assembly settled the dispute, rather than the university staff itself, or the Crac-PC, as one of Unisur's founders? The assembly draws attention to issues of state recognition, autonomy, ownership of the university, and grassroots participation, the key topics of this chapter.

²⁴⁹ Fieldnotes, March 10, 2014.

Through the governance and administration of intercultural education, new relationships between indigenous peoples and the state have taken shape across Latin America. In this chapter, I follow the perspective of Bret Gustafson (2014) by looking at the way Unisur members attempt to build new relations with the state through the university as a contested space. Because intercultural education can serve as a vehicle to rearrange state–society relations, Gustafson (2014, 91) points to its democratizing potential. The emergence of intercultural institutions has stirred questions such as who will shape the education of indigenous citizens and how. For instance, indigenous organizations in Ecuador have had a direct say in the Dirección Nacional de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural (DINEIB), described as “a kind of parallel mini-ministry of education within the wider Ecuadoran state structure,” which granted them a certain space for self-determination (Gustafson 2014, 83). This possibility depends on what Gustafson (2014, 86) calls “an effective model of dialogic educational governance” between indigenous organizations and the state.

Since its beginning, Unisur leaders envisioned a university model “from the *pueblos*, directed by the *pueblos*,” in the words of the general secretary cited above. For the university staff, the notion of *pueblos* is an important source of legitimacy to make claims to public education and indigenous rights. The aspirations and claims of Unisur take me back to the concept of political authority. I will examine Unisur’s attempts to institutionalize and make room for the authority of *pueblos* within state educational institutions. I take a look at the distinctive politics and social practices of the university members and examine their political implications. I understand this activism as an attempt of Unisureños to generate new forms of educational governance, as part of broader struggles over democratization. The term “educational governance” refers to the ways teachers, community leaders, state officials, grassroots organizations, and students constitute and negotiate the university model through diverse practices and unequal relations.

This chapter starts by tracing the origins of the university. I introduce some of Unisur’s founders and address the institution’s history to bring out the various aspirations of the project. Thereafter, I examine the process leading up to the opening of the state-sponsored Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero (UIEG; Intercultural University of the State of Guerrero), which is closely related to the emergence of Unisur. I analyze how Unisur became involved in a conflict over the meaning and future of intercultural education in Guerrero. By taking two Unisur departments as case studies, I explore how the educational governance model developed over the years. I specifically study Unisur’s institution building, management, and social mobilization and how all this took place in dialogue with multiple state and civil society actors. Accordingly, I address how the university’s search for state recognition played out, also in the context of the Ayotzinapa drama. The chapter concludes with a reflection on Unisur’s role in transforming educational institutions. I offer insight into what Unisur teaches us about the challenges of multicultural frameworks for grassroots struggles. But, before anything

else, I situate Unisur in wider educational trends and ongoing debates about the politics of intercultural universities.

2. Intercultural Universities as Arenas of Political Struggle

The university project of Unisur unfolded in the context of shifts in educational policy and multicultural reforms in Mexico. In the past, education had served as one of the primary instruments to assimilate indigenous people into Mexico's national *mestizo* culture (see Dawson 2004). Throughout the twentieth century, ideas and policies of *indigenismo* came up that advocated the “progressive, persuasive integration of the Indian into Mexican society” (Knight 1990, 81).²⁵⁰ This state policy appreciated indigenous culture as part of the Mexican nation and provided nursery and primary education for rural indigenous communities. However, *indigenismo* reproduced many racist assumptions (Knight 1990, 87). In the 1970s, *indigenismo*'s emphasis on integration became the object of fierce criticism. It was believed it would lead to the ethnocide of indigenous people in Mexico (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 143).

Whereas, in the 1940s, schools in indigenous regions operated in line with *indigenista* politics, the schools came to be called “bilingual” in the 1970s and “intercultural” in the 1990s (Rockwell and Gomes 2009, 101). The latter happened following the Zapatista uprising in 1994, when indigenous organizations demanded a *post-indigenismo* relationship with the state. As part of their broader agenda for recognition and autonomy, indigenous organizations promoted the creation of an intercultural education system to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity. They reacted against the “mestizizing impulse” operative in schools in indigenous regions that reproduced everyday racism and stigmatization of indigenous people in Mexican society (Schmelkes 2014, 131). Indigenous movements also claimed the right to quality education for their children. Socioeconomic indicators showed that indigenous children in Mexico significantly lagged behind compared to non-indigenous children. The lack of access to quality education was one of the major problems (Schmelkes 2014, 131).

In this setting, state efforts emerged to interculturalize schools and diversify the curriculum in primary and secondary education. Soon after, indigenous organizations started to make demands for intercultural higher education. In 2001, President Fox responded with a promise to create intercultural universities. Ever since, thirteen state-run intercultural universities have been established in Mexico (see Moisés and Rivas 2008; Dietz 2009a; Llanes Ortis 2009; Schmelkes 2009, 2014; Lehmann 2013). In addition, other types of intercultural higher education initiatives, including Unisur, have appeared

²⁵⁰ *Indigenismo* was the official policy of the Mexican state, implemented by means of a number of government policies and institutions such as the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI).

on the scene.²⁵¹

All of these institutions, also in other countries in Latin America, responded to demands and proposals of indigenous communities and, more recently, of Afro-mexican people (Mato 2011). However, there are important differences in terms of the regional sociopolitical context, the level of participation and interests of all actors involved, and the meanings attached to intercultural education (Rojas-Cortés and González Apodaca 2016, 85). Indigenous groups and state institutions are often in disagreement over the interpretation of what intercultural education means (Mato 2016, 218). For instance, official intercultural education programs have been criticized for only incorporating ideas and values of interculturality associated with harmony, tolerance, respect, and cultural enrichment. As such, intercultural education might turn into a poster child of neoliberal multiculturalism. While diversity is accommodated in intercultural programs, they fail to problematize the systemic differences and power relations between cultural groups, minorities, and majorities (see Bertely Busquets 2009; Tinajero and Englander 2011; Gasché 2010). Intercultural education may pay attention to indigenous language and cultural pluralism as folklore rather than understanding these notions as part of broader efforts toward indigenous self-determination (Gustafson 2014, 89). In contrast, grassroots indigenous organizations tend to employ an idea of interculturality rooted in conflictive and asymmetrical power relations (Bertely Busquets 2011; see also chapter 7). Intercultural education programs then question colonial legacies and exclusionary effects of neoliberal reform (Gustafson 2014, 80).

In view of the multiple interpretations of interculturality, intercultural education emerged as a new arena of struggle in which state institutions, social movements, indigenous organizations, and non-governmental groups negotiate its meanings. This relates to the question of under what conditions and how indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations construct intercultural education as a space to renegotiate their relationship with the state, and how to link education to wider agendas for political change. As mentioned before, I explore this question in this chapter by studying social contestation over Unisur's educational governance model. The next chapter follows up on the question by taking a closer look at Unisur's academic program and pedagogy.

²⁵¹ Some examples: the Universidad Campesina Indígena en Red (UCIRed) in Zautla, Puebla; the Instituto Superior Intercultural Ayuuk in Oaxaca; the Centro Universitario Regional del Totonacapan in Papantla, Veracruz; the Universidad Indígena Latinoamericana in Tabasco; the Universidad de la Montaña in Chiapas; the Universidad Comunal del Cempoaltéptl (UNICEM) in Santa María Tlahuitoltepec; and the bachelor in Educación Intercultural Comunitaria of the Unidad de Estudios Superiores de Alotepec (UESA-LEIC) in Mixe communities in Oaxaca (Rojas-Cortés and González Apodaca 2016, 87).

3. Following the Footsteps of Unisur Leaders

This part tells the story of Unisur's hybrid origins. Since I did not collect data at the time of Unisur's emergence, I present the personal histories of three university leaders to explain what preceded the foundation of the university. Academic Joaquín Flores, indigenous leader Pedro de Jesús, and union leader and politician Bulmaro Muñoz all come from different walks of life. I look at why they shifted their attention to a university project. Their stories illustrate the various social conditions, personal affiliations, and ideological struggles that led to the emergence of the university in 2007.

Joaquín Flores had just turned sixty when I interviewed him in his office at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) in Mexico City in 2015. Over the last eight years, he had been the rector of Unisur. At an early age, Joaquín had become involved in political activism. During his studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), he was a member of the communist party and engaged in trade union activities. His activism brought him to the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero (UAG). Since the early seventies, the UAG was run by communists who promoted the university-*pueblo* project.²⁵² Joaquín became involved as a teacher in the preparatory schools of the UAG. He looked back at these experiences: "It gave me an important perspective on the state of Guerrero, its political perspectives and political shortcomings. My own shortcomings as well."²⁵³ He went back to Mexico City and found employment at the UNAM.

At the beginning of the 1990s, indigenous organizations in Mexico launched the national campaign 500 Años de Resistencia (see chapter 3). Together with three colleagues, Joaquín offered the campaign technical support and this work took him back to Guerrero. After the campaign came to an end, he documented his experiences in a thesis, published by the UAM in 1998.²⁵⁴ He continued to combine his academic and sociopolitical work in Guerrero, conducting his doctoral research on the Crac-PC and contributing to the founding of Human Rights Center Tlachinollan and research center El Colegio de Guerrero.²⁵⁵ His attention was especially drawn to education, which was part of the proposals for integral development promoted by the Crac-PC: "Based on my knowledge of Guerrero and familiarity with leaders, I wanted an institution that would train young indigenous people. Something akin to the idea of the Colegio de Guerrero, Tlachinollan, a space made up of promoters trained in indigenous people's rights, materialized, more solid. And that's where the story [of Unisur] that you know begins." Joaquín had crossed

²⁵² When the Left controlled the UAG, they promoted a project based in class struggle that aimed to link communities to the university: *Universidad-Pueblo* (Bartra 2000, 34). This also occurred at many other universities in Mexico.

²⁵³ Interview with Joaquín Flores, October 24, 2015.

²⁵⁴ Flores Félix, Joaquín. 1998. *La revuelta por la democracia; pueblos indios, política y poder en México*. Mexico City: UACM-Xochimilco.

²⁵⁵ Flores Félix, Joaquín. 2007. "Reinventando la democracia. El sistema de policía comunitaria y las luchas indias en el estado de Guerrero." PhD diss., CIESAS.

paths with Hugo Zemelman, a researcher at El Colegio de México. One Unisur teacher mentioned: “Many [Unisur academics] attended Zemelman’s seminar, it was theoretically very solid, like a formulation of Marxism when you couldn’t speak openly or say you were a Marxist.”²⁵⁶ Zemelman’s work tapped into sociological debates about subjectivity and epistemology to challenge the influence of colonialism on knowledge construction in Latin America. Furthermore, he developed ideas to train historical subjects of change through education. In short, the idea was to make subjects aware of their historical position, with the intention of generating new visions for future conditions of living (see Zemelman 1995, 1997, 1998). The intellectual work of Zemelman was an important source of inspiration for Joaquín and his contemporaries. Together with local intellectuals in Guerrero, Joaquín began to organize meetings to discuss the foundation of an indigenous university. A group of teachers from Chilapa had visited a conference in Michoacán called “Indigenous Education, a utopia?” in 1998 and brought the idea of an indigenous university back to Guerrero (González González 2017, 209–210).²⁵⁷

Pedro de Jesús, who later became board member of Unisur, also shared this ambition. He was an indigenous leader from the Nahua community of Xalitla in the Alto Balsas region in northern Guerrero. As youngsters, Pedro and his brother left Guerrero to go to college in Mexico City. They were the first ones to go to university in their family. Later on, he took part in the Consejo de Pueblos Nahuas del Alto Balsas, which successfully campaigned against the construction of a hydroelectrical project (see chapter 3). In the aftermath of these struggles, Pedro became a national delegate of the Asamblea Nacional Indígena Plural Por La Autonomía (ANIPA). He participated in drafting a document for the dialogues in San Andrés after the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas: “they were addressed topic-by-topic, a diagnosis of each topic with its solution.”²⁵⁸ Among these topics was the need for indigenous, intercultural, and bilingual education: “Right there and then we suggested that through an education proposed by the *pueblos*, well, we could train our own intellectuals, our own leaders, governors, and that these models of government would allow us to rescue our culture, strengthen it, re-create it, disseminate it.” Pedro would later become the delegate of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) in Guerrero and he participated in congresses and meetings that addressed the topic of indigenous education. Bulmaro Muñiz also attended these events because of his work as a teacher and union activist; he later became the coordinator of the Unisur department in El Mesón.

Fifty-five years of age, Bulmaro Muñiz’s everyday life consists of educating and organizing. During our conversations, he often needed to pause to control his coughs. It was said his voice was affected by all the years of giving speeches and organizing.

²⁵⁶ Interview, October 21, 2015.

²⁵⁷ Among others, Humberto Sánchez, an indigenous sociologist and coordinator of the National Pedagogical University (UPN) in Chilapa de Álvarez, was part of this delegation. He also played an important role in founding Unisur.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Pedro de Jesús, December 17, 2015.

Born in Puebla, Bulmaro studied agronomy in Chilpancingo: “those of us who studied agriculture had two paths, either go with those who have bountiful resources and plenty of agricultural machinery, or align with the peasants.” Bulmaro chose the second option by responding to a call to work as an agronomy teacher in the Montaña region of Guerrero. From the town of San Luis Acatlán, he walked fourteen hours to arrive at the indigenous community where he started to work in the community boarding school. In these days, only larger communities had primary schools, so children from small communities went to such schools. About this period of his life, Bulmaro remarked: “I began to understand, in effect, that education was a right that had been denied to many communities, and my first concern was, how to fight to ensure there’d be, at the very least, a primary school in every community.”²⁵⁹

Bulmaro participated in the emergence of the PRD in Guerrero. He was part of the group called Izquierda Democrática Nacional (IDN), which held close relations with Andrés Manuel López Obrador. More recently, Bulmaro shifted his allegiance to political party MORENA while working as a teacher trainer. As a teacher, Bulmaro became involved in union activism early on in his career. He was one of the founders of the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE). The union of dissident teachers emerged in 1979 in response to the lack of democracy and strength of the official teachers’ union, the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE): “During the founding of the CNTE a thesis emerged that is still valid today, it convinced me that it was necessary to fight to make the union more democratic, education more democratic, and society more democratic. This is my thesis. That’s where I’m coming from.” The CNTE became known for its strikes, marches, and sit-ins, alternated with negotiations with authorities (see Foweraker 2002). Later on, the CNTE in Guerrero converted into the Coordinadora Estatal de los Trabajadores de la Educación de Guerrero (CETEG), in which Bulmaro came to play an important role. These struggles led him to found another group called Colectivo Pedagógico José Martín: “to start thinking about what educational alternatives could be created to benefit the *pueblos*. From pre-school, primary, secondary, high school, etc., and then another current emerged . . . pondering the possibility of the university.”

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From different paths of political activism, Joaquín Flores, Pedro de Jesús, and Bulmaro Muñoz each became advocates of a university for rural and indigenous students. The leaders crossed paths in political campaigns, congresses, universities, and mobilizations. Their experiences with the social circumstances of Guerrero motivated their activism. The state of Guerrero had a low number of higher education institutions compared to

²⁵⁹ Interview with Bulmaro Muñoz, September 20, 2015.

other Mexican states, which were mainly in the urban areas of Acapulco, Chilpancingo, and Iguala. This “institutional coverage gap” reflects the urban and mestizo bias of higher education in Mexico, where education institutions are not often located in rural regions, nor target indigenous students (Guilherme and Dietz 2017, 12). Besides the inaccessibility of higher education, the specific intercultural education available for indigenous and rural youth often ends at the pre-university and university level, what the same authors call an “interculturality gap.”

In response, indigenous leaders such as Pedro de Jesús expressed the desire to diversify the university system. Yet, the calls of these leaders went beyond demands to fill institutional gaps. The efforts to found a university emerged in the aftermath of the heydays of the CG500 movement, and as part of Crac-PC’s project for integral development and autonomy described in chapter 3. Academics such as Joaquín Flores were motivated to initiate indigenous educational projects inspired by Marxist ideals for socioeconomic transformation, epistemic justice, and decolonization.²⁶⁰ These ideas found a fertile environment in universities in Mexico City and Chilpancingo, known for their historical role in labor struggles and as breeding grounds for the New Left. Teachers such as Bulmaro Muñoz promoted the democratization of education and society more generally, along the initial course of the PRD. Consequently, the demand for a university emerged from different traditions and ethnic and class identities, and involved various aspirations for sociopolitical restructuring. The beginning of the new century offered a window of opportunity.

4. Contestation over the University: Whose University is it?

Unisur’s actual emergence sets the stage for understanding its model of governance. Its history is highly politicized. I use narratives of Unisur members to understand what happened during these years. In addition, I consulted archival documents and the work of other scholars to make sense of Unisur’s contested beginning. It all started in 2001, when President Fox followed up on his electoral commitment to diversify Mexico’s higher education system. He installed the Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (CGEIB). Sylvia Schmelkes became director and the first official intercultural university opened its doors in the state of México in 2003. Schmelkes approached indigenous leaders in Guerrero to plan the creation of the second intercultural university. The same year, a diverse group of people came together in the First Congress of Intercultural Bilingual Education in Guerrero. About four hundred academics, municipal authorities,

²⁶⁰ In Latin America and beyond, academics and activists have started to promote epistemic justice as a way of making marginalized ways of knowing relevant, and decentering dominant knowledge systems that tend to be imposed on such other forms of knowledges. Indigenous and Afromexican knowledges are often pinpointed to serve as example (see de Sousa Santos, 2015).

state representatives, civil society organizations, and representatives of Tlapaneco, Mixteco, Amuzgo, and Nahua communities gathered in Chilapa. On Schmelke's request, the congress formed an academic commission, including Joaquín Flores, Humberto Sánchez, and Bulmaro Muñoz. The commission held the responsibility over the design, elaboration and implementation of the project.²⁶¹

During 2004 and 2005, commission members participated in congresses and regional assemblies to elaborate an academic program and university model in dialogue with local leaders.²⁶² Because various municipal mayors showed interest in hosting what would become Unisur, the commission carried out a feasibility study to determine possible university locations.²⁶³ Four communities were selected to host departments: 1) the Tlapaneco community of Santa Cruz del Rincón would respond to the education needs of Tlapaneco and Mixteco youth in the Montaña region; 2) known as “the heart of Amuzgo territory,” the municipal town of Xochistlahuaca would serve the needs of Amuzgo students in the Costa Chica region; 3) the Nahua community of Xalitla was selected to house a university department for Nahua students in the Alto Balsas region; and 4) the Nahua community of Acatlán ensured access to education for indigenous youth living in the Centro region of Guerrero. High levels of “social participation and organization” was an important selection criterion. The selected communities were considered important nodes in regional social struggles. Santa Cruz del Rincón was one of the birthplaces of the Crac-PC, and community authorities in the municipality of Xochistlahuaca had formed the Consejo Municipal Popular to oust a local *cacique* (Rodríguez Wallenius 2005, 239). Furthermore, Xalitla had played a major role in the conflict over the hydroelectrical dam in the Alto Balsas region, while the community of Acatlán actively participated in Guerrero's 500 Years of Resistance movement, CG500.

In 2005, the academic commission proposed plans for the university, which were approved by an Intersectoral Commission that consisted of various state representatives responsible for the establishment of the university in Guerrero (López 2009, 33).²⁶⁴ The

²⁶¹ The commission needed to develop: “the feasibility study, diagnoses, philosophical foundations, curriculum design, Organic Law, and all the other required documents.” See Unisur. 2003. “c) Resolutivos del 1er Congreso en Chilapa de Alvarez.(Octubre 2003).ppt”

²⁶² Unisur. (date unknown). “b) Breve reseña histórica del proceso de creación de la universidad intercultural en Guerrero.”

²⁶³ The university locations were selected on the following criteria: “indigenous population, number of high schools, inscriptions in high schools, highway access, means of communication, social participation and organization, existence of certain cultural manifestations, strategic location, social peace.” See Dr. Humberto Santos Bautista, M.C. Alfredo Méndez Bahena, Dr. José Joaquín Flores Félix, Lic. Bulmaro Muñoz Olmedo, Dr. Rodrigo Pimienta Lastra. 2006. “Estudio de factibilidad - Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur.” Chilpancingo, Guerrero.

²⁶⁴ The Intersectoral Commission included representatives of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (CGEIB), Comisión Nacional Para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI), Guerrero's Secretaría de Asuntos Indígenas (SAI), the education commission of local congress, and the academic commission appointed at the First Congress.

intercultural university was ready to open once state congress authorized its foundation. However, problems started to emerge as Guerrero was in the midst of an electoral campaign. The academic commission reached out to Zeferino Torreblanca, the candidate governor of the left-leaning PRD. The latter promised to support the university once elected. When Torreblanca won the election and came into office, the university project was mentioned in Guerrero's development plan of 2005–2011.²⁶⁵ Even so, the university's future was still not guaranteed.

The feasibility study caused controversies. The academic commission had decided that Santa Cruz del Rincón would be the seat of the university headquarters, but officials of Guerrero's Secretaría de Educación (SEG) preferred the community of La Ciénega. According to the commission, the latter was inaccessible and lacked the basic services necessary to host the university. In turn, state officials argued that Santa Cruz del Rincón already had a subdepartment of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN), which met the community's need for higher education (González González 2017, 225–226). In the end, the academic commission was overruled when state congress approved the construction of the Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero (UIEG) in La Ciénega, a university that was not designed according to the feasibility study and academic proposals elaborated on by the commission. Guerrero's congress allocated 100 million *pesos* (approximately 4,3 million euros) to the UIEG, which started classes in 2007 (López 2009, 34).

"We saw two routes there," Bulmaro Muñoz remembered, "either accept the UIEG because it offered us jobs, or go back to the *pueblos*, tell them what happened, and see what they have to say."²⁶⁶ Pedro de Jesús also recalled the situation: "The university that [Congress] approved, was alien to the indigenous peoples, nor did they participate in its formulation, its elaboration. [Merel: What was the fundamental reason for rejecting Unisur so out of hand?] Well, we thought, they feared to give indigenous peoples an institution where their intellectuals would receive training, to continue preventing certain indigenous regions of the state from waking up, and so easily subject them to electoral, or some other kind, of politics."²⁶⁷ Furthermore, another member of the academic commission, Floriberto González González, wrote about the event: "We recalled Dr. Hugo Zemelman's words: 'You're ingenuous, trusting and stupid . . . what you're doing is building a whole social movement around an academic project, the State isn't going to allow it; both federal and state authorities serve only power, because that's

²⁶⁵ Guerrero Gobierno del Estado. 2005. "Plan Estatal de Desarrollo 2005–2011." P.155. "(in order to add) economic and human resources, the Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe, the municipalities with indigenous population and the state shall finalize the project of creating the Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos Indígenas del Sur." Accessed December 21, 2017. https://es.slideshare.net/aca_ser/plan-estatal-de-desarrollo-de-guerrero-2005-2011.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Bulmaro Muñoz, September 20, 2015.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Pedro de Jesús, December 17, 2015.

how they make their living” (2017, 226). These narratives show how members of the commission understood the dispute. According to commission members, state officials had not wanted to construct the university at the locality that initiated the Crac-PC. They perceived the UIEG as an attempt of the state to stop social mobilizations affiliated to their university project. Moreover, the leaders rejected the UIEG because the university was not formed in dialogue with indigenous communities. In fact, no consultation had taken place, as was the case for the university proposed by the commission.

This dispute takes us back to critical studies about the implementation of multicultural policies that go beyond recognizing limited cultural rights (Hale 2011; Overmyer-Velázquez 2010; Sierra 2005). In this view, the partial recognition of collective or group rights was an integral part of establishing neoliberal policies. Latin American states, including Mexico, have been criticized for adopting multicultural policies to neutralize more radical demands. As such, intercultural institutions sometimes served as a form of social regulation (Rojas-Cortés and González Apodaca 2016, 82). A case in point is the Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Puebla, founded in 2006. Studies pointed out that the selection of the university location was informed by political motives to take away power from the long-standing social movement Organización Independiente de Totanoca (OIT) (Rojas-Cortés and González Apodaca 2016, 82). My participants understood the conflict over Guerrero’s intercultural university along similar lines. The university proposal of Unisur was closely connected to movements and individuals with aspirations for socioeconomic restructuring and political changes. By putting that university project to a halt and founding another university, the state acted as the ultimate arbitrator in the conflict over the future of multiculturalism in Guerrero.

5. A University of the *Pueblos*

In response, the academic commission launched the Third Congress of Intercultural Education of the State of Guerrero in 2007 to consult local leaders and communities about how to proceed. José Luis, a Unisur student, remembered the Third Congress invitation reaching his high school. He participated in the event along with representatives of the CDI, agrarian and community leaders, social organizations, and intercultural and popular high-schools. The public statement of the event documents the decision to open Unisur:

Gathered in the community of Santa Cruz del Rincón, Municipality of Malinaltepec, the representatives of the Mephaa, Na savi, Ñoom daá, Naua and Afromestizo *pueblos* of the state of Guerrero hereby make the following [exhortation] public knowledge: that all civil and community authorities emanating from our communities, or elected by them, shall assign efforts and resources for the good Functioning of the Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur (UNISUR)

that today we have agreed to establish, and that will commence academic operations on August 9. In addition, we demand and exhort: that Federal, State and Municipal authorities and State and Federal legislators, in strict obeisance of our *Magna Carta*, recognize and respect the original project of the University that we, the original *pueblos*, have constructed and agreed upon through our mechanisms of government and discussion, and in consequence [of same].²⁶⁸

In the statement, the elected name of the university stands out. The name Intercultural University of the *Pueblos* of the South expressed the difference from the official university in La Ciénega, which was called Intercultural University of the *State* of Guerrero. Eiss (2010) has extensively studied the various meanings of the term *pueblo* in Mexico. *Pueblo* refers to a place, in the sense of villages, but also to a form of communal life that inhabits such places. Furthermore, *pueblo* has become a mode of organizing collectively and for imagining collectivity. The different meanings of *pueblo* as either a living space, form of community, or political abstraction in the framework of popular politics cannot be separated easily. Therefore, it is a heterogeneous concept entangled in various social and political settings (Eiss 2010, 5–11). This holds true for the case of Unisur. The rector and university secretary wrote about the notion in a 2008 article, one year after Unisur's opening. Communities and organizations in support of Unisur were reclaiming the notion of *pueblo* "as the collective subject that gives form and essence to interculturality" (Flores Félix and Méndez Bahena 2008, 215). Unisur's model of intercultural education was built on the various aspirations and claims in reference to the plural *pueblos*.

First of all, *pueblos* was an expression of shared peasant and ethnic identities united in the university project. In the Third Congress, it was decided to do away with the initial name of the "indigenous" university to also include Afromexicans and *mestizos*. This has to do with the attendance of Afromexican representatives at the Third Congress. At the event, Bulmaro García and his company from Cuajinicuilapa requested the inclusion of Afromexicans in the university project. As an agrarian leader and co-founder of the PRD in the Costa Chica region, Bulmaro had recently become engaged in putting issues of Afromexican marginalization on the agenda. The Third Congress agreed and, from then onward, the target population of Unisur was described as original *pueblos*, rather than indigenous *pueblos*.²⁶⁹

The inclusion of *mestizos* and Afromexicans in the university project distinguished the university from other intercultural universities in important ways. It opened the way

²⁶⁸ Unisur. 2007. "d) Pronunciamiento 3er Congres Final (2007)." May 26, 2007.

²⁶⁹ Joaquín Flores Félix explained the term *pueblos originarios* by referring to the definition of indigenous peoples used by the International Labour Organization (ILO), where they are described as the descendants of a process of conquest. Accordingly, Afromexicanos have been part of the same process of conquest, as they are the descendants of enslaved Africans brought to Mexico by Spanish colonizers: Interview Unisur rector, October 24, 2015, Mexico City.

for cross-ethnic alliances at a time when Afromexican rights were not yet prominent issues on the political agenda. This is important, since cultural recognition can have regulatory effects when it happens at the expense of solidarity and cross-ethnic class struggles. For the case of Garifuna ethnopolitics in Honduras, Loperena (2016) recently studied how activists demystified exclusions provoked by state multiculturalism with regard to black and indigenous Hondurans. Similar to Unisur, Garifuna ethnic activism worked as a way to “challenge official narratives of difference” (Loperena 2016, 535).

Second, the term *pueblos* was also a legal category and could hence serve as an instrument to legitimize the institution in the court of law. The notion is used in Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), ratified by Mexico in 1990 (Flores Félix and Méndez Bahena 2008, 215). It grants rights to indigenous *pueblos*, among others by obliging states to consult them about legislative or administrative issues that would affect them, such as intercultural education (see chapters 3 and 5). In contrast to the official university, Unisur opened its doors without state recognition. However, they had the support of indigenous and rural communities that, for years, had been participating in the consultation process organized by the academic commission (López 2009, 35). Accordingly, Unisur operated at the threshold of legal frameworks such as the ILO.

Finally, and most important for this chapter, *pueblos* was employed as a reference to a particular model of educational governance rooted in the union of rural communities and grassroots organizations. The Third Congress became the governing body of Unisur that held academics and teachers accountable.²⁷⁰ Community leaders and organizations in the region were collectively responsible and held decision-making power over the university. The university embodied connections between various leaders, organizations, and community and municipal authorities, comparable to how security facilitated upscaling and regional alliances in the case of Upoeg. According to Gustafson (2014, 90), the key to transformative intercultural education is when it is developed by organized indigenous participation on regional and national levels. For Unisur, the participation of local communities and grassroots organizations at the Third Congress legitimized the claim to open another university, parallel to the state-funded UIEG. The *pueblos* essentially authorized the opening of the university. It would be integrated in communal

²⁷⁰ Unisur. 2015. “The Organic Law of Unisur.” Excerpt: “Chapter II ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANS. ARTICLE 5. The Congress of Intercultural Education is the constitutive power of the Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur. All the administrative organs of the University and the university community in general shall obey the Congress’ mandates. All resolutions taken in the new State Congress of Intercultural Education shall be binding and applied by the administrative organs of the University and the university community in general, and may entail changes in the positions in the administrative organs, in the persons named to occupy them, in general, for all the internal normativity of the institution, including the present instrument. ARTICLE 6. The Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur shall have the following administrative organs: The University Council; The Rectory; Coordinations of Academic Units; Coordinations of Academic Area; Councils of the Academic Units; The Academic College; The Intercultural Governing Council; The Board of Trustees; The Student Council.”

forms of organization and decision-making, locally perceived as legitimate acts of governance. Unisur leaders opened several university departments in Guerrero to put this view in practice. In the meantime, Unisur leaders tried to obtain recognition for the university from the state. This laid the foundation for a form of educational governance with distinctive participation by the *pueblos*. In the next section, I analyze how the *pueblos* governance model of Unisur developed locally. Subsequently, I study Unisur's attempt to make place for the authority of the *pueblos* within the state department of education.

6. Unisur in Santa Cruz del Rincón and Cuajinicuilapa

The inauguration of the Unisur department in Santa Cruz del Rincón took place on a Saturday morning in October 2007. The Crac-PC organized a military parade, which was followed by political and academic events. There was much enthusiasm and local support, a Unisur teacher remembers:

It was a marvelous experience, there was a magical atmosphere, an impressive silence in the central building, in that space, because not only were the students there [but also] their mothers, sisters, grandparents, the whole community, the place was full. I don't know, maybe three... four hundred people, it was so beautiful... impressive! We felt this huge impact from the moment we arrived. I'd never been to Santa Cruz before. When we came I heard the speakers say, "here come the teachers, so get the tortillas ready to feed the teachers." So lovely, so beautiful, that feeling of community, everyone working together.²⁷¹

About sixty adolescents from Santa Cruz del Rincón and surrounding communities registered at the university. Santa Cruz del Rincón is a rural locality with approximately 2500 inhabitants.²⁷² Each student needed an endorsement letter from their community leader that recorded local support. For the time being, Unisur was given the vacant primary school building to start classes, while Santa Cruz del Rincón donated a terrain of fifteen hectares for the construction of university buildings. All community members contributed thirty *pesos* (1,40 euro) per month to support the university. According to *usos y costumbres*, the community assembly elected inhabitants for the positions (*cargos*) of university coordinator and secretary. It also appointed inhabitants to help out in the university kitchen at the time of classes. Through these practices, community members took on an active role in running the university.

During my research, students in Santa Cruz del Rincón still took classes in the old

²⁷¹ Interview, September 30, 2015.

²⁷² INEGI. 2010. "Censo de Población y Vivienda." Accessed May 5, 2018. <http://www.microrregiones.gob.mx/zap/datGenerales.aspx?entra=125&ent=12&mun=041>.

primary school, now painted with the Unisur logo, which says “roots of identity.”²⁷³ Upon entering the premises, situated in the center of the community, one finds a green courtyard enclosed by classrooms. From the courtyard, students can see the mountains looming. Mateo was one of the students who had attended classes here. After his graduation, he remained involved in Unisur. Born in Santa Cruz del Rincón, he attended high school when the Third Intercultural Congress was organized in his community. As many people from outside his community attended the event, he encountered Amuzgos and Afromexicans, which caught his attention. He chose to join Unisur because: “I fell in love with the project, I saw that the teachers were fully confident they could construct a different university.”²⁷⁴ He graduated two years before I met him. In the past years, Mateo had been teaching classes in the first academic year of Unisur, consisting of obligatory courses (*tronco común*).²⁷⁵ These classes are attended by all Unisur students, before they chose one of the two-year bachelor tracks on offer. Nowadays, he has less time, since the community has elected him to the position of commander of the community police in Santa Cruz del Rincón, an honorable appointment that he accepted with modest pride. Unisur staff applauded Mateo’s activities as Unisur teacher and his appointment in the Crac-PC. After all, for alumni to take over teaching or leadership functions in the university or related organizations proved that the next generation committed themselves to a university in the hands of the *pueblo*.

After the inauguration of Unisur in Santa Cruz del Rincón in 2007, a commission of Unisur staff traveled to Cuajinicuilapa. The inauguration ceremony in Cuajinicuilapa took place in one of the *redondas* located in the town center. One of the Unisur teachers present during the inauguration described the event as very different from the one in Santa Cruz del Rincón: “We came together over there in the *redonda*, in the ball court. It was surprising to me, there were twenty people, maybe fewer, all elderly. Those *negros* in their seventies surprised me... outstanding! Later I learned they were *comisarios* and *ejidal* representatives [community and agrarian leaders] from the communities.”²⁷⁶ Local authorities of communities in the municipality of Cuajinicuilapa were present. Together, they formed the Council of Elders (*Consejo de Ancianos*), which functioned as the moral and symbolic authority of the department. Bulmaro García was appointed as university coordinator in Cuajinicuilapa by the Third Congress. At the time, he was alderman of public works in the municipality.

As alderman in the first PRD municipal government in Cuajinicuilapa, Bulmaro requested the mayor to support Unisur. The municipal office granted the university a

²⁷³ The construction of Unisur’s own buildings had met several setbacks in terms of finances. The designated terrain was still available but without buildings at the time of research.

²⁷⁴ Participatory Action Research session “Storytelling,” November 11, 2014.

²⁷⁵ *Tronco común* is made up of four modules: Intercultural Pedagogy, Original Knowledge, Universal Knowledge, and Territory. I provide more details about the academic program in chapter 7.

²⁷⁶ Interview, September 30, 2015.

substantial terrain on the outskirts of town. Furthermore, the mayor allocated resources for the construction of university buildings. Because these finances never arrived fully, the round classrooms in red colors were constructed without windows and proper floors. Only one *redonda* has been completed, and even has air conditioning. This *redonda* hosts a radio station, Radio Unisur, for which Bulmaro had obtained state subsidies. More recently, the university terrain has become more eye-catching because one *redonda* has been covered by a large mural painting of Nelson Mandela and the text “Everything seems impossible until it’s done.” An artist has painted the mural in honor of a visit by the South African ambassador to Unisur, who had come to show his solidarity with Afromexican struggles in the area.

Sandra belonged to the group of students in Cuajinicuilapa first to register at Unisur. After high school, Sandra wanted to leave Cuajinicuilapa to continue studying in Mexico City but her parents would not let her go, which led her to Unisur. Ever since, she stayed involved by doing administrative work. She hoped her voluntary work would turn into formal employment once Unisur obtained state recognition. Especially the ethical values taught in the university caught her interest: “Here they teach you to live together (*convivir*), they teach you to, how can I say?, bond to your community and what your community needs, to help out too.”²⁷⁷ She puts this in practice as a radio host, when she broadcasts regional music and promotes Afromexican events alongside her shows about love-related issues. When children in the neighborhood pass by the radio station to send greetings to friends or family, Sandra reminds them to be proud of their color. She also recorded the children saying “I’m proud to be Afromexican.”

Some Unisur staff saw the radio station as important place to encourage collective participation and social commitment to the university and to “construct community.” This was especially important because the department in Cuajinicuilapa had not achieved the sense of communal ownership as envisioned by its founders. Apart from some alumni who took part in running the university and the symbolic weight of the Council of Elders, Bulmaro García organized the university’s logistics and maintenance. Some of my participants blamed the more urban features of Cuajinicuilapa for not creating the conditions for community involvement, while others pointed to the coordinators’ solitary organizing style. In Cuajinicuilapa, the ideal of a university of the *pueblos* was still something to be materialized. Rather than an everyday practice, it served as a source of political imagination to work toward. This differed from Santa Cruz del Rincón, where the department operated with the financial and operational support of the community and the municipality from the start. As I will show next, the different university governance experiences of Santa Cruz del Rincón and Cuajinicuilapa were no exceptions.

In 2007, Unisur also opened departments in Xalitla and Xochistlahuaca. Ever since, some departments closed down and new ones have been founded. The university

²⁷⁷ Participatory Action Research “Drawing,” October 2, 2014.

department in Acatlán, included in Unisur's original plan, never opened because of differences within the community. The department in Xochistlahuaca closed its doors in 2013. It encountered problems when the local founders and grassroots supporters of the department, the Consejo Municipal Popular, gradually fell apart. Some years after its inauguration, the department in Xalitla also faced difficulties. Because of its proximity to Chilpancingo and Iguala as university cities, it only attracted a few students. Villagers also saw Unisur in Xalitla mainly as a personal project of Nahua leader Pedro de Jesús, whose leadership was increasingly questioned over time. Since most students at the university in Xalitla came from Hueycantenango, the department moved to the latter in 2011. Its initiators were involved in grassroots struggles to limit the power of the PRI throughout the municipality of Hueycantenango. In general, Unisurians applauded how the municipality valued that department and participated in its affairs.

In 2012, three new Unisur departments opened. On the initiative of Upoeg, Unisur's department in El Mesón was inaugurated. Similar to Hueycantenango, it earned a reputation of strong local support and grassroots commitment. In the same year, communities affiliated to the Consejo de Ejidos y Comunidades Opositores a la Presa la Parota (CECOP) requested a department in Cacahuatpec in the Acapulco region, where the struggle against the Parota Dam was in full swing. When the hydroelectric project divided local communities, Unisur became enmeshed in local conflicts and stepped back. However, some of the local initiators decided to initiate a Unisur department anyway. It ended up in the Acapulco neighborhood of Llano Largo, where close connections to the place and local popular struggles still needed to be constructed. Furthermore, the PRD mayor of Metlatónoc set up a university department in her municipality, the poorest of Guerrero, in 2012 as well. The department flourished until another political party won the local election and withdrew financial support. Since then, the department has a hard time coping.

In some departments, the educational governance model developed better than in others. Sometimes, differences can be explained by whether a department was requested on behalf of a community or grassroots organization, or more on personal accounts. In other cases, local disputes affected the possibility of building stable institutions. To fully understand the nature of the dilemmas faced by Unisur in advancing its governance model, I take a closer look at the department at Santa Cruz del Rincón.

7. Discouragement of the *Pueblos*

I invited Sandra, Mateo, and other Unisur students and graduates to discuss and assess the university's functioning in Participatory Action Research sessions. I present some of the outcome of two PAR exercises conducted with students from Santa Cruz del Rincón, since the issues that came up at that department offer insight into how the university

was doing more generally. By using storytelling techniques, I introduced topics such as important learning moments, obstacles, and expectations. While one student told a story, the others listened and wrote down keywords. In the end, we collected all the keywords and grouped them into the categories of strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of Unisur. Below, I list some of the reflections on the university's functioning:

Strengths: change of ideas, the pedagogy of the *pueblo*, revalorization of Me'phaa language, focus on problems, link to struggles.

Weaknesses: the finances, the problems among teachers' groups, failure to listen to students, disinterest, teachers from outside.

Opportunities: graduation, meeting people from different departments and communities, freedom in learning, friendly relations between teachers and students, Unisur–UACM connections.²⁷⁸

While some keywords refer to how the students in Santa Cruz experience Unisur's academic program, which I will examine in the next chapter, others addressed matters of educational governance: financial difficulties, links to struggles, tensions between teachers, disinterest by the community, and the relationship between Unisur and the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM). In what follows, I explore these issues more in-depth by looking at parts of the PAR exercises and examining particular events.

During one of the PAR exercises, Carlos talked about the obstacles he encountered during his time at Unisur: "Yeah, there's all kinds of obstacles. Economic obstacles for me and for the community, and rejections, missing a legal document for Unisur. You simply don't have it . . . [people] don't speak well of all the graduates, they say we wasted our time."²⁷⁹ Mirna, another alumna, also pointed to the lack of recognition as the largest obstacle. She was still writing her thesis and worked in a lemonade stall:

It's important to have your certificates... maybe you don't need them much in the community, but outside you do. Outside, when you want to leave town or continue studying, they say you need this [diploma], and shut the door. Even worse, as an indigenous student they don't even give you the opportunity. That's the obstacle I've faced, you know, recognition. And worse yet with the problems in Unisur, with the Díaz teachers, they've made all sorts of trouble . . . and then they spoke badly about Unisur. "Unisur has no future" . . . it's like, discouraging for the *pueblos*.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Participatory Action Research sessions "Storytelling," November 11, 2015.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Interview with Mirna, November 12, 2014.

These alumni spoke about the difficulties of not having a valid diploma and the consequences for the community's support for Unisur. After eight years, there was little progress in making Unisur a publicly funded and recognized university. Moreover, community members observed alumni staying in the community without degrees nor prospects to climb the socioeconomic ladder. It had discouraged community inhabitants. Apart from that, Mirna mentioned the problems among Unisur teachers as a factor in the community's decreasing affection for the university. Santa Cruz del Rincón had been at the epicenter of the dispute that was resolved during the assembly described in the introduction of this chapter. Nevertheless, these developments had profound effects on the Unisur department.²⁸¹

The relationship between the Unisur department and grassroots organizations also became complicated. I noticed this during the assembly mentioned in the introduction, where community leaders of Santa Cruz del Rincón settled the dispute among Unisur teachers. Rather than taking the dispute to the Crac, the assembly decided to not consult their community justice system.²⁸² This surprised me at the time, since Crac was one of Unisur's founding organizations and the regional authority to mediate in conflicts. Moreover, Unisur's governance model stood out precisely because of the importance of grassroots engagements, something that was confirmed by students during the PAR sessions, who perceived linkages to the struggles as one of the university's strengths.

The community bypassed the Crac because of the emergence of tensions and factions within its ranks. Shortly before I started my research, Unisur became involved in these internal divisions. A Unisur student described what had happened during a regional Crac-PC assembly in San Luis Acatlán in September 2013. She recalled it as really rough. During the assembly, Crac leaders, citizens, and community authorities affiliated to the House of Justice in Santa Cruz del Rincón attempted to take control over the House of Justice in San Luis Acatlán, as announced: "we took the decision and mandate of the community assemblies that indicated we should take back the House of Justice in San Luis Acatlán."²⁸³ In their view, the Crac coordinator in San Luis Acatlán neglected to work according to *usos y costumbres*. They wanted to see him replaced as coordinator of the House of Justice in San Luis Acatlán, but the latter refused. During the tense assembly, the rector of Unisur took a stance by supporting the intention to take over the House of Justice in San Luis Acatlán. "As university, we were only there to listen, because it concerns us, it is our territory," one student told me.²⁸⁴ Another student added: "The idea

²⁸¹ As described in the introduction, tensions among Unisur staff emerged over the vision, finances, and internal organization of the university, alongside personal matters.

²⁸² As elaborated in point twelve of the assembly decisions mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the community decided to prevent the involvement of the Crac in pedagogical issues.

²⁸³ Paredes, Heriberto. 2013. "San Luis Acatlán y su Casa de Justicia..." *Subversiones, Agencia Autónoma de Comunicación*, September 27, 2013. Accessed July 3, 2018. <https://subversiones.org/archivos/13855>.

²⁸⁴ Conversation, March 3, 2014.

was to only be present and observe, but the rector also presented his opinion. Now he has a dispute with Gabino [Crac coordinator].”²⁸⁵

As the takeover failed, the event had consequences for Unisur. Some months later, the case was discussed at a Unisur staff meeting. Looking back, the rector said it might have been a mistake to have spoken out. But, sometimes you need to take a stance, he argued, even though it costs us. While Unisur leaders wanted grassroots organizations to embrace and support the university, now the institution had also become part of factional disputes in the region. Some teachers stated that: “People see us as part of one group of the Crac.”²⁸⁶ This complicated the support for the university from local organizations across the region.

Taken together, the students indicated that Unisur in Santa Cruz del Rincón coped with serious issues in terms of support from fellow community members and local organizations. Initially, Santa Cruz del Rincón had taken an active part in running the university, mirroring the espoused educational governance model. Some students themselves also began to play important roles in university management and other forms of community organizing. At the same time, problems inside the university and within the Crac-PC undermined local support. Most of all, the long-lasting absence of official recognition and state finances started to have its toll. It discouraged villagers who aimed to seek a brighter future for their adolescents by sending them to an accredited university. It seemed that not only the community got discouraged, but also some of its students. Cases of dropouts were high and enrollments fluctuated over the years. Between 2007 and 2011 an average of thirty students enrolled in the department of Santa Cruz del Rincón. Since then it decreased to an average of two students a year. In 2015, enrollments would start to increase again up from a handful to fifteen students. The department of Cuajinicuilapa shows a similar trend: an average of twenty-nine students enrolled between 2007 and 2012, after which enrollments dropped dramatically. There also, enrollments increased again in the year 2015. The reasons for the upward trend, among others caused by the signing of an agreement between Unisur and the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM), will be discussed in more detail below.

The difficulties hit the heart of the university-*pueblos* project. They unsettled the broader political dimension of the university, since it needed to move in the direction of becoming fully embedded in communal forms of organization and support. Some departments, like the ones in Hueycantenango and El Mesón, developed in that direction. More recently, the community of Santa Cruz del Rincón also reclaimed its ownership over the university, as described in the introduction of this chapter. In general, however, similar to more conventional universities, Unisur was increasingly run by teachers and university coordinators, and concentrated on education. The difficulties that Unisur

²⁸⁵ Conversation, March 12, 2014.

²⁸⁶ Fieldnotes, March 29, 2014.

encountered locally were intimately connected to processes on other levels. While attempting to make the university work in the communities, Unisur leaders negotiated with state officials over what Gustafson (2014, 86) called “an effective model of dialogic educational governance.” In the next section, I look at Unisur’s interactions with state officials and their responses to the university’s appeals.

8. Negotiations with the State

I often joined Sandra on her radio shows during the first months of my research. One afternoon, an unexpected visitor came to Unisur’s radio station. The young man worked for the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI), made visible by his beige vest, the key-cord with his plastic identity card, and the small, white computer under his arm. He had come to register Unisur as part of a larger work assignment. Sandra explained that Unisur was a project for the *pueblos*, by the *pueblos*. “That probably doesn’t tell you anything, does it?” she asked. The INEGI official had a questionnaire, but Sandra was unable to answer the questions about what type of institution Unisur was. She called the university coordinator for help, and the INEGI official called his supervisor. Eventually, he made an appointment to come back another day and left without answers.²⁸⁷

Sandra was unable to answer the INEGI questions because the university did not match any existing institutional categories. The state secretary of public education applied the categories of technological, polytechnical and intercultural universities. Since only one intercultural university per state was allowed and already existed—the Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Guerrero (UIEG) in La Ciénega—Unisur leaders over the years appealed to state officials to make institutional space for their atypical institution. I joined Unisur leader Bulmaro Muñoz during such an occasion. In one of the offices of the department of education in Chilpancingo, two lower level officials listened to Bulmaro’s petition. He had actually wanted to speak to Guerrero’s minister of education, who was informed about Unisur, but he was unavailable. Bulmaro started to recount the history of Unisur: “What’s the path been like? Slow but steady. Since 2006 . . .” After some time, he arrived at the problem: “no normativity applies to Unisur because the sub-systems [technological, polytechnical and intercultural] are already defined.” He also sketched a solution:

the original and Afromexican *pueblos* of Guerrero are known, as are their customs, beliefs, culture, ethnicity, linguistics, and all those things that give our ancestral peoples their richness. Logically, since they’re in Guerrero, it should be the department of education of Guerrero, the state government, that resolves

²⁸⁷ Fieldnotes, February 14, 2014.

and promotes it. Textually, it says that an ad hoc normativity should be created following the Unisur model so that it can finally be included, recognized and supported in line with the consecration of the constitutional rights of original *pueblos* in Article 2 of the Constitution, the very situation which they recognize in writing and complement so they are truly respected. Those rights cannot differ from what international agreements establish in this regard.

After listening for some time, one of the officials stepped in. He announced the taking of two steps. He promised to study “the technical aspects” of the project, for which Bulmaro had given him a CD-ROM with all of Unisur’s official documents and academic programs. The official also proposed to set up a meeting in Mexico City to talk to university experts about how to deal with Unisur’s registration: “it needs to be placed where it belongs, it has to be in the federation now!”²⁸⁸

During the meeting, Bulmaro employed the rights of the *pueblos* to stake his claim to register the university project. However, the project could not be included in the legislative category of intercultural universities that had been called into being precisely to respond to the rights of indigenous people. Ever since its beginning, Unisur leaders had approached state agencies and officials to negotiate over this bureaucratic issue. Unisureños requested state officials to find or design a legal framework that fitted the university model directed by the *pueblos*. Unisur leaders had often found themselves in meetings with state officials of various agencies and levels, a practice locally known as knocking on doors (*tocar puertas*). Such bureaucratic practices can be seen as a particular “ritual of rule” (Corrigan and Sayer 198). According to Goldstein, (2012, 118) access to rights can there become depended on compliance with certain political proceedings, rather than being based in constitutional guarantees.

In one of such meetings some years ago, Unisur leaders had agreed to remove the word “intercultural” from the university’s name—from then onward called Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur—because of the one-intercultural-university-per-state prescription. However, this concession had not led to the desired recognition as a public institution with self-determination in terms of university governance. Sometimes, the officials sent them over to the federal government, as in the case of the meeting described above. At other times, they asked Unisur to comply to other or new requirements. Unisur teacher Leonardo looked back at these encounters and bureaucratic procedures:

On various occasions, the state has offered us official recognition, but always conditioned, as a private university or one incorporated into the Ciénega [UIEG]. We said, no, it’s the other way around. We’ll take charge of the Ciénega . . . but they wanted no part of that. They see us as a really poor university. It’s an issue

²⁸⁸ Fieldnotes, September 20, 2014.

at the state level. We've already spoken with the federation and they don't have a problem. It's an attribution of the state government to create its educational system. It's part of the state's sovereignty; they can do it. They send us to the federal government because there's really no way they can deny us. We've satisfied all the requirements and they've authorized all the study plans and programs. They're approved so there's no excuse for them to say we can't do it. It's just a way of freezing us out.²⁸⁹

Caught in these bureaucratic labyrinths, the university project was "frozen." Over the years, Unisur members have employed different strategies to warm up state officials to satisfy their demand for university recognition. According to Canessa (2016, 90), an older statement made by Kirk Dombrowski is still relevant today: "recognition by power can, and increasingly does, involve as many problems as the neglect and marginalization that comes from an absence of state interest." After all, recognition can come with conditions that run counter to the initial project, or make the project operate within the limits and rules of what the state allows. Without recognition, the project can stay truthful to its own political ideals and can broaden the utopian horizon, but runs the risk of not drawing on the substantial benefits that come with state recognition. Ever since its beginning, Unisur attempted to strike a balance by working for recognition on their own terms. During my research, teachers attempted to continue negotiations with the state without lapsing into repetition: "we have to tell them what is negotiable and what not: the academic structure and pedagogy."²⁹⁰

After years of fruitless negotiations with Governor Zeferino Torreblanca (2005–2011), the election of Ángel Aguirre Rivero in 2011 gave Unisureños new hope. Especially the appointment of Bulmaro García as state sub-secretary for the development of Afromexican *pueblos* of the Secretaría de Asuntos Indígenas (SAI) raised expectations. Once employed by the SAI, Bulmaro hoped to promote socioeconomic development for Afromexicans, including their rights to higher education. He described his considerations: "Many things can be fomented from here [the state] and, in effect, once inside, it was possible to obtain things for Unisur. School buses, resources direct from the governor. I handled these solicitudes personally, taking advantage of the fact that the governor had given me a position and told me, "okay Bulmaro, your recognition is coming." You know, I said, "love is paid with love, you bastard."²⁹¹ Bulmaro had joined Aguirre's electoral campaign and organized rallies in his support. Unisureños hoped the favor would be returned in the form of Unisur recognition. Bulmaro expected reciprocity, love is paid with love, an important element of Mexico's political culture, where goods and services

²⁸⁹ Interview with Leonardo, October 21, 2015.

²⁹⁰ Fieldnotes, March 23, 2014.

²⁹¹ Interview Bulmaro García, December 3, 2015.

are often exchanged on the basis of personal relationships of trust (Pansters 2018, 319). Overmyer-Velázquez (2010, 100) also wrote about such politics by leaders of the CG500 movement: “The council consistently favored this kind of direct, clientelist appeal to high level authorities that bypassed regular institutional and bureaucratic channels and that, having secured promises from a political leader, called on that leader’s sense of honor to fulfill them.” Once Unisur got one foot inside the state, the university put pressure on Governor Aguirre to live up to his promise.

In these days, Unisur received support from federal agencies such as the Chamber of Deputies and the Comisión de Asuntos Indígenas (CAI), which then sent official petitions to Governor Aguirre to recognize Unisur.²⁹² Around the same time, Upoeg arrived at the scene to put Unisur’s demands on its agenda. This collaboration resulted in the opening of another Unisur department in El Mesón, the community that would later become the headquarters of the *policía ciudadana*. In this context, the government of Aguirre donated 450,000 *pesos* (almost 20,000 euros) to the university project and donated two vans for the transportation of students and teachers. With that, Aguirre appeared to have paid off his part as he reached the limits of his “reciprocity.” Like his predecessor, Aguirre never followed up on his promise of university recognition.

The bargaining power of an educational movement with one foot inside state institutions stems from its capacity to “stir things up” on the streets (Kane 2013, 76). For example, the CG500 movement had mobilized its support base and organized large demonstrations when political leaders did not fulfill their promises throughout the 1990s. In the case of Unisur, however, mobilizations decreased after Bulmaro took office. In an interview, Bulmaro nostalgically looked back at the days before he worked at the SAI. He used to mobilize people and organize protests: “We’d go to Chilpancingo to do this. I’d get two or three pick-ups together and off we’d go. . . . they’d accompany me. It seemed like the mobilizations have died down but it was because nothing could be done: I was there in the state. That is how they put me in the freezer. All I can think is that Aguirre . . . thought ‘I’d better appease this prick because he’s really restless.’ Well, I still am, because I’m not dead, but he has calmed me down in this aspect.”²⁹³

Once employed by the state, he still took the lead in organizing events about Afromexican rights, but mobilizing people on the streets to pressure state officials became less common. Unisur students still recalled the mobilizations back in the days, for instance when they all slept on Chilpancingo’s main square to demand Unisur recognition. One student commented that she used to travel to Mexico City and Chilpancingo: they went

²⁹² Cámara de Diputados. 2011. “Mesa Directiva LXI Legislatura Oficio No.: D.G.P.L. 61-11-3-1793. Expediente No. 2865.” September 14, 2011.; CAI. 2011. “Accord of the Administrative Board of the Commission of Indigenous Affairs to exhort the Holder of Executive Power in the State of Guerrero to recognize the Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur as an Organism of Higher Public Education and provide the corresponding economic support.” May 26, 2011.

²⁹³ Interview with Bulmaro García, December 3, 2015.

everywhere to claim their rights. But ever since Bulmaro took office, not as much had happened. He always organized the protests, but now he abandoned it a bit: “If you do it [social struggle] peacefully, nothing will happen,” she said.²⁹⁴ Without large mobilizations that put pressure on the governor, it proved difficult to convince state officials of university recognition. After the Third Congress in 2007, there were no signs of regional assemblies and upscaled university mobilizations of similar scale.

During Bulmaro’s time in office, the state government did recognize Afromexicans as a minority population in the state constitution and renamed the SAI to SAICA: Secretaría de Asuntos Indígenas y Comunidades Afromexicanas. Furthermore, twelve municipalities were recognized as Afromexican municipalities through consultation proceedings, including Cuajinicuilapa. Bulmaro was cautiously enthusiastic about these developments. Afromexicans now enjoyed official recognition on state level, but without the necessary secondary laws to allocate official budgets, he said. Furthermore, he had preferred the SAI name change of “Afromexican *pueblos*” rather than “Afromexican communities”. The term *pueblos* has, after all, more legal significance in international treaties.

Unisur leaders such as Bulmaro alluded to the legal possibilities of the term *pueblos*. But, unlike its sister organization Upoeg, which took the consultation case over indigenous governance to court, Unisureños did not engage in legal activism. Their activism for recognition mainly consisted of knocking the doors of state officials, mobilizing support, and working from inside state institutions. Nevertheless, Unisur leaders did not seem to bring sufficient bargaining power to the table in their meetings with state officials. The latter remained unwilling to act on Unisur’s petitions. Officials held on to the one-intercultural-university-per-state policy and evaded looking for alternative ways to administer the atypical university. This had to do with the unique nature of Unisur’s claims and the contradictions that developed after years without state recognition. Local embeddedness of Unisur in communities and grassroots organizations was the main source of legitimacy versus state officials to demand a university “from the *pueblos*.” But, the university had fallen into the paradox of seeing its local support decrease because of lacking state recognition, while chances to obtain it only grew with the help of local support. At the time of my research, Unisur staff and students tried to break through this impasse.

²⁹⁴ Conversation, February 14, 2014.

9. Recovering the University: Unisur Staff

During the first university event in which I participated, I watched university staff undertake action to “recover the community’s trust from below,” as they put it.²⁹⁵ Every academic term at Unisur ends with an end-of-module-event (*cierre de módulo*), when students and staff from the different departments come together in one place to exchange knowledge and engage in cultural performances. The departments organize this event on a rotating basis, since students perceive it both as an honor to host all the Unisureños for a weekend, but also as a load of work. The responsibility to accommodate and feed everyone requires considerable effort. In March 2014, the *cierre de módulo* was scheduled to take place in El Mesón, but it was moved to Santa Cruz del Rincón at the last moment. The foremost objective of the weekend for Unisur was to demonstrate its students to the community of Santa Cruz del Rincón. Unisur staff wanted to turn the tide of decreasing community support, especially in Santa Cruz del Rincón because of its symbolic and strategic importance as a founding community and hub for regional social movements such as the Crac-PC. The only way to recuperate trust was by demonstrating that the university was in full swing. After the opening ceremony on the ball court in Santa Cruz del Rincón, everyone moved to Unisur’s courtyard, where a local religious leader performed a ceremony. By lighting candles and incense, the ceremony intended to clean the university from any bad energy. In the next three days, there were classes, lectures, and cultural events in the evenings.

Unisur staff attempted to re-politicize the university and return it to its original track. They hoped to revive Unisur’s local support by demonstrations of institutional rigor. At the same time, everyone knew that issuing the first diplomas would most certainly rebuild the trust of communities and enhance the university’s prospects, enrollments, and political possibilities. The older generation of Unisur leaders therefore continued knocking on the doors of state officials, in the hope of finding a way out of the bureaucratic labyrinth. The younger generation of teachers turned to a different approach. Most of Unisur’s teachers were academics and graduate students based in Mexico City.²⁹⁶ These teachers participated in Unisur on a voluntary basis as solidarity work. Because of their conviction to social justice for indigenous, rural and Afromexican youth, and belief in the emancipatory value of education, they spend two weekends per month in Guerrero teaching classes. The rector often spoke highly of the quality of teaching at Unisur: “which university has teachers from the UACM, UAM, technological universities; all the best universities of Mexico?”²⁹⁷ Some of these teachers designed a strategy to issue diplomas

²⁹⁵ Fieldnotes, March 23, 2014.

²⁹⁶ They were affiliated to either the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, or the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM).

²⁹⁷ Fieldnotes, August 30, 2015.

for Unisur students without the need of state intervention. The Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM) played a key role in this scheme.

The UACM had recently gone through an institutional crisis and, in the aftermath, Unisur teachers saw possibilities for a university partnership. In 2013, discontent with the rector of the UACM led to upheaval within its academic community. Major protests eventually caused the rector to step down. Enrique Dussel was appointed as interim rector.²⁹⁸ The new rector's ideals coincided in significant ways with Unisur's ambitions. Four Unisur teachers employed by the UACM seized the opportunity to lobby for Unisur's incorporation in the UACM, also a university committed to analyze and solve social problems.²⁹⁹ These teachers paved the way for Unisur to make an official request for its incorporation. It is not a blank check, as one of them emphasized to Unisur students during an assembly. The list of requirements to obtain a diploma through the UACM affiliation contained records of twelve modules with grades, registration of four hundred and eighty hours of social service, and the completion of a research project.

The lobby had its effects. In August 2015, the new rector of the UACM signed a document called "Agreement of Incorporation and Validity of Studies UACM–Unisur."³⁰⁰ It promised to be a win-win arrangement. Unisur students would be able to graduate with official diplomas and it opened up the possibility for them to apply for state scholarships. When the numbers of graduated students at UACM increased, so would its funding. The signing of the agreement took place during a festive event in Santa Cruz del Rincón. In the presence of community members and authorities, UACM's rector approved the plans and academic programs of Unisur and pledged commitment to start the procedures to incorporate Unisur in the UACM. Half a year later, Unisur's rector signed another

²⁹⁸ The renowned Argentine-Mexican philosopher and historian founded the movement referred to as philosophy of liberation, and his work proposes a critical way to read universal history, criticizing Eurocentric discourses.

²⁹⁹ UACM's history as described on its website: "The Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM) was created on April 26, 2001, by the Government of the Federal District. On December 16, 2004, the UACM obtained autonomy with the publication of the Law of the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México, approved by the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District (ALDF). Its mission and vision, objectives, study programs and plans, strategies and activities are intended, according to its Law, to give priority to train citizens, male and female, in the capacity to critically analyze reality with multidimensional understanding of social problems and provide sufficient knowledge and tools of science and the humanities to propose viable solutions with high commitment and pertinence." UACM. (date unknown) "Historia." Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://www.uacm.edu.mx/UACM/Historia>.

³⁰⁰ The legal foundation for Unisur's incorporation in UACM is grounded in the following articles: "Articles 2,3,4 fractions III, XII, and XIV, 13, 14, 15, 17, fractions III, V, XIV, and XX, 19 of the Law of the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México; article 14 of the General Organic Statutes; First section 'General Dispositions', articles 1, 2, and 3, Second section 'incorporation', articles 4 to 19, of the Regulations of incorporation, Validity, Revalidation and Equivalence of Studies; accord UACM/CU-4//OR-03//034/15; and the Agreement for the incorporation and recognition of the validity of studies between the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México and the Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur." See Consejo Universitario UACM. 2014. "Acta de Acuerdos Vigésima Quinta Sesión Extraordinaria de 2014 Tercer Consejo Universitario." November 19, 2014.

agreement, this time with the rector of the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo during a *cierre de módulo* in Hueycantenango.³⁰¹ This General Agreement of Collaboration with Chapingo mainly implied material and academic support.

The alliances with these universities provided some financial and practical relief. Unisur staff made use of a UACM van to commute teachers between Mexico City to Guerrero, while the university of Chapingo covered parts of gasoline expenses. Furthermore, the partnership with renowned universities provided Unisur with legitimacy in their dealings with both communities and state agencies. The incorporation into UACM was always planned as a temporal measure, until state recognition was finally obtained. Importantly, the partnerships produced a rush of hope and excitement across Unisur's academic community, especially among the students. They expressed joy, because the dream of obtaining a valid diploma seemed within reach. At the same time, the agreement made them nervous. Now they really needed to hurry and finish their investigation projects. Most of the students who had graduated from the twelve modules of Unisur's curriculum, still had to finish their final research project. During my last research period, I read more draft theses than in all the previous months combined. The numbers of enrollments increased again.

When a team of Unisur and UACM teachers started to formalize the incorporation process, the plan met unforeseen opposition by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). According to SEP officials, the process of incorporation UACM–Unisur was “atypical” and failed to meet the necessary bureaucratic regulations. To make incorporation possible, the SEP presented the option to register Unisur as a private university. However, this possibility had been widely rejected by the assembly in Santa Cruz del Rincón and Unisurenos stuck to the principle that only a public, state-funded university would do justice to the right to education for indigenous, Afromexican and rural youth in Guerrero.

The agreement with the UACM gave a boost to the university's legitimacy and served as a hope generator, just as Governor Aguirre's one-off material support had done before. The younger generation of Unisur staff had attempted to bypass state officials by incorporating Unisur in already existing and befriended universities. This was always presented as a temporal solution. It served as a way for students to obtain valid diplomas while the institutionalization of new forms of educational governance between the pueblos and the state was still pending. Even so, the younger teachers met similar bureaucratic obstacles as their older counterparts had experienced. At the end of my research, the discussion about UACM incorporation was still ongoing as teachers

³⁰¹ Excerpt from the agreement between the Universidad Autónoma Chapingo and Unisur: “III.1 That they have agreed to celebrate the present General Agreement of Collaboration to carry out programs of academic support and exchange between the two institutions in order to stimulate and foment the formation of teachers and researchers and scientific and cultural diffusion in the areas of their competence, such that they will contribute to improving the academic and cultural level of our States and country.” UACH, Unisur. 2015. “Convenio General de Colaboración.” December 5, 2015.

explored all the options to make it happen. In the next part, I turn to Unisur's students, who took yet a different approach in getting the university back on track.

10. Reclaiming the University: Unisur Students

The forced disappearance of forty-three Ayotzinapa students in September 2014 shocked people all over Mexico, including Unisurños. In Cuajinicuilapa, students took action to demand their return alive. Sandra took the lead in organizing protests in close collaboration with the local branch of the teachers' union CETEG. At one of these marches in October 2014, about twenty Unisur students held a large banner with UNISUR CUAJINICUILAPA, GRO. as they walked behind the front group of CETEG teachers. Sandra encouraged the crowd by shouting slogans through a microphone: "Long live Ayotzi, let the struggle go on!" The march of about one hundred people stopped in front of Cuajinicuilapa's municipal palace, where an Ayotzinapa student and survivor of the attack in Iguala recounted what happened on that fatal night. Afterwards, Unisur student Lupita took the microphone:

The posture of Unisur's students is that our companions must be returned alive. . . . The people are fed up and say they've had enough of tricks and repression by the three levels of government, federal, state and municipal. . . . Unisur proposes, first, to search for the forty-three students who disappeared in Iguala and the rest of the state, all citizens of Guerrero and Mexico must join hands. . . . Second, the constitution of a fourth level of government is a right of the original *pueblos* where they will enjoy support and direct citizen participation, to be made up of men and women who are committed to their *pueblos*. . . . This will be very useful, my fellows. It means that by organizing we'll gain power, and that power will give us strength. With power, anything can be achieved. Today we see that Cuajinicuilapa is present, the facts speak for themselves; companions, we are all Ayotzinapa!³⁰²

During the march, I had tried to calm Lupita's nerves over her first public speech, which received a roaring applause from the crowd. Under Sandra's wings, students in Cuajinicuilapa became part of the countrywide Ayotzinapa struggle, which eventually forced Governor Aguirre to step down. In her speech, Lupita also demanded the installment of the fourth level of governance, a key demand of Upoeg. Sandra, Lupita, and others had participated in Upoeg events and were now connecting its demands to the university's agenda.

³⁰² Video material, November 7, 2014.

In November 2014, all of Unisur's departments came together for the first time since the forced disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students. Unisur students traveled to Mexico City to attend the event that celebrated the collaboration between Unisur and the UACM. The three-day encounter included classes, guest lectures, field trips to the Supreme Court of Justice, and exchanges between students from Unisur and UACM. During one of the panels, Sandra presented Unisur to a UACM audience as participants in social struggles. She described how Unisur had encouraged her to participate in social struggles and ended with the statement: "This university stands with the *pueblos* and for the *pueblos*."³⁰³ Sandra's public statement reflected what she and other students had been doing in the last few months: forging ties with the Ayotzinapa movement, Upoeg, and other organizations involved in grassroots struggles.

The night before everyone headed back to Guerrero, a university assembly was held in the hostel where everyone stayed. Carlos, the previously mentioned graduate from the Unisur department in Santa Cruz del Rincón, read out a letter that criticized the missing linkages between the university and grassroots projects. He then elaborated on the actions taken by the students from his department to reconnect the university to grassroots organizations. They had spent the past months attending meetings organized by the Council against mining (CRAADT), and participating in Crac events and assemblies of the Asamblea Nacional Popular (ANP). Carlos launched the idea for Unisur to officially join the ANP in the nationwide struggle to bring the forty-three students back home. The struggle for Unisur's recognition would then become part of the movement's demands. The hope was that, with large ANP mobilizations, Unisur could increase the possibility to finally obtain state recognition.

Just as in Cuajinicuilapa, students and graduates from Santa Cruz del Rincón took the lead in reclaiming the bonds between the university and local struggles. This became clear during the Crac's fifteenth anniversary in October 2015. In the early morning, I traveled to Santa Cruz del Rincón to accompany Unisur students and staff in the event. All the schools in the community joined the parade. The community leaders marched in front, followed by Commander Mateo and the community police, rifles in hands and dressed in black caps and different shades of green shirts with yellow Crac logos. As a higher education institution, Unisur followed, while the tail of the parade was made up of preschool kids. The parade ended in front of the community hall, where the civic act started. We sang the national anthem and Guerrero's hymn before local leaders read the statement to honor the work of the Crac-PC. Once the event in Santa Cruz del Rincón ended, I joined the Unisur teachers and some of the students to leave for San Luis Acatlán. In the municipal town about twenty minutes away, a parallel Crac anniversary event was taking place. The two Crac factions each organized their own celebrations.

Once we arrived in San Luis Acatlán, we registered as Unisureños and joined the

³⁰³ Fieldnotes, November 14, 2014.

working groups scheduled for the day. I joined the roundtables about Law 701 and community development. Unisur students and teachers actively participated in the discussions. We missed the last round of discussion, because we needed to hurry back to Santa Cruz del Rincón. As part of the anniversary celebrations there, a cultural program started at 6:00 p.m., including dance performances by Unisur students. All nervous and excited, a group of fifteen Unisur students performed a dance on the ball court, with the villagers watching from the benches. The next morning, we got up early again to go back to San Luis Acatlán to participate in a march. In the company of about twenty students and staff, we marched about three hours in the burning sun, together with around a thousand others. The long line of community police marched in straight lines with serious faces, wearing the same outfits as those in Santa Cruz del Rincón. Various marching bands energized the crowd. Unisur students seemed inexhaustible, recounting slogans to demand justice for the Ayotzinapa students all the way through. One student held a banner that read “Unisur and Crac.” Finally, we arrived at the location where the closing plenary of the anniversary celebrations took place. As usual, the organizations present, among others Unisur, were welcomed by the assembly facilitator. Maria, one of the first-year students, sat next to me on the plastic chairs. All excited, she told me this was the first time she participated in such a major Crac event.³⁰⁴

Students in Santa Cruz del Rincón had found a way to navigate Crac’s factionalism and made the university participate in the parallel celebrations. While staff concentrated above all on expanding support for Unisur among affiliated communities and universities, groups of students re-politicized the university by reconnecting to grassroots organizations. As such, Unisureños employed various strategies and set distinct priorities in facing the university’s problems. Sometimes, this led to disputes over the meaning of a university “from the *pueblos*, directed by the *pueblos*.” This also happened in December 2014.

11. An Assembly about Ayotzinapa

During a university assembly in El Mesón, Carlos’s proposal for the university to officially join the Ayotzinapa struggle was discussed. Unisur students and staff had gathered at the ball court and the rector opened the discussion. He did not want to make the step and explained it as follows. He wanted Unisur to become a public institution and become part of the state. He recalled his obligation to society: “It is my duty to negotiate with the government, as I have done with the three previous governors, ministers of education, either PRD or PRI state representatives. It is an obligation to present them our demands according to the university principles and documents.” The rector referred to the mandate

³⁰⁴ Fieldnotes, October 15–16, 2015.

drawn up during the Third Intercultural Congress in 2007, when communities ordered the rector to search for state recognition. His stance ruled out the official association with the ANP because it called for a boycott of the new interim governor. According to this boycott, until the forty-three Ayotzinapa students returned alive, no negotiations with the state could take place. Organizations that continued such negotiations, such as Upoeg, would be kept out of the ANP movement. Meanwhile, the new interim governor had just invited Unisur leaders to discuss university recognition. To support the Ayotzinapa movement, the university would be forced to let this possibility slip by. The rector was not in favor.

In response, teacher Mario asked to speak: “To me, it sounds like a contradiction. The right to Unisur’s recognition is not what we are discussing here. But the ANP asks us to boycott [interim Governor] Rogelio until the students appear alive. The governor will sit down with some organizations and not with others, as a way to divide social movements. Upoeg is not accepted by the ANP and part of the Crac neither. Let every department speak. We want state recognition, but we are in solidarity with the ANP. Are we with the students, or are we with the state?” His statement provoked various reactions from the assembly. One teacher mentioned: “To negotiate with the government is not taking advantage of the moment. It is our right, not a favor.” The rector called it a false discussion, since the parents of the Ayotzinapa students met with state representatives all the time. He stuck to his views: “I am obliged to try to talk with executive power. If we stop the process, who knows when we get a second chance.”

As the discussion stagnated, a student proposed that every department should discuss the matter separately, so that, afterwards, an agreement could be reached together. At each corner of the ball court, the individual departments discussed the issue. About half an hour later, the general assembly continued. Student delegates of every department informed their position:

Department of Santa Cruz del Rincón: “Continue the talks with the government but with more companions present: a commission of community authorities and representatives of the student council. We pose an ultimatum of three months.”

Department of Hueycantengango: “Chilapa enjoys protection of *policía comunitaria*, we don’t. For us, it’s difficult to participate in the ANP movement because of organized crime. That is why we go for recognition. But we feel the pain.”³⁰⁵

Department of Metlatónoc: “Continue negotiations with the government.”

³⁰⁵ Organized crime groups were active in the area of Hueycantenango and the students feared reprisals for participating in ANP activism.

Department of Acapulco: “If something would happen to us, we wouldn’t want others to take advantage of the situation. Continue the negotiations but set conditions.”

Department of El Mesón: “Continue [negotiations].”

Department of Cuajinicuilapa: “Continue [negotiations].”³⁰⁶

The university assembly together agreed to continue the negotiations with the government. A commission of community authorities and students would accompany Unisur leaders in the talks, and the interim governor had three months to meet their demands.

The assembly in El Mesón brought out the tension that had been building up ever since the university was founded. After years without funding and valid diplomas, Unisurenos expressed the critical need for state recognition as their highest priority. In this context, a meeting with the interim governor looked most appealing. For the university to become a publicly supported institution in combination with *pueblo* ownership, grassroots mobilizations seemed crucial. This time, however, the official connection to grassroots mobilizations took somewhat of a back seat. Unisur’s attempt to change educational governance was balanced with the students need for diplomas. Meanwhile, students and university staff continued to engage in popular politics and approached Unisur’s initial supporters to not do away with the original objective of the university.

12. Concluding Comments

Unisur’s role in bringing about new processes of educational governance was examined in this chapter. I studied university claims, authority making, and activism on who legitimately governs and decides over intercultural universities. I raised the question of how indigenous and Afromexican organizations attempted to redirect the course of state intercultural education by making it into an arena of contestation. In the conclusion, I want to draw some lessons from Unisur’s experiences and reflect on the political outcomes.

I have shown how Unisur’s leaders confronted one of the dilemmas of multiculturalism at an early stage of their project, when the state denied the university proposal closely connected to social movements and only allowed for one intercultural institution per state. The state ultimately decided *what* exactly multiculturalism should recognize, while also playing a part in the conflict. In this case, it was about the future of intercultural education. Unisur attempted to overcome such regulatory effects by reclaiming the

³⁰⁶ Fieldnotes, December 5, 2014.

notion of *pueblo* as the basis for new models of educational governance.

To understand how this worked, I examined the interplay between developments on the local level and Unisur's negotiations with state officials. *Pueblo* was a collective subject around which claims were formulated and that helped build local university departments. Integrated in communal forms of organization and decision-making, it reflected a specific understanding of legitimate university governance. Unisur leaders attempted to institutionalize the authority of regionally connected indigenous and Afromexican communities and grassroots organizations in a new educational governance model. The project thereby made steps to link intercultural education to broader issues of democratization, autonomy, and cross-ethnic struggles. However, the notion of *pueblo* also made Unisur depend strongly on one type of legitimacy. The legitimacy repertoire of *pueblo* does not have the same legal meaning as that of "indigenous *pueblos*," whose rights could more easily be defended in court. While Unisureños did make claims on cultural and social rights for their education to obtain state recognition, they did not fit any available (intercultural) university category.

By building its own educational institutions, Unisur managed to question the meaning of cultural recognition by state-led multicultural policies and created alternatives. But it also faced specific legal gaps. In its grassroots educational struggles for deeper institutional change, the university could not reach out to the rights and legislation made available by years of indigenous struggles. Unisur's leaning on community and grassroots legitimacy alone turned out to be insufficient thus far. The bargaining power vis-à-vis the state largely depended on the university's ability to draw on the authority of the *pueblos*, at a time when local support networks were weakening. Students and affiliated communities faced difficulties in working toward new political horizons, without the everyday benefits of funded school buildings, teacher salaries, and student diplomas. Unisureños attempted to reclaim the university in various ways, for instance by making appeals to the autonomy of other universities and by strengthening local and grassroots ties.

While Upoeg eventually situated its policing authority within the municipal government of Ayutla de los Libres, Unisur did not achieve something similar during the period of research. It was unable to place the university under the jurisdiction of the state department of education and rearrange the governance of university institutions. Instead, it reached *de facto* self-determination over education in several local departments through active local participation and that of voluntary teachers from Mexico City. The departments stirred local action and discussions around the theme of legitimate university governance. Thereby, the university revalued notions of community governance and gave students from these marginalized places the opportunity to continue their studies after high-school. Nevertheless, without proper funding, both the communities and teachers were weighted with a heavy responsibility in the long run. Furthermore, my study brought a specific dynamic to the fore. When Unisur's project to put public educational institutions in the hands of the *pueblos* had stagnated for some time, Unisur's

academic program became all the more important. The project came to focus more on the possibilities provided by said program. After all, Unisur's younger staff attempted to use the autonomy granted to befriended universities to obtain student diplomas. The choice of the university to speak to the interim governor after the Ayotzinapa drama also revealed this priority. Unisureños continued their efforts to get the university back on its original track, but also gradually shifted the focus to ambitions at other levels. In the next chapter, I examine these ambitions, which are enclosed in Unisur's pedagogical and academic program.

7

Unisureños: Negotiations over the Functions of Intercultural Education

1. Introduction

In September 2015, I traveled to Veracruz with a delegation of Unisur students and teachers. Unisur had received an invitation to participate in the First Encounter of Graduates from Intercultural Universities in Xalapa. The Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) organized the event, in which more than seventy students and teachers from twelve intercultural universities and institutions participated.³⁰⁷ Most of these universities were public institutions, but there were also different ones, such as Unisur and the privately financed Instituto Superior Intercultural Ayuuk from Oaxaca. Twelve years after President Fox opened the first public intercultural university, the event would allow for a discussion of whether the universities lived up to their promises by foregrounding the experiences of alumni.

During the inauguration, the UVI rector welcomed everybody and emphasized the need to build networks of intercultural professionals. She applauded that students often stayed as academics at the institutes where they had studied. At one point, someone in the audience asked: “What’s gonna happen when our graduates return to their communities, their fields, is that all just a failure?” The question touched upon the expected role of alumni in society, which was anything but clear-cut. An invited keynote speaker from the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM) stepped up the debate further. He had been involved in Unisur from the very beginning. In his presentation, called Epistemic Violence and Education, he drew a grim picture of the future of adolescents in Mexico: “They’re killed. . . . In the last five years, physical aggression, homicides, constitute the principle cause of death among our young people.” He referred to the scale of violent deaths of young people as *juvenicidio*. He asked what function intercultural education can have in this context and laid out two pathways. Intercultural education could either

³⁰⁷ The participating institutions: Instituto de Investigaciones en Educación Universidad Veracruzana, Instituto Intercultural Nõño, A.C., Instituto Superior Intercultural Ayuuk, Universidad Autónoma Indígena de México, Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur, Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Hidalgo, Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Puebla, Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Tabasco, Universidad Intercultural de San Luis Potosí, Universidad Intercultural Indígena de Michoacán, Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo, and Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural: UVI Intercultural. 2015. “Encuentro de egresados de universidades interculturales de México.” Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://www.uv.mx/uvi/encuentro-de-egresados-de-universidades-interculturales-de-mexico>.

function as a way to integrate indigenous and Afromexican students into modern and capitalist society, by offering education based on principles of tolerance and integration. Or, intercultural education could trigger a decolonization process that would question unequal relationships in society. In other words, the UACM academic seemed to ask his audience whether their intercultural education efforts were actually transforming society. His thought-provoking presentation triggered discussions during the following days.

During a roundtable about experiences from the field of self-employment, we listened to a Maya alumna who told the story of how she started her own clothing shop after she obtained her bachelor degree at an intercultural university. When she noticed that well-off inhabitants of her village enjoyed “nice clothes and novelties,” she opened up a successful business. In the Q&A, a Unisur alumna advised her to sell handicrafts and traditional clothes to preserve Maya culture and “avoid cooperation with transnational businesses that rob us.” The Maya student responded that traditional clothes did not sell in her community, and that she expressed her Mayan identity in other ways than dress. “But what then is the difference between intercultural and conventional education, if we do not have a project for change?” somebody else in the audience asked. The question remained unanswered.³⁰⁸

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This account of the First Encounter of Graduates from Intercultural Universities gives an impression of the discussions among members of these institutions. Was intercultural education a way to improve the integration of ethnic minority students into society, or should intercultural education imply a project for change? The Encounter served as a platform to debate students’ experiences with the possible functions of interculturality. The expectations, achievements, and diverse pathways for students were discussed. Academics and alumni alike examined the future role of students in society: would they become intercultural professionals, the new generation of academics in the universities themselves, successful business managers, or were they supposed to return to their communities with new knowledge to actively change them?

In the previous chapter, I studied Unisur’s development and how the university attempted to reconstruct politics and authority in the region through a particular model of university governance. This chapter moves into the classrooms and the everyday lives of Unisur students. Operating as an unrecognized university, I study how Unisur translated its vision for intercultural education into practice. Unlike Unisur, many indigenous organizations of the last decades have shifted from waging struggles over rights toward realizing their demands from within spaces won by these struggles. I examine what happens when grassroots organizations rethink academic intercultural programs and

³⁰⁸ Fieldnotes, September 23–25, 2015.

pedagogy outside of institutional frameworks. How do students experience and enact Unisur's program, and what possibilities do they have to realize Unisur's manifold political-academic ambitions? By enrolling at Unisur, students give shape to their own future in the midst of long-standing social struggles and societal (im)possibilities.

Youth from peasant families in Guerrero are pulled in various directions after high school. Generally, they move to cities to work or take a shot at higher education. It is also common for adolescents to migrate to the United States, while some make a living in the drug trade. For young women, the options are often reduced to marriage. Most Unisur students aspired to continue their studies after leaving high school, but could not do so because studying and living in cities is costly. Parents sometimes needed or preferred their children to stay at home. Cities are considered dangerous places, especially with the increase of violence in Guerrero, while agricultural work at home requires many hands. For adolescents in these socioeconomic conditions, Unisur was often the only possibility to continue their studies on university level. There are no typical student experiences at Unisur and it is impossible to portray the wide range of narratives. Yet, I aim to identify some patterns. Most of the data presented here were gathered in Cuajinicuilapa, but I also include ethnographic material from Unisur departments in El Mesón and Santa Cruz del Rincón.

This chapter starts by exploring scholarly discussions about the functions of intercultural education, including the political motives behind such (higher) educational projects, the accommodation of diversity, and the enhancement of social equality. I then situate Unisur in these discussions by looking at its pedagogy and academic program. In what follows, I study how Unisur's ambitions work out by presenting case studies, ethnographic fragments of university life, and a PAR exercise. The Unisur program is designed to prepare students for the reshaping of their lifeworlds on personal, community, and civil society levels. I therefore follow the work of Gustafson (2014, 91), who studied the unfolding of intercultural education at multiple scales of political complexity. In the section about Unisur's ambitions on the personal level, I study student-teacher interactions over cultural-political representations. I then turn to students' efforts to rethink and improve their communities, and I lastly study Unisur's ambition for students to become involved in social organizations and movements. In the conclusion, I reflect on the gap between Unisur's aspirations and accomplishments, and what this means for grassroots educational organizations that seek to rearticulate relationships of power and authority.

2. Multiple Functions of Intercultural Education

Since the emergence of the concept of interculturality in Latin America, it has become a buzzword that appears in various academic disciplines and public discourses. In

the context of demands to diversify educational institutions, the term “intercultural” embodies different intentions with regard to policy, epistemology, and societal issues. Gustafson (2014, 81) sees three central elements of interculturality as cross-cultural exchange, recognition, and relationships. Interculturality can then be a prescriptive and ethical discourse for social groups to live together harmoniously (González Apodaca 2009b, 6). It is also a plea to let knowledge of marginalized groups come into dialogue with more established knowledge on an equal basis (Guilherme and Dietz 2017, 11; Fornet-Betancourt 1994). I follow the work of scholars who have studied interculturality as part of a political project of ethnic pluralism (Rappaport 2005; Gustafson 2009; García 2005; Bertely Busquets 2007). They focus on the political and philosophical approaches to interculturality in education. In such accounts, state conceptions of intercultural education in Mexico are often contrasted to what is called conflictive interculturality—discussions to which I turn next.

The thirteen public intercultural universities in rural regions in Mexico predominantly target indigenous students. According to one of its main promoters, Silvia Schmelkes, the curriculum promotes and values indigenous languages and culture, and the general objective is for students to become professionals who work for the development of their home communities (Schmelkes 2014, 127). Interculturality in these institutions is more often conceived as a future-oriented perspective for the positive promotion of cultural difference (Rojas-Cortés and González Apodaca 2016, 85). According to Lehmann (2013), interculturality in Mexico’s public intercultural universities are programs of affirmative action, targeted to overcome the dual challenge of recognition and socioeconomic inclusion. He sees this as “recognition by mainstreaming,” which is meant to enable indigenous students to fully participate in a form of higher education that pays attention to their particular needs and appreciates their cultural background (Lehmann 2013, 800). Recent studies show how the joint quantitative and qualitative push—for more access to higher education and culturally relevant programs—has generated operational conflicts (Dietz 2017, 23). Universities are expected to expand their coverage to increase the number of students attending, but they also need to offer the type of education that generates work on local and regional levels.

Gunther Dietz, one of the initiators of the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI),³⁰⁹ has argued that, when intercultural education mainly targets indigenous students and is organized as a subsystem of public education, the conventional public university remains largely unaffected (Dietz 2009a, 3). This sends out the message that indigenous students are “the problem” and have to become “intercultural” as a remedy rather than that institutionalized racism and societal discrimination needs to

³⁰⁸ In 2005, the autonomous public university in Veracruz (Universidad Veracruzana) opened its own Intercultural Program, from which later the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) emerged, as part of the established public university.

be challenged. In these cases, intercultural institutions create opportunities of inclusion for cultural-ethnic minorities without dealing with societal power relations between majorities and minorities. Gustafson (2009, 281) has also concluded that intercultural schooling alone cannot be a remedy: “Beyond EIB [Educación Intercultural Bilingüe], access to higher education and productive employment requires rethinking education and development, in ways that address both the anti-colonial struggle for deep democracy and the realities of globalization.” His critique is directed at multicultural policies based on liberal perspectives. With individual liberty as leading principle, people’s well-being depends on the individual’s capacity to make something of one’s life and not on society or its deeper structures. As a result, “social gaps, social injustices, and educational failure are seen as personal and family problems that can be individually overcome” (Walsh 2010, 16). When we accept that the notion of individual liberty has been historically connected with the systematic exclusion of indigenous people, who were unworthy of rights, we arrive at the broader debate on the challenges of the liberal state (see Postero 2017, 16; chapter 1). For many scholars and activists, a key question is whether the liberal state can become an instrument to remedy injustices (de Sousa Santos 2010).

Some scholars raise questions about how organizations can modify liberal and legal regimes (Gustafson 2009, 278), while others focus on *neoliberalism* (Padilla 2008; Ortiz 2008; Walsh 2012a). They employ the term “functional interculturality” to point out the contradictions between state-led intercultural education that privileges culture and ethics and downplays structural political and economic power relations. Interculturality is here only embraced by states as long as it is functional within the neoliberal system and maintains the status quo. In response, indigenous organizations, NGOs, and intellectuals have begun to rethink the notion of interculturality in education. Scholars critical of intercultural public institutions tend to contrast government approaches with “critical interculturality” or “conflictive interculturality.” In general, these approaches see conflict as constitutive of intercultural relations and recognize the social and power asymmetries at stake (Bertely Busquets 2011; González Apodaca 2009a). Intercultural education then incorporates the following principles: “the positive reclaiming of the identity of ‘one’s own’ culture, the critique of hegemonic forms of knowledge, the legitimacy of the knowledge of ‘others’ linked to the cultural and political praxis of actors, and the defense of territory and collective resources (Rojas-Cortés and González Apodaca 2016, 74).

This type of intercultural education wants to explain and analyze conflicts, and to empower youngsters to change the terms of social power and domination. For instance, Mato (2011, 340) argues that educational projects of indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations not only aim to train professionals capable of developing their communities, but also to engage in projects of democratization. Other projects focus on decolonization by evaluating cultural relations and differences in reference to the colonial legacy of contemporary power relations (Walsh 2012a). In general, these projects are said “to reshape educational, economic and social relationships at the communal,

regional and state level” (Oyarzun, Perales Franco, and McCowan 2017, 860). Fraser (1995, 82) once described such efforts as “transformative remedies” to change underlying political-economic structures, in contrast to “affirmative remedies” to redress injustices. Educational movements are then engaged in a battle for the transformation of the state itself, in the words of Gustafson (2009, 278). Connected to social struggles with “a clear critical, decolonial and emancipatory component” (Rojas-Cortés and González Apodaca 2016, 82), Unisur belongs in this category.

Given the variety of political projects and philosophical approaches that guide intercultural education institutions, questions about the functions of intercultural education—as they were posed during the Encounter in Xalapa—have no straightforward answers. Intercultural educational initiatives differ on the issue of how to combine cultural difference with social equality. Critical interculturality approaches counterbalance stated models of interculturality by aiming to transform power relations. In the context of Mexico’s educational landscape, these are ambitious objectives. In the next section, I zoom in on Unisur’s political-academic aspirations to specify the university’s place in these debates.

3. Unisur’s Pedagogy and Academic Program

In the 2006 feasibility study, Unisur’s founders perceived education as a strategic space in sociocultural transformation. They foregrounded the notions of subject, context, project, inspired by the work of Hugo Zemelman (see chapter 6). Unisur teacher Leonardo explained how he understood Unisur’s pedagogy: “The idea of making students conscious, remaking them into historically-constituted subjects, and the series of historical and social relations that have molded them into what they are. But at the same time, these relations. . . if this context is formed in such a way that it subjects them, it can also be transformed through its own forms. Between action and structure. Sure, the structure delimits, limits, but it can also be a transforming element; that’s why so much of Unisur’s pedagogical project is based on the idea de action.”³¹⁰

The academic program aims for students to learn from their own social history as a means of forming critical dispositions. The terms of subject and context are employed by teachers to refer to this process. The same terms give meaning to Unisur’s more general understanding of interculturality. Two of Unisur’s founders wrote: “For UNISUR, interculturality is a relational process imbued with the exercise of power, where subaltern subjects must be recognized as products of historical processes of colonialism and exploitation, such that they set out from there to the encounter with points of convergence towards the construction of new historical blocks” (Flores Félix and Méndez Bahena 2008,

³¹⁰ Interview with Leonardo, October 21, 2015.

213). Following that line, the first year of the academic program, called *tronco común*,³¹¹ has the objectives to position the subject in her/his spatial and temporal context and to critically reflect on the contributions of different forms of knowledge to this context (Aguilera 2014, 46). The year consists of four modules—Introduction to Intercultural Epistemology; Original Knowledge; Occidental Knowledge; and Identity, Culture and Territory—each of which touches upon what is called a problematic field.³¹² In this sense, Unisur’s educational program resembles the one in the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) in Xochimilco. The UAM’s modular approach foregrounds an interdisciplinary investigative process for every field, where students engage with specific problems and work in groups. At Unisur, the teaching staff is required to engage in interdisciplinary teaching or coordinate with other staff in such ways that students are invited to address local and regional issues from different interdisciplinary perspectives. Classes take place during bi-monthly extended weekends, so-called *presenciales*, and continue when students conduct fieldwork and research in their communities.

In the *tronco común*, students learn to identify with their culture, original language, and communal practices through consciousness-raising in the classroom. According to Rappaport (2005, 155), this kind of intercultural education is a way for cultural-ethnic groups to define how they cohere in what she calls a “political-cultural inside,” deployed in contrast to the dominant society. Unisur aims for students to become protagonist subjects, in contrast to subjected subjects, in Zemelman’s terms. Students are invited to question the reality as it is presented to them and to adopt their own position towards it, rather than uncritically accepting it. The ability to critically reflect on contemporary societies and future possibilities is seen as one of the transformative values of intercultural higher education (Mato 2016, 229).

Unisur also aims to move beyond critical reflections by “training local professions that communities need in order to participate in the construction of their future projects.”³¹³ The notion of *proyecto* refers to action or acts of social change. At Unisur, communities are seen as important sites for such action. During the first course of *tronco común*, students are asked to walk around in their communities and identify the most important

³¹¹ *Tronco común* refers to the first academic year of Unisur, during which all first-year students take the same courses. Afterwards, students choose between different two-year bachelor programs.

³¹² Unisur’s feasibility study of 2006 has a list of problematic fields (*campos problemáticos*) used at Unisur, although these have been updated and changed over time: “The Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur will organize its academic activities around the following problematic fields: culture as a space for the construction of knowledge, the construction of new identities, territory as a cultural construction and social space, intercultural education and processes of the construction of knowledge, indigenous languages, languages of technology and the development of thought, our own technologies, the environment and sustainability.”

³¹³ Unisur. (date unknown) “Unisur Archives. 4). Licenciatura en Gestión A.C. Plan de Estudios Gestión Ambiental.; 5.) Licenciatura en Gobierno de M.T. Plan de Estudios Gobierno.; 6). Licenciatura en Justicia y D.H. Plan de estudios Justicia y Derechos Humanos.”

institutions.³¹⁴ They are instructed to observe everything anew and make observations that answer the following questions: How is your community doing, what do you see, what are the needs of your community? The *vinculación comunitaria*—the linkages between university and communities—takes central stage in the academic program and students need to conduct social service during their studies.³¹⁵ In the last course of *tronco común*, students elect a research problem. Common themes are land rights, irrigation, medicinal plants, infrastructure, recuperation of cultural and local knowledge, sustainable agricultural, the justice systems of the community police, or women's rights. On the one hand, these research projects are academic. They turn into a thesis of which the criteria are set by Unisur and the UACM. On the other hand, these projects encourage local commitment and action in dialogue with local authorities and social organizations. In other words, these projects intend to prepare students to become academic professionals at the service of their communities.

The research projects form part of two-year bachelor tracks. Students can choose between the tracks Sustainable Agriculture, Governance of Municipalities and Territories, and Justice and Human Rights, and each track consists of eight modules. In the Sustainable Agriculture track, students follow courses such as Ecosystems, Deterioration and Sustainability; Resources, Productive Systems and the Market; and Planning and Management of Community Territory. In the track Governance of Municipalities and Territories, students learn about themes such as State, Citizenship and Forms of Governance in Modernity; Political Parties and Institutions; and Democracy and Autonomy. In the last track, Justice and Human Rights, students, for example, take courses such as Justice and Legality of the Pueblos; State, Justice and Human Rights; and Justice and Cultural Diversity Rights. Aside the more generally discussed themes, these tracks pay special attention to knowledge and perspectives of the *pueblos*, and take into consideration communal ways of life and organization. These forms of organization are often linked to both historical and contemporary ways of organizing in rural indigenous and Afromexican communities (Dietz and Mateos Cortés 2011, 16). Just as Upoeg, Unisur views certain aspects of communal life as an ethical frame and guide for students to reimagine and improve their local communities. Unisur teachers value communal life because they are meant to instill collective participation and self-organization. This

³¹⁴ In the academic program, the objectives of these educational activities are described accordingly: “to recognize their territory, recover and re-articulate their context, address the diverse levels in which they consist; to problematize the determinations of development and identify problems in their communities.” Unisur. (date unknown) “Unisur Archives. *Tronco Común* Mod 1 formato SEP.”

³¹⁵ As described in the document “Procedimiento de titulación,” Unisur students are required to take part in 480 hours of social service: “This social service may be performed before the community's authorities (submunicipal *comisario* of communal or *ejidal* leaders), the municipal administration (council or delegation) or any community organization, institution or civil association whose goals are of a public, not-for-profit nature, in accordance with UNISUR's substantive functions.” Unisur Comisión de Registro Escolar. 2015. “Procedimiento de titulación.”

brings us to Unisur's broader ambition: "Higher education is valued as an option to strengthen local processes and leaderships, not only to gain access to better workplaces" (López 2009, 76–77). Students are encouraged to strengthen community and civil society organizations that work on a collective basis to forge change in society. Students come to know such organizations during *cierre de módulos*, meetings between Unisur and the UACM, and during visits to the events of the Crac-PC, Upoeg, and Afromexican organizations. Intercultural education can then become what Gustafson (2009, 257) calls a "networking and communicative vehicle facilitating the movements of leaders, resources and symbols, and new practices like assemblies, marches, commemorations and confrontations."

Altogether, the notions of *sujeto*, *contexto*, *proyecto* lend meaning and direction to the university, which seeks to engage students in the reshaping of their lifeworlds on the personal, community, and civil society level. The creation of critical dispositions on the personal level can translate into engagements with the community and enhance participation in civil society organizations, whose goals often go beyond local issues. At the same time, the academic program is designed to make students graduate as certified professionals. The latter responds to the right of adolescents to public higher education, just like any university. Accordingly, I understand the objectives of Unisur as a "double push". It seeks to change political relations at multiple scales, but it also aspires to the social inclusion of rural and ethnic-cultural minority adolescents by means of higher education. To define these objectives, I borrow the term "transformative inclusion" from Gustafson (2009, 257), which he used for the case of Bolivian indigenous movements involved in intercultural education struggles. In the next three sections, I examine how students negotiate Unisur's ambitions on the personal, community, and civil society level, respectively. Since Unisur stands out for being a "project for change," I focus mostly on the possibilities and contradictions students encounter to realize Unisur's political-academic ambitions. I therefore pay less attention to the intrinsic value of acquiring new knowledge as such, that would happen in any other university.

4. Reshaping of Personal Lifeworlds

"I'm going to put you back to the *tronco común* because you don't understand anything about territory, you haven't learned a thing.' When someone does that to you, 'I'm going to put you back to the *tronco común*' . . . that's the essence of being a Unisureña . . . the cosmovision of the world is to study its territory, the context."³¹⁶ Unisur student Karla described the *tronco común* as some kind of *rite de passage* that produced the essence of being a Unisureña. She referred to the jokes being made within the university, for

³¹⁶ Interview with Karla, September 18, 2015.

example when students or teachers showed a lack of knowledge about one's cultural origins, community, or territory. Humorous remarks such as "I'm going to put you back to the *tronco común*" were also made when students acted against certain values encouraged by the university, such as sharing or speaking out. The first academic year served as the groundwork for the university program and students often described it as the time when shifts in thinking took place. It marked the beginning of the pathway toward becoming protagonist subjects—students with a critical position toward reality.

When student Carolina had just enrolled at Unisur, she remembered telling her teacher: "I don't like law, I don't like politics."³¹⁷ Nowadays, she tries to convince her brother to go to Unisur. She told him: "How can you not like politics? Everything we do is political, from the moment we are born until everything else, cooking, eating, everything is political. Whether you like it or not, you have to deal with it."³¹⁸ Throughout the first academic years, students discuss the significance of colonialism in Latin American by reading texts by Enrique Dussel, Gustavo Esteva, Luisa Paré, and Anibal Quijano. Furthermore, they engage with more sociological and political science literature, including some classics, for instance written by Karl Marx, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Luis Villoro. Besides learning about Mexico's social history—with a special focus on peasant, indigenous, and Afromexican struggles—students read about contemporary sociopolitical processes in Guerrero, such as the resistance against la Parota mega dam and community policing.³¹⁹ For many students, these readings are a great challenge, especially taking into account the often deficient quality of their primary and secondary education. Unisur teachers attempt to mitigate such difficulties by employing popular

³¹⁷ Conversation with Carolina, November 20, 2014.

³¹⁸ Conversation with Carolina, September 3, 2015.

³¹⁹ To give an impression of the authors and scholarly work used in class, I include some references of the articles students are required to read. I have organized the references along more general themes: 1) Colonialism in the Latin American context, 2) Political philosophy, 3) Mexico's social history, 4) Cultural and ethnic rights and mobilizations, and 5) Local political struggles. 1) Quijano, Anibal. 2000. *Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina*. Lima: CIES.; Dussel, Enrique. 1994. *La conquista espiritual ¿Encuentro de dos mundos?* In *El encubrimiento del otro. Hacia el origen del mito de la modernidad*. La Paz: Editorial Abya Yala.; 2) Villoro, Luis. 1997. *El poder y el valor: La comunidad*. DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, El Colegio de México.; Marx, Karl. 1980. *Contribución a la crítica de la economía política*. DF: Siglo XXI editores.; 3) Harvey, Neil. El derecho a tener derechos. In *La Rebelión de Chiapas. La lucha por la tierra y la democracia*. DF: Ediciones Era.; Guardino, Peter. 2001. *Campesinos y Política en la Formación del Estado Nacional en México. Guerrero, 1800-1857*. Instituto de Estudios Parlamentarios Eduardo Neri del H. Congreso del Estado Libre y Soberano de Guerrero.; 4) Martínez Montiel, Luz María. 1995. *La cultura africana, tercera raíz*. DF: Editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica.; Báez-Jorge, Félix. 2001. *Cosmovisión, Ritual e Identidad de Los Pueblos Indígenas de México*. DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica.; Lazos, Elena and Paré, Luisa. 2000. *Miradas indígenas sobre una naturaleza entristecida*, México. DF: UNAM/Plaza y Valdés Editores.; and 5) Castro, Gustavo. 2004. *Presa la Parota, la resistencia en Guerrero*. DF: CIEPAC.; Flores Félix, José Joaquín. 2001. *El tigre, San Marcos y el comisario, Poder y reproducción social en la montaña de Guerrero*, Colegio de Guerrero, A.C. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.

education techniques and group discussions.³²⁰

Although Unisur has a general academic program, each university department also has its own specific points of attention. In Cuajinicuilapa, I attended a class by Ricardo, a PhD candidate at the UNAM, who gave a workshop on Afromexican history in the *tronco común*. In class, he asked first-year students about their knowledge of the African continent. He used their hesitant answers as stepping stones to explain concepts such as Eurocentrism in history and epistemological racism, and introduced students to the history of Afromexican slavery by showing images of slave ships and historical drawings. Teachers such as Ricardo play a vital role in bringing knowledge and reflections about ethnic-cultural belonging and its political dimension into the classroom. So did teacher Esteban. In his class, he asked *tronco común* students questions like: “How do you recognize an Afromexican *pueblo*? By the way we dance the *cumbia*, the way we fall in love, and our way of celebration.”³²¹ He often talked about cultural representations such as the *danza de los diablos* (devil’s dance) and the *danza del toro de petate* (petate-bull dance), folk music such as *son de artesa*, or culinary traditions as parts of Afromexican identity.³²² “If you don’t have an identity, you won’t act. Your identity encourages you to work for your communities. Your identity makes you feel, this is me, that’s what I need to fight for,” said Esteban.³²³ While the *tronco común* in Cuajinicuilapa introduces students to the cultural and material features of Afromexican struggles, other Unisur departments pay more attention to other cultural markers and signifiers, such as indigenous languages, cosmovision, territory, and resource struggles.

Part of the academic program can be said to facilitate processes of “ethnicization.” In this logic, Afromexican groups and individuals in the Costa Chica region create visibility and enable mechanisms for recognition by highlighting specific ethnic or cultural identity markers (Hoffmann and Rinaudo 2014, 147). There are long-standing discussions about the political potential and limitations of vindicating ethnic or cultural difference. These differences can be used as arguments in struggles for collective rights and entitlements, similar to the way Esteban employs Afromexican identity. However, while it creates the conditions for cultural-ethnic groups to mobilize for claims to autonomy and self-governance, it can also lead to the essentialization of identity (see Jackson and Warren 2005). For instance, Esteban stressed one particular type of Afromexican identity, while studies of everyday life in the Costa Chica region have shown the multiple experiences

³²⁰ The long-standing tradition of popular education in Mexico, and Latin America more generally, is, among others, based on the work of Paulo Freire and his many followers. Through participatory pedagogies, popular education intends to empower “the oppressed” by taking control of one’s own learning and hence effect social change.

³²¹ Fieldnotes, September 24, 2014.

³²² *Son de artesa* is a music style that emerged in Guerrero during colonial times. Ever since, Afromexicans played *son* music during their festivities where various musicians play the guitar, *vihuela*, violin, box, and harp. Nowadays, the music is mainly performed during cultural encounters.

³²³ Conversation with Esteban, September 8, 2014.

and ways of being Afro-descendant (see Lara 2007; Lewis 2001; Castillo Figueroa 2016). Such a focus can contradict what Dietz (2003, 13) calls the “very basic assumptions of diversity”: the complex differences and intersections of ethnicity, gender, culture, and class. The question then arises of what happens with diversity in struggles that are shaped by cultural and ethnic referents but are not exclusively driven by these issues. I examine this question below, by asking how Unisur’s assertions of cultural-ethnic difference played out for students, especially in terms of the ambition to evoke critical dispositions.

4.1 Ethnic-Cultural Identities

During university meals or everyday interactions, Esteban often narrated stories. One story about a particular meeting between him and state officials was a recurring topic. The story started by Esteban imitating the words of a state official: “Afrodecendientes, they don’t have their own language, that is why they cannot be considered a *pueblo*.” Esteban replied: “Senator, sir, go f-- yourself.” He continued by describing the shocked face of the senator, who accused Esteban of insulting him. Esteban had replied: “Señor, this is not an insult, this is Negro [culture].”³²⁴ The story of Esteban’s gross and offensive speech to a high-ranking government official often triggered laughter among students.

With such narratives, Esteban evokes *lengua suelta* (loose speech) as one of the proud aspects of Afromexican culture. This speech is commonly identified by the “eating” of the end of words and sometimes the use of vulgar words. It is also called *costeña* (coastal), in reference to the place where it is spoken, and can be looked down upon. In the story, Esteban appropriates the stereotypical image of coastal speech, *lengua suelta*, and presents it as an aspect of Afromexican culture. This practice has everything to do with the different positions occupied by indigenous people and Afro-descendant populations, when the latter have a less integrated relationship with Latin American states (Rahier 2012, 4–5). Unlike indigenous groups that can make claims of difference based on language and territory, Afromexican people are more often perceived as lacking such referents. This explains why some organizations have started to “indianize” their claims (see Rahier 2012, 5). In this logic, Esteban performs *lengua suelta* as Afromexican language, in resemblance to languages spoken by indigenous groups, to give extra substance to Afromexican identity, thereby offering students a political-cultural representation to engage with. The following description of a university assembly gives an impression of such engagements.

During weekends of classes in Cuajinicuilapa, some time is reserved to convene an assembly where teachers and students discuss and decide upon university matters. In September 2014, about twenty-five students and teachers gathered in one of the *redondas*. Although most students came from nearby towns and communities, the students were not exclusively from the Costa Chica region. Some students came from other regions in

³²⁴ Fieldnotes, September 23, 2015.

Guerrero to study the specific bachelor track on offer at this Unisur department. One group of students even came all the way from the municipality of Pinotepa de Don Luis in Oaxaca, where attempts to set up a university similar to Unisur had failed.

Esteban opened the assembly by welcoming five new students. He asked everyone to present themselves by naming one's "*pueblo* and language." One student answered: "I am Evelyn, I live in El Espinal. My father is from a village close to El Espinal and my mother is Mixteca from the mountains." The round moved slowly through the circle, at times interrupted by laughter and jokes. "I am Cecilia, I have a little of both things." Her cryptic comments produced laughter among her peers and someone asked "What things?" to which Cecilia responded: "My father has Afro origins, his family is Afro, my mother is indigenous Nahuatl." "*Pueblo*?" Esteban asked. "Afro, because for a long time, I've been living here and I was born in Cuaji." "Language?" Esteban insisted. "Well, like everybody else, *lengua suelta*." Again, Cecilia's answer produced laughter, now because of her reference to provocative speech. The round continued: "I am Pepe, I was born in Cuajinicuilapa and everyone tells me that Esteban is my uncle but I'm not sure." Everyone laughed because Pepe's white phenotype contrasted with Esteban's black phenotype. "*Pueblo*?" Esteban asked. "Well, Afro." "Language?" Esteban repeated, "Afromexican." The round advanced. "My name is Karla, I live in Cuajinicuilapa, my mother is from a Zapotec village in Oaxaca, and my father comes from a village in the Costa Chica, so I call myself Afroindia." Other students followed: "I am Ana, I come from San Lucas in Oaxaca, I am Nahuatl and speak the language." This time, Esteban stayed silent and only nodded, as the next student continued: "I am Gabriel, I am from Cuajinicuilapa, Afromexicano and I speak two languages, castellano and *lengua suelta*." ³²⁵

When Esteban asked students to mention their *pueblo* and language, he employed *pueblo* as a category of ethnic-cultural belonging, for which language serves as a specific identity marker. Many students expressed their identification with Afromexican or indigenous communities, often in hybrid ways, and referred to their mastery of two languages. Carolina mentioned how this kind of identification differed in high school: "I had seen the differences in color at school, brown ones, blacks, indigenous, etc. but everything was just normal. Only at Unisur I learned about Afromexicans. This here [her home] was my reality. I didn't know anything about community police risking their lives to safeguard communities, I didn't know anything about the colonization. We learned nothing like that in high school." ³²⁶

By studying at Unisur, students started to express their cultural-ethnic identity in new ways. Ethno-cultural representations such as languages, dances, physical appearance, family origins, and so on became vehicles for students to define their difference from dominant society (cf. Rappaport 2005, 155). For instance, in the *tronco común*, students

³²⁵ Fieldnotes, September 21, 2014.

³²⁶ Conversation with Carolina, August 29, 2014.

were given the assignment to make a family tree. It intended to produce awareness about one's roots and positioning within society. In Cuajinicuilapa, students such as Cecilia began to define themselves as Afromexican. Although her comments about *lengua suelta* had provoked laughter during the presentation round, since it is also associated with rude language, I will next illustrate how Cecilia's references to Afromexican language held significance beyond jokes.

People used to discriminate Cecilia when she worked for a government agency in Chilpancingo: "She's the one from the coast," they said, pronouncing the words in exaggerated coastal speech.³²⁷ She stopped using her coastal accent. Once she enrolled at Unisur, Cecilia re-signified her way of speaking. As a Unisur student, she was invited to a forum for indigenous adolescents organized by an NGO: "That was one of my best moments, I achieved something here. . . to re-position the topic of Afromexicans." At the forum, all participants were asked to give a presentation. On her name tag, Cecilia wrote "Afro," the nickname used by her friends and family: "They can call me that, I don't see any problem if they do. But if it's done in a derogatory way, then of course not, but if it's just normal there's no problem." Cecilia started her presentation by stating that she did not speak an indigenous language, like everyone else in the room, but rather spoke *lengua suelta*: "Yeah, I bite off words sometimes, but that's normal, for me it's normal. But there's something I'd like, to see it written down that we're also present here [Afromexicans]." The rest of the participants applauded when she stated: "We're all equal, although we speak differently." After her appeal to be included in the event as an Afromexican participant, the NGO decided to change the target audience of future events into "young indigenous and Afromexicans."³²⁸ For Cecilia and other students, cultural representations such as *lengua suelta* became an important personal referent and a way to position themselves in local social relations and political networks.

Students appropriated the political-cultural representations learned at the university in multiple ways, and they did not appeal to all students equally. For instance, not everyone took pride in speaking rudely, one of the aspects of *lengua suelta*. This was a much-debated topic in personal conversations as well as in university plenaries. The representation of Afromexicans as festive and convivial did not resonate among all as well. Born and raised in Cuajinicuilapa, Alonso described his experience of Unisur as a blindfold falling from his eyes. Especially the critical analyses of the state fascinated him. He enjoyed Unisur's general program but the ethno-cultural practices at Unisur did not appeal to him: "I am Afromexican, I am from around here, but I don't feel it as such. I don't know why. . . . If the people from here listen to music, they want to dance, but I don't."³²⁹ He did not like the end-of-module-events, it was too much partying and

³²⁷ Conversation with Cecilia, September 2, 2015.

³²⁸ Interview with Cecilia, September 29, 2015.

³²⁹ Conversation with Alonso, February 20, 2014.

dancing. During such events, Unisur students and teachers from Cuajinicuilapa engaged in local cultural dances such as the *danza de los diablos*. I even got to dance as a devil myself once, but Alonso never participated.

By the time of my last fieldwork period, Alonso had joined a local evangelical group. As a recent convert, his Bible studies kept him more and more away from Unisur: “In my life, I have known three realities. First, I thought the state was just, I believed in the good intentions of the state. Then, I came to Unisur and I learned another reality, a reality of injustices, social problems. I saw that the state was not just, it formed part of all the problems. And then, I encountered yet another reality, as a Christian.”³³⁰ He said he finally felt at home somewhere as Christian, something that Unisur had not offered him. As such, the cultural-ethnic identity markers transmitted through teaching did not always match students’ personal lifeworlds. This produced alienating effects for students like Alonso. For many students, speech practices such as *lengua suelta* unsettled dominant discourses and introduced critical and creative identity claims. For some others, the encounters between collective ethno-cultural expressions and individual experiences produced frictions and new cultural boundaries. In the next sections, I examine how Unisureños attempt to renovate Unisur’s cultural-ethnic educational notions by including the ways they interact with other social issues that affect their lives. This is especially relevant in relation to Unisur’s ambition of turning critical dispositions into community action.

5. Professionals at the Service of Communities

At Unisur’s department in Cuajinicuilapa, Sunday mornings are reserved for *tequio* or *fajina*. These terms refer to practices in which indigenous and Afromexican communities carry out collective work for the good of the community. Unisur teachers often repeated the importance of *tequio* in everyday university life. They said that *tequio* is something that makes us a community. As such, they adhered to scholars who describe the work as “one of the most vigorous institutions for cohesion and belonging to the community” (Warman 2003, 235).

One Sunday in August 2015, during *tequio*, some students started to *chaponar*, that is, to cut the grass and clean the ground around the university buildings. They raised their machetes in the air and brought them down in short and fast movements. Mostly students from the Montaña region and from rural communities around Cuajinicuilapa took care of this task. Others, including me, from non-rural backgrounds, made themselves useful in other ways. We cleaned the toilets, swept the dust out of the *redondas*, or cleared away piles of grass. At a certain moment, I saw Enrique attempting to cut the grass. While most of Enrique’s family lived in Guerrero, he himself was born and raised in Mexico City. To

³³⁰ Interview with Alonso, September 18, 2015.

mitigate the heat, Enrique had picked a grassy spot in the shadow of a tree. “I’m from the Montaña!” he shouted while attempting to cut the grass with his machete. He had a hard time and, after five minutes, I watched him take a break with his forehead covered in sweat. A teacher from Mexico City took on the same challenge. He even picked a spot in the burning heat and attempted to imitate the machete movements of the other students.³³¹ I also made some attempts. Unlike Lupita, I never became very skillful. Lupita was a student from a nearby town. One day during *tequio*, Lupita’s gaze sparked pride. “I feel proud,” she said after clearing a substantial area with her machete. “When I just entered Unisur, I couldn’t do it and look at me now!” She looked tired, but marveled. Another student, who had just enrolled at Unisur, looked unhappily at her own unsuccessful attempts to use the machete. Lupita comforted her: “You just started; I’ve already been at Unisur for three years.”³³²

The performance of peasant skills by students and teachers was repeated during every *tequio*. Both from more urban backgrounds, Lupita and Enrique made efforts to learn the craft of *chaponar*. Not only for practical reasons, but because such *tequio* practices are considered as emblematic for communal life. In similar vein, Upoeg leaders articulated certain ideals in the name of community life as part of its democratizing project, such as assembly decision-making. At Unisur, these aspects of rural indigenous and Afromexican community governance are also a guide for students, who are on their way to become professionals embedded in community life.

Unisur teachers bring practices of community governance, also referred to as communitarian practices or *usos y costumbres*, back to historical ways of organizing in rural indigenous and Afromexican communities. They recognize their complex and long history. One teacher explained that these *usos y costumbres* are “not precisely pre-Hispanic, for it was molded by the Crown. We need to be real clear on this, it was the Crown that organized these communities and endowed them with the structure we know as forms of traditional government.”³³³ The meanings and workings of communal practices such as *tequio* have changed over time. Whereas Bonfil Batalla (1996) sees communal work as a community tradition of social sharing and solidarity, other scholars have traced the roots of *tequio* from the pre-Hispanic period toward postrevolutionary times, and identify a fine line between consensual communal work and coerced labor, for instance enforced by colonizers or Mexican elites (Smith, forthcoming).

The meaning of *tequio* is still contested today. This has to do with how certain narratives romanticize community life while failing to take into account the reproduction

³³¹ Fieldnotes, August 31, 2015.

³³² Fieldnotes, October 12, 2015.

³³³ Input by a Unisur teacher during the roundtable discussion “Guerrero: Organización Popular, Violencia y Protesta,” second session “Violencia y Respuesta Comunitaria,” at the Social Sciences department of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) Azcapotzalco, October 29, 2015.

of existing hierarchies. Apart from that, indigenous governance models based on notions of participation, deliberation, and autonomy fit comfortably with neoliberal models of governance (Hernández Castillo 2016, 126). Orta (2013, 128) calls this the “complex embrace of indigenous and neoliberal models of governance,” where processes of decentralization and cultural recognition may be accompanied by trends toward self-reliance and the outsourcing of state tasks. Drawing upon these discussions, I will now examine how Unisur’s ambition for students to improve their communities played out in the tensions produced by the usage of communal life as reference. I present the dynamics of a PAR exercise where students evaluated community improvement in El Mesón. Thereafter, I turn to the personal stories of students on their efforts to become communal professionals.

5.1 Evaluating Community Improvement

Mid-December 2015, I organized a Participatory Action Research exercise with Unisur students of the community in El Mesón. In the small concrete building painted with Unisur logos, we spent the afternoon reflecting upon the role of Unisur in the community. I introduced the exercise that I had named the Tortilla Diagram to seven students. The idea behind the exercise was for students to evaluate how the academic program and institution of Unisur might affect the community. The Unisur department in El Mesón had existed for three years when I arrived, so there was no generation of graduated students to put Unisur’s ideals into practice yet. Still, I was curious about how students perceived Unisur’s relevance to the community. By making a diagram, the discussions of the students about the role of Unisur in the community could take a concrete form. I put one large piece of paper in the shape of a tortilla, which depicted the community, on the wall. Throughout the exercise, I asked students to place tortilla-shaped papers on the diagram. Every paper tortilla presented a specific topic that came up. The bigger the impact of Unisur on the community in regard to this topic, the bigger the size of the paper tortilla had to be. In the end, the diagram full of paper tortillas was to make visible the students’ perspectives on the ways in which Unisur affected their community. Ideally, the exercise would trigger new insights and maybe even directions for action.

With the large tortilla poster on one wall of the room, the students started discussing and diagramming. The conversation turned to the influence of Unisur students in community assemblies, the most important communal decision-making body. One student argued that more prosperous members of the community exercised substantial influence during these assemblies: “They’re the ones who contribute the most, I’m really limited economically.” This was a reason to more often keep quiet. They discussed the impact of socioeconomic inequality on local decision-making. I asked them about the influence of Unisur on these economic differences. “The simple fact there’s a school here . . . really, in a community, a university?” It was exceptional to have a university in a rural

community and it therefore gave them new future opportunities. While diagramming, they returned to the topic of community assemblies.

Martin: We can vote, but we let the elders speak. I attend but only as an observer, you see, I've never participated. Simply put, the elders have more experience, give solutions to problems thanks to the experience they've lived during their time here.

Estela: It's their fear of the young people in this type of situation. Young people have abilities too, fresh ideas we could implement. They could work. The community has always been run by older people, and we saw that it didn't work, right? They close the door on young people, they don't let us give opinions. Maybe they let us speak, but they don't do anything with our ideas.

Estela observed who made the decisions in the community, that is, older people and men: "If you don't pitch in [financially], they won't let you speak. . . much less if you're a woman. This happens a lot, discrimination against women." I then asked about the role Unisur played in these local dynamics of gender and age. Students gave examples. In Unisur, not only the women cook, but also men make tortillas. Others pointed out the female participation in agricultural collective work. On the topic of age, one student brought up the election of an exceptionally young second *comisario* [submunicipal leader] as a success story. Many Unisur students had voted for this young candidate, who had obtained an official position in village politics. They saw this as a sign of change that adolescents would be listened to in the future.³³⁴

After long discussions, night had fallen and we were forced to go outside. The Unisur building had no electricity, so we used an outdoor light to evaluate the Tortilla Diagram that had emerged from the exercise. With the large paper placed on the ground, students reflected on the outcome. The biggest shaped tortilla said "culture", then "ethnicity." Students argued that to change the community, first they needed to change their own ideas regarding these topics. That was what they were doing in Unisur. In the end, students identified the smallest tortilla in the diagram, which was about "age." Someone commented: "It's about positioning ourselves as young people." Reflecting on the general outcome, the students agreed to visit the community leader and discussed how to pitch a proposal to encourage their participation in community affairs: "It's taped!" one student joked in reference to my recordings and as a way to hold the others accountable.

The PAR session showed how Unisur students faced difficulties in being taken seriously. The lack of participation of adolescents in community assemblies made this especially apparent. The possibilities of participation for women proved to be even more difficult, as the limits set by age intersected with gender prejudices. Being young and

³³⁴ Participatory Action Research session "Diagramming," December 11, 2015.

female could make it twice as difficult to convince their communities of their capabilities. On top of that, the voices of poor inhabitants weighed less than those of their more prosperous peers, and Unisur students often belonged to poorer families. While the founders of Unisur had placed their hopes on the younger generation to become agents of change, the same generation struggled to have a voice in their own communities on multiple fronts. The disjunction between Unisur's emphasis on communal life and students' real-life experiences with hierarchies within their own communities raises questions about the possibilities for students to accomplish their envisioned mission. Their experiences asked for the rethinking and broadening of the political issues upon which Unisur's program was designed, especially taking into account social hierarchies of age and gender. What is more, students often presented inclusion in the higher education system as an opportunity. All the while, Unisur was still in negotiations with the state over recognition, something that complicated the students' considerations. To understand how such tension played out in everyday life, I turn to student efforts to become communal professionals.

5.2 Rethinking Community Improvement

All first-year students were gathered in one class during the *cierre de módulo* in El Mesón. It was December 2014. The students were asked to think about their preferences in regard to the bachelor tracks. A Unisur teacher wrote the objectives of the three bachelor tracks on the blackboard:

- 1) Sustainable Agriculture: to train professionals for agricultural production and sustainable economic development based on a consensus among communities.
- 2) Governance of Municipalities and Territories: to train better community public servants to attend to the communities, not bureaucrats. Recover indigenous and Afromexican forms of governing, and accompany leaders during negotiations with the state.
- 3) Justice and Human Rights: to recover processes of community justice, orient communities and individuals to resolve interpersonal, inter-community and agrarian conflicts.

Unisur graduates are meant to revive communal practices in the areas of sustainable agriculture, community and municipal governance, and justice. Rodríguez Wallenius (2005, 248–50) calls this style “solidary community development” when communal practices serve as the basis for production and reproduction of everyday activities of peasants and indigenous people through relations of solidarity, mutual aid, and redistribution. Such communal practices are understood as an alternative to development models based on universalist and normative modernist principles (see Escobar 1995;

Esteva 2011). However, many problems of communities cannot be solved locally since they are embedded in larger societal structures. Unisur seeks to prepare students as professionals able to navigate within such structures to the benefit of communities, for instance by becoming human rights councilors or by learning the craft of *gestionar*, that is, requesting state funds or loans and manage community development projects. I draw on the experiences of Unisur students Enrique, Jorge, Carolina, and José Luis to assess how Unisur students think about and work toward their future roles as “communal professionals.”

Jorge was thirty years old when I met him. He was one of the few students who lived close to El Mesón but traveled to Cuajinicuilapa to attend the bachelor track Justice and Human Rights. The university in El Mesón only offered the bachelor track Sustainable Agriculture and this was not something Jorge was interested in. He worked on the land every day and came to the university to learn something else, as he put it. He had worked in the US for about six years as an illegalized migrant: “Money up there really goes a long way; you can eat for a month on a hundred bucks.”³³⁵ After various deportations and problems with drugs, he was back to work his family’s land, growing corn, beans, and hibiscus. Jorge was the youngest child of his family but already an important breadwinner. With economic hardship and the failed promise of migration, Jorge overcame his fear of being too old to study and enrolled at Unisur.

In Cuajinicuilapa, he always carried his notebook along under his arm and was especially intrigued by philosophy. For his research project, Jorge had chosen to study the existential experience of crossing borders. Besides learning about critical theory, Jorge enjoyed the occasional afternoons at the beach and other university trips that gave him the chance to visit other places in Guerrero and Mexico City. This was not a natural given for Jorge, who was place bound and for whom work took up most of his time. In general, the importance of Unisur as a place of leisure and peer encounters was an important part of its appeal. Where Jorge enjoyed Unisur’s bachelor track and the university’s social aspects, he was less enthusiastic about community life. During his time in the US, he had sent money to support the community festivities, but, after his return, Jorge still had no voice in community affairs. To partake in assemblies, he needed to marry, and for that, he needed an income. The little money Jorge had saved now was all spent on traveling back and forth to Unisur in Cuajinicuilapa. Knowing he felt a bit left out of community affairs, I asked him what he thought about Unisur’s ambition to develop community improvement projects. He could envision possibilities, but money was always an obstacle, as he explained:

Imagine I start a fishing project to provide every household in my community with a fish basin, so they don’t need to pay the high prices for fish coming from other

³³⁵ Interview with Jorge, October 8, 2015.

places. It is easy to get all the signatures from the authorities in the community. But, afterwards, I need to go to Ayutla for paperwork. Who will pay for my trip to Ayutla and the food that I need to buy there? And what about the work on the fields that I'm missing out? And, if things go badly, when officials don't respond positively, I need to go to Chilpancingo, even further away, to arrange everything. And not only once, no, you need to go ten times, back and forth, waiting and waiting, until they'll talk to you. It costs 300 *pesos* [approximately 14 euros] for a round trip.³³⁶

Jorge referred to the practice of promoting projects, *gestionar*, something that he believed was out of reach for him as a poor peasant. The distribution of state resources and development projects is intimately connected to clientelism (Grindle 2007, 177). Rural communities rely on intermediaries to bring projects to the community, which, in any case, not often take off. Little accountability makes corruption widespread, and communities often spend development loans or funds on immediate necessities rather than long-term investments (Overmeyer-Velázquez 2010, 146). Notwithstanding the results, the imaginary of socioeconomic improvement in rural Mexico has continued to be centered on such development projects. Some time ago, Nuijten (2003, 197) studied how Mexico's bureaucracy has the ability to overcome people's disillusion and makes them hopeful for new development projects to take off. Also for many Unisur students, becoming communal professionals was connected to this particular imaginary of development. When students such as Jorge have no access to development funds, the realization of this ambition is no easy task. This was a more general dilemma, as recounted by a graduate from Santa Cruz del Rincón: "If I ask somebody from Unisur 'What will you do after Unisur?' he will tell you, 'Help my *pueblo*,' but how?"³³⁷

Unisur students had to be visionary to give shape and content to being a professional at the service of the *pueblo*. Yet, the lack of state recognition of Unisur narrowed down their possibilities. It would be easier to operate within state bureaucracies and organizations once one became part of the professional class. Without diplomas as a possible vehicle to climb the socioeconomic ladder, the continuance of everyday hardship distressed students. One day, when Jorge and I sat on the veranda of his house, stripping the freshly harvested, deep red hibiscus flowers of its heart to prepare them for local sales, he said: "Philosophy's okay, but you need money. When I get sick here, I'm just gonna die. My family's got no money to pay for a doctor. Who cares about ideology? Sometimes it's so complicated, so difficult. Who cares about Marx when what you need is money? Being poor is okay, but not *this* poor. It's like religion: it's thinking about the future, always the

³³⁶ Conversation with Jorge, October 6, 2014.

³³⁷ Conversation with Mateo, December 8, 2015.

³³⁸ Conversation with Jorge, September 21, 2014.

future. . . . then Heaven. All about the future. That's what it's like at Unisur.”³³⁸

Every once in a while, Jorge criticized what he described as Unisur's tendency to promote liberating ideas without bringing effective socioeconomic improvement to his everyday life. This dilemma reflects more general concerns about material hardship experienced by indigenous and Afro-descendant people in Latin America: “Arguably, political gains with respect to consciousness-raising, cultural and political rights, and perhaps even of rights to territory and resources must precede the construction of sustainable economies by providing cultural and institutional guarantees. The question is whether people can afford—literally afford—to wait for those conditions to be in place” (Smith 2007, 242). With regard to Unisur's twofold ambitions of forging change in communities, as well as social inclusion by means of higher education, Jorge was left with questions of how and when. It did not stop Jorge from investing money and committing to the university. Both the classes themselves and the prospect of graduation were sufficiently appealing.

Before his enrollment at Unisur, Enrique had crossed the border to the US three times, starting at age fifteen. With the prospect of imprisonment in 2009, he chose to return to Mexico. He found employment in Mexico City, where he had lived for most of his life, but started studying in Guerrero, where he had his roots. Unisur was his only option because he had difficulties with certifying his US high school diploma. Once enrolled in Unisur, Enrique became an impassioned advocate of Afromexican identity. He planned to organize a cultural bus tour from Mexico City to Guerrero to educate his fellow *chilangos* (inhabitants of Mexico City) about Afromexicans. This focus was prompted by his own experiences. In both Mexico City and California, people sometimes questioned his Mexican nationality because of his black phenotype. After having spent time at Unisur, he was inspired by Upoeg activities in the community where his family lived: “Unisur convinced me, it led me to make commitments with my community.”³³⁹ On Enrique's request, he became an official member of his community of origin during a general assembly. From then onward, he could claim his family's parcel of land and build his own house. At the same time, he needed to live up to the financial and social responsibilities of local *usos y costumbres*. When he could not participate in *fajinas* because of his work in Mexico City, he paid a compensation. Even though the costs were substantial, Enrique remained excited. At a time in which rural areas in Mexico experienced an exodus of young adolescents, Enrique went against the grain by moving from a city to a rural community, revaluing his roots and identity in the process.

For his research project, Enrique decided to study the challenges faced by Upoeg. This fitted his bachelor track in Governance and Municipalities. According to his analysis, community commitment to Upoeg had declined because of the burden of

³³⁹ Interview with Enrique, December 19, 2015.

providing for police sustenance in times of drought. I accompanied him in what he called the promotion of a community kitchen for the Upoeg police. It was to be run and build by the community where his family lived. We spent days on end visiting community and Upoeg leaders who pledged support to his project. As a next step, Enrique needed to look for financial and material support.

We traveled together to the nearby municipal administrative office and were welcomed by the general secretary and the private secretary. Enrique started his pitch: “We are part of the university Unisur, and that university asks me to develop a project for my community.” While he laid out his detailed plan to build a kitchen for the community police, one of the secretaries interrupted him with a positive response. He assured Enrique that the mayor would fully support it and referred to the government program called Crusade Against Hunger. The person in charge was a friend of his, and he would give him a call tonight: “Give us fifteen days, then we’ll let you know, but don’t worry, your kitchen’s a done deal.” When we left the municipal office, Enrique was somewhat confused. But, on our way back to his community, he posted a proud message in the Unisur Whats App group “we’re here in negotiations for the community.”³⁴⁰

Enrique had requested material and financial support for his community to run its own kitchen, an communitarian kitchen (*comedor comunitaria*), but he was offered a state-controlled one. The Crusade Against Hunger was a federal development program aimed to eradicate poverty in Mexico’s rural communities by building community kitchen’s (*comedores populares*). These would be run by external supervisors and various scholars have seen this program as part of a counterinsurgency strategy: “Using the pretext of the crusade against hunger program, the armed forces have opened community kitchens in the Montaña, and subjected civil society to rigorous controls” (Hernández Navarro 2014, 129; see also Gledhill 2015, 136 about the case in Chiapas). For the same reason, the Crac-PC and Upoeg, including Enrique’s community, distanced themselves from the state kitchens. When Enrique realized this, he turned to his contacts in Mexico City and the US to look for alternative funding for his Unisur project.

Enrique’s experience illustrates the difficulty to achieve the goal of improving his community through communal processes because of problems with funding. By appealing to state-led funds, he encountered the ambiguous side of development. Some time ago, Ferguson (1990) described how development has depoliticizing effects while extending the reach of the state into society. In a similar way, current development interventions are also perceived as having political motives (Gledhill 2015, 20–22), as illustrated by the objectives of the Crusade Against Hunger to regulate political activism. For Enrique, state funding came with conditions that unsettled his ideas about improvement as Unisureño. He continued to creatively look for possibilities to carry out his project on his own terms, thereby reappropriating and rethinking development. But, like Jorge, Enrique also cast

³⁴⁰ Fieldnotes, October 13, 2015.

doubts about the future: “Sometimes I have doubts. Is this what I want, Unisur for the rest of my life? If officials check my papers, they’ll say ‘Ah Unisur, counter-hegemony, no thank you.’ But if the Crac and Upoeg hear ‘Unisur,’ they welcome us to work there. But then, there is always the problem of money. Do I want this, my entire life in Guerrero, living this way?”³⁴¹ Communal practices appealed to Enrique as a way to reimagine his personal life as well as his community, but he also worried about his financial prospects. Students found themselves oscillating between Unisur’s ideas of making community changes and looking for personal socioeconomic improvement. With one foot in Guerrero and another foot in Mexico City, Enrique stayed connected to employment possibilities in the city.

Carolina, twenty-five years of age, was generally in good spirits when I arrived at the department of Cuajinicuilapa. After high school, she had enrolled in a governmental social service program. In exchange for voluntary work at a preschool, the program offered her a three-year university scholarship. She went to the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN) in Acapulco, but did not last long. She felt unsafe in Acapulco, one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico, and said to learn nothing in the overcrowded classrooms. When Unisur was founded in Cuajinicuilapa, she changed to the new university in her hometown. Carolina lived in Cuajinicuilapa’s outskirts. When we walked on the unpaved and unkept road toward Carolina’s house, dogs, chickens, and small children welcomed us upon arrival. In her neighborhood, people dumped garbage on the streets and she intended to organize recycling workshops. She was enrolled in the Justice and Human Right track and her research project was about the issue of environmental pollution from a human rights perspective. Initially, however, Carolina had chosen another topic for research.

Carolina told me what most concerned her in Cuajinicuilapa: “The *narcos* and everything they do, the killings, the assaults, the stealing . . . we cannot leave our house at night because you don’t know who you run into. I wanted to know so badly, why . . . why is this happening here?”³⁴² For her and other students in Cuajinicuilapa and Acapulco, community life was under the shadows of insecurity and violence. This research project, however, was not feasible for security reasons. When Unisur started in 2007, violence had not yet reached the levels Guerrero would experience some years later. Teachers who had been part of Unisur since its very beginning explained how university ambitions had changed along with societal circumstances. Unisur’s general ambitions were extended to keeping students out of crime, as one teacher said in 2015: “I firmly believe that a student at Unisur, means one less hit man, one less *narco*.”³⁴³ Carolina once said that it

³⁴¹ Conversation with Enrique, April 3, 2014.

³⁴² Conversation with Carolina, September 16, 2015.

³⁴³ Interview, October 21, 2015.

was common for teenagers in her neighborhood to join criminal groups because of the lack of other prospects.

At the end of her studies, Carolina worked at the Unisur radio station and volunteered at a literacy program for children and the elderly: “It is for humble, poor people, that is what we learned at Unisur.”³⁴⁴ She was happy to contribute to her community, but also cast doubts about how to do so more professionally. Carolina knew from the start that her career at Unisur would not allow her to work as a lawyer. Instead, she would become a “human rights councilor.” While students like Carolina tried to imagine what the actual work of a “human rights councilor” looked like, José Luis, a graduate from the department in Santa Cruz del Rincón, had an idea. He found an example to follow: “The community is still marginalized because no one is trained to orient, to devise plans to defend our rights. The only guy who’s defended us, including me, is my fellow citizen, Manuel Vásquez, that young man. He’s the only one who sent in documents. He’s always been around for us, proposing projects to the authorities, obtaining resources, even workshops for the indigenous. He’s the only one who’s returned [to his community], just like Bruno Plácido.”³⁴⁵

José Luis followed the lead of Manuel Vásquez, Upoeg’s communitarian lawyer. Originally from San Luis Acatlán, he played a fundamental role in the legal struggles about *usos y costumbres* in Ayutla de los Libres (studied in chapter 5). José Luis looked up to him because of the way in which Vásquez was able to legally protect his fellow community members and arrange funds and projects for his community. During my research, José Luis was among the most active graduates. He took part in Upoeg and Crac-PC activities and represented Unisur, for instance at the conference in Xalapa mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. Through these activities, he managed to give substance to the idea of the communal professional. At a certain point, José Luis also started another bachelor at a public university in Mexico City. This would improve his chances on the labor market and the eventual certificate would also enhance his credibility as a community leader. He found a way to reconcile efforts to make social changes and possibly enjoy social inclusion by turning toward a recognized university.

In this section, I have illustrated how students attempted to give meaning to the ideal of becoming professionals at the service of the *pueblo*. In student’s attempts to answer the question of “help my *pueblo*, but how?” they had to be visionaries to rethink notions of community life and development. The PAR exercise shows that students faced obstacles in their communities due to class, gender, and age hierarchies. Students attempted to navigate the difficulties, for instance, with their research projects. Sometimes, dependency on state finances could stand in tension with the imaginary of improvement envisioned by Unisureños. Other students found inspiration in examples set by Upoeg leaders. Many

³⁴⁴ Conversation with Carolina, September 16, 2015.

³⁴⁵ Interview with José Luis, September 25, 2015.

students became engaged in community processes in one way or the other, although not often in the professional capacity envisioned by Unisur. It proved hard to reconcile the double ambition of achieving community change and ending students' social exclusion, all embodied in a new type of university graduate. To get a full picture of what these dynamics tell us about the functions of grassroots intercultural education, the last section of this chapter turns to Unisur's broader civil society ambitions.

6. Civil Society: Individualization versus Collective Action

In Cuajinicuilapa, students often participate in events organized by Afromexican organizations. I joined students during a trip to El Azufre in Oaxaca to participate in the Encounter of the Pueblos Negros, alternately organized in Oaxaca and Guerrero by several NGOs. All the events had more or less the same program of cultural performances, lectures, and roundtable discussions, with dances in the evening, which were the favorite part of the event without a doubt. In El Azufre, Unisur students participated in these cultural dance performances and the roundtable about Afromexican adolescents and discrimination. They also participated in assemblies, marches, and other events organized by the Crac-PC, Upoeg, and other grassroots organizations. These brought students in contact with ideas and political efforts to collectively change the social circumstances of Afromexicans, rural, and indigenous people in the region and their relationship with the state. Mobilizing collectively had empowered rural citizens in Guerrero before, by building bargaining power vis-à-vis state institutions and local elites as a way of enforcing changes (see Bartra 1996, 2000). After having examined students' experiences with Unisur's ambitions on the personal and community level, I now zoom in on Unisur's ambition for students to become involved in civil society organizations and movements. I examine intercultural education as a "networking vehicle" (Gustafson 2009, 257).

Gabriel was a cheerful, twenty-four-year-old young man when I met him. His father was killed when he was younger and Gabriel had inherited his job at a governmental institute. Unisur offered him the opportunity to continue studying while working at the same time. At an earlier age, it had been one of Gabriel's dreams to study at the prestigious art academy of Bellas Artes in the city of Oaxaca. But, nowadays, art had become a side activity and political expression. For instance, as part of the community social service at Unisur, he was painting a local community center. In the small building where the municipality hosted cultural activities and workshops, Gabriel explained: "Here, at this time, I'm creating certain images that resemble the identity of Afromexicans."³⁴⁶ Most of Gabriel's paintings depicted historical images of cultural life that included political messages. For instance, the painting of a historical celebration of the yearly fair, the

³⁴⁶ Video material, September 15, 2015.

weeklong festivities in Cuajinicuilapa, drew attention to people's traditional cultural expressions, respect for nature, and local products, and thereby criticized contemporary consumption patterns and industrial development.

Just like Gabriel's paintings, I observed how the fair in Cuajinicuilapa had also become a platform to express Afromexican identity. In March 2014, the NGO AfricaMex had invited people from Cameroon to perform dances and cultural activities during the event. The intention was to strengthen connections with Cameroonians: "it's to show similarities with peoples on the continent; for example, the [AfricaMex representative] said that the Dance of the Devils in Cuajinicuilapa is really similar to a dance from that area."³⁴⁷ The visit of Cameroonians to Cuajinicuilapa also served as a preamble for other events organized by the Secretaría de Asuntos Indígenas (SAI) and NGOs, such as El Primer Encuentro de Afromexicanos y sus Raíces. Gabriel sometimes participated in these events, but mainly expressed his commitment to Afromexican struggles through his artwork. When we talked about Unisur's objective to educate what he called "social leaders," he said: "It is impossible to become a leader if you don't have money. If I, after finishing Unisur, want to be a leader, for instance for the Afromexican cause, they will ask me: what is it you bring? If I want to organize a forum or event, you need money. First you need to have participated in events and have raised money to organize an event. Only then they will take you seriously. If you don't bring in funds, you get nowhere."³⁴⁸

For Gabriel, it was hard to imagine to be a promoter of the Afromexican agenda without resources. It seemed easier to get involved in organizations such as the Crac-PC or Upoeg, which were based in community structures, than in the NGOs that fought for Afromexican rights. A member of one of those NGOs in Cuajinicuilapa, México Negro, told me that some NGOs focused more on consciousness-raising in communities, while others were more concerned with lobbying and acquiring development funds.³⁴⁹ After graduation from Unisur or during their studies, some students became involved in such NGOs through personal or university networks. But, as I showed in chapter 6, Unisur also faced difficulties in maintaining the links to the movements that initially had given rise to the university. Various attempts were made to revive such alliances, but students were not automatically embraced by such organizations after graduation. After graduation, Unisur alumni from Cuajinicuilapa found work in local governments, stores, schools, restaurants, or the hospital. Some of them still engaged in social struggles, for instance through political art or local radiobroadcasting. But such efforts were not always connected to more collective struggles, which leads to what I refer to as the individualization of politicized identity. It left students like Gabriel with aspirations, but

³⁴⁷ Chávez, Lourdes. 2014. "Anuncian organizadores un encuentro de afromexicanos para lograr su aceptación como tercera raíz de la cultura." *El Sur de Acapulco*, March 11, 2014. Accessed July 15, 2018. <https://suracapulco.mx/archivoelsur/archivos/134349>.

³⁴⁸ Conversation with Gabriel, September 15, 2015.

³⁴⁹ Interview, February 16, 2014.

without the means to translate these into more collective efforts.

Student experiences in Santa Cruz del Rincón were similar yet different. Unisur students became involved with grassroots organizations such as the Crac-PC and the anti-mining campaign, as described in chapter 6. Another group of graduates was setting up a collective project to open what they called a House of Knowledges. It was meant for Tlapaneco children and the elderly, where they could speak the variety of Tlapaneco languages and exchange stories and knowledge to safeguard their survival. At the same time, students experienced the consequences of the unfulfilled aspiration of Unisur: the inclusion of rural and ethnic minority adolescents into society with certified diplomas. In the rural mountains of Santa Cruz del Rincón, it was generally harder to find employment than in the more urbanized setting of Cuajinicuilapa. Importantly, this is a broader concern. Students from public intercultural universities experienced the same problem of finding appropriate work, despite the fact that they were in possession of a valid diploma. Employment, income, and social mobility are mainly available in large cities and not in more rural areas, which is where most of the public intercultural institutions are based (Schmelkes 2014, 138).

The continuation of material hardship produced another kind of individualization than the one experienced by Gabriel. Graduates needed to think of themselves and their families. Notwithstanding Unisur's attempts to achieve social inclusion by demanding state recognition, poverty often remained a personal matter rather than a collective problem. Accordingly, when it came down to engaging in civil society organizations, students balanced their personal needs, commitment to struggles, and (im)possibilities for action. I turn to the experiences of Karla to see how she managed to strike a balance.

Karla was in her late twenties and her father owned a shop in Cuajinicuilapa's center, where she helped out. In the shop, Karla was often to be found behind the screen of her laptop. There, she showed me the pictures she posted on Facebook. Dressed in a mixed style of clothing, she presented herself as Afroindia on social media. In the classes of *tronco común*, Karla learned that her grandmother on her mother's side was actually Zapoteca, who had stopped speaking the indigenous language to avoid discrimination, while her great-grandfather on her father's side was Afromexican from Guerrero: "I call myself Afromexican, though I'm part of both. . . I feel like my ideas, my way of being is reflected more on the Afro side than the indigenous one."³⁵⁰ She also explained to me the appeal of Afromexican identification: "*Machismo* exists everywhere... but there's an aspect of Afro women, they fight back. There's something inside us that never leaves, it's in our Afro blood." She gave meaning to her Afromexican roots by pointing to normative ethno-cultural representations about Afromexican femininity as strong and free-spirited. Karla appropriated some of these ideas in ways that gave her the tools to confront expressions

³⁵⁰ Interview with Karla, September 18, 2015.

of male dominance and superiority. Such representations gave meaning to the struggles for women's rights, which she became involved in at Unisur.

Several teachers at Unisur dealt with gender inequality, women's rights, and sexuality in their classes. Some of them employed their personal networks to get female students involved in workshops about women's rights organized by local and national NGOs. Such feminist programs often went hand in hand with ethnic and cultural struggles. During my research, Karla attended a workshop series titled Community feminism, an Afromexican perspective. She focused on sexual violence in her research project and, together with Cecilia, she founded an NGO. The entrance of Cecilia's house was decorated with the name of the NGO and, inside her home, an office space was cleared out. While Karla worked in her father's shop for a regular source of income, they applied for funding to organize workshops about sexual rights of Afromexican girls in secondary schools at the municipality. Karla and Cecilia also became regional representatives in state and national networks of indigenous and Afromexican adolescents promoting women's rights. Indigenous female Unisur students had similar experiences, as recounted by Laura: "I enrolled in *tronco común* and a [woman] professor shared a convocation from the UNAM with us. A convocation for indigenous women . . . a national-level course for many women from different countries. I enjoyed it. I met many women activists who form part of NGO's of women, and networks. I began to contact them after the course, we're in touch, they started to invite me."³⁵¹

For these female students, Unisur opened up spaces to engage in struggles for women's rights in and beyond their communities. They became part of existing NGO networks that facilitated the participation of female adolescents in struggles for ethnic minority women. Individual political commitment became translated into collective action. Furthermore, students such as Karla and her teachers diversified the educational notions upon which the university program was designed. By making women's rights part of the university agenda, which was not among the struggles that initially gave rise to Unisur, they broadened the meaning of diversity applied within the university.

It is important to note that, however, for female Unisur students who aspired to engage in non-feminist organizations, experiences with *machismo* could become an obstacle. While students such as Karla had the chance to use the knowledge and experiences learned at Unisur in feminist organizations, when it concerned other political issues, female students experienced similar or even higher barriers than their male peers. Unisur student Patricia managed to overcome these. As a fervent promoter of Afromexican women's rights and Unisur student, she became the first female representative of the newly constituted municipal government in Ayutla de los Libres in 2018. Accordingly, Patricia became a municipal leader of local democratization processes initiated by Upoeg.

³⁵¹ Participatory Action Research session "Story Telling," December 14, 2015.

7. Concluding Comments

This chapter started with a congress for intercultural graduates in Xalapa, where the multiple functions of intercultural education were debated. The variety in functions can be traced back to the different political projects behind intercultural higher education. In the previous chapter, I studied Unisur's broader project to change educational institutions and political relations between rural, indigenous, and Afromexican people and state level officials. By making authoritative claims using the notion of *pueblos*, the university worked toward a particular model of legitimate university governance. This chapter looked at how other ambitions unfolded on the personal, communal, and societal level. I identified Unisur's political-academic aspirations and the ways in which these played out inside and outside the university through student imaginaries and activities. The academic program often related to the notion of *pueblo*, as discussed in the previous chapter. On the personal level, cultural-ethnic assertions of one's *pueblo* encouraged political identities and community commitment. In their villages or neighborhoods, students were taught to think about improvement in line with communal life, communal forms of organizations and governance. Joining grassroots organizations was another way to defend the rights of the *pueblo* as imagined collectivities of marginalized peoples. Unisur's academic program also aspired social inclusion for students through higher education. I called this the "double push" toward transformative inclusion. In this conclusion, I reflect on how students balanced the possibilities and contradictions of Unisur's program, and what it tells us about the functions of grassroots intercultural education.

Unisur attempted to connect processes of professionalization and community commitments by simultaneously meeting academic standards and promoting communal life. In a context where youngsters might otherwise be drawn to migration or even into local criminal groups, this combination appealed to students. Unisur gave them access to higher education, something that would have otherwise been unattainable for most. And the critical academic program in particular broadened students horizons, as Unisur introduced them to new knowledges, places, people and political networks. Nevertheless, students often found themselves oscillating between Unisur's various ambitions. Students themselves needed to give meaning to the ambitious category of "professionals at the service of the *pueblo*", invented by Unisur's founders, while figuring out how to make a living. They faced the hierarchies more typical of rural communities, which limited the possibilities to "improve their communities," and their views of what such a change might look like. Students depended on their creativity as they searched for ways to make their project work in favor of at least part of Unisur's ambitions. Becoming a community-based activist was often easier than becoming a professional, while it was precisely the reconciliation of the two that was Unisur's objective.

Embedding both transformative and affirmative ambitions in an intercultural university had not turned into a clear-cut educational recipe. Especially the lack of

certifications weighed heavily on the entire project. It tended to limit the space for change opened up by student enrollment at Unisur. Students needed to balance their commitment to struggles and personal needs. The university emerged out of grassroots struggles, placing hopes on the younger generation to become future leaders. When Unisur served as the networking vehicle as it aspired to be, efforts toward more collective political action opened up. Other students continued to face poverty individually rather than as part of a collective fight over economic justice. This issue brings us to the broader dilemma that education cannot be a way out of poverty when it is not part of a wider state restructuring, and of projects to rethink development, democracy, and socioeconomic distribution (Gustafson 2009, 280–81). Paradoxically, Unisur's efforts toward more systemic changes in terms of democratization, as described in the previous chapter, precisely developed in a way that made education the central focus of attention. While the university attempted to expand the meaning of intercultural education in Guerrero, I have demonstrated how Unisur came across the dilemmas that were also faced by other social movements. Unisur was caught up in attempts to reconcile activism for long-standing and systemic political change with bringing more short-term socioeconomic relief.

Students were often ready to make a change, but the organizations and communities they engaged with, and society at large, were much less ready for them to actually do so. Students responded by playing a role in rethinking the notions on which intercultural education at Unisur rested. Reflecting on the exclusions that took place on all fronts of their lives, they identified new directions for social action. Social work, artistic expressions, development projects, language revitalization efforts, NGO work and social movement involvement; these are some of the ways students participated in projects for change. Without diplomas, dreaming of alternative futures was extra challenging for Unisureños, but it was a challenge many of them were still willing to take on.

1. Introduction

This dissertation has looked at the way activist organizations reimagine and reconstruct education and security in Guerrero. The objective of this final chapter is to bring my analysis of Unisur and Upoeg together and draw out some general contributions. Situated in the field of political anthropology, I employed a conceptual approach of political authority in relation to multiculturalism in Latin America. I studied how Unisur and Upoeg made efforts to realize their cultural, economic, and social demands within the institutional and legal spaces opened up by multiculturalism, and within a context of deepening violence. For that purpose, I subsequently examined my own ethnographic practices and methodological choices, historical trends in Guerrero's activism, the emergence and development of a regional policing organization, legal activism and rights struggles, university politics and educational governance, and the workings of university pedagogy and the curriculum. In this final chapter, I present two contributions to scholarly discussions. First, I elaborate on the benefits of my conceptual approach for the study of the pluralization of authority. My notion of political authority has been helpful to understand the way in which grassroots organizations challenge and remake the power of the state and other authoritative actors. It brought out the broader political projects behind activism, such as Upoeg's ambition to strengthen the fourth level of governance and Unisur's aspiration for radical democratization. It also examined the impact of these projects on local communities and political relations. Second, I examine the significance of my findings for scholarly debates about grassroots organizations involved in rethinking the course of state-led multiculturalism. I take into account the specificities of education and policing as mobilizing strategies in conditions of violence, as well as the contradictions such strategies have produced. In the final part of this chapter, I look at some recent developments in Guerrero since I concluded my fieldwork in December 2015. I present the continuities in claims and strategies and new roads taken by the organizations. This brings me to recommendations for future research and to some final methodological reflections concerning engagement and research in violent settings.

2. Reflections on Political Authority

I have used political authority as the frame of analysis. Especially the work of Smith (2003) has helped me to apply the concept of political authority to grassroots struggles. I looked at how groups attempt to locate legitimate authority in acts of governance of last resort. In struggles over security and education, Upoeg and Unisur remade the meaning of legitimate authority. They aimed at rearranging existing institutions of governance (municipal governments, the state department of education) according to these notions of legitimate authority. I studied how my participants tried to translate their aspirations into recognized institutions that had a final say over security, education, and governance more generally. For the organizations under study, it was precisely this process in which the potential for more systemic political change appeared and disappeared. I examined such political openings by concentrating on the diversity in claims and social practices of Upoeg and Unisur. It allowed me to shed light on how and when interactions with state and non-state actors led to contradictions that disrupted grassroots projects, pushed activism in other directions, or opened up new political possibilities.

My study of Upoeg showed how its activism developed and changed in interplay with societal conditions, internal pressures, and external responses. When conditions of insecurity increased in Guerrero, Upoeg engaged in practices of scale making and moving toward key political and economic locations to become an important player in Guerrero's complex political landscape. The repertoires of legitimacy employed by Upoeg were adapted to regional circumstances and audiences. The organization legitimized its policing practices with specific modes of organizing, such as community assemblies. Depending on the cultural-ethnic backgrounds of the local communities, it concerned *usos y costumbres* or *sistemas comunitarias*. When looking for support among the business sector, Upoeg capitalized on the state's ineffective fight against crime. By setting up a regional policing organization embedded in local communities and with broader support networks, Upoeg became engaged in conflicts and negotiations with other authoritative actors. As it moved from marginalized rural areas toward powerful urban centers, Upoeg created the conditions in which state actors, criminal organizations, and Upoeg itself entered into a relationship of unsteady tolerance, which, in turn, opened up political possibilities. Upoeg employed its bargaining power to restructure local political relations. Community assemblies and the representative status of elected community leaders (*comisarios*) were foregrounded as key elements of new and legitimate municipal governance. Using multicultural legislation, Upoeg eventually changed a municipal administration in the Costa Chica region and the notions of legitimate authority on which it rested. However, Upoeg's project stagnated in other areas. The strategy of upscaling policing toward powerful centers backfired precisely where drugs-related violence was most intense. There, Upoeg became mostly dependent on its coercive capacity. Rather than instituting its policing authority in new municipal political associations, local

conflicts with organized crime and other armed groups intensified.

In the case of Unisur, things fared differently. Compared to Upoeg, Unisur's activism was more constant, both in terms of assertions of legitimacy and its practices across time and space. Since the beginning of the project, Unisur leaders drew on the notion of *pueblo* as a collective subject and attempted to unite diverse social groups around the demand for a university. The claim was built on the distinctive participation of communities, leaders, and grassroots organizations through legitimate communal governance. By promoting a specific type of university governance, embedded in local support, Unisur leaders aimed to build a new institution that rearranged the political relations between rural, indigenous, and Afromexican peoples and the state. In its negotiations with state officials, Unisur's bargaining power largely depended on its ability to draw on the support of the *pueblos*. Locally, the university served as a vehicle for new community engagements, cross-regional alliances, and discussions over the meaning of a university from the *pueblos*. During my research, Unisureños leaders were unable to obtain the state recognition and support that would have enabled them to institutionalize their project of university governance. When the project to democratize public educational institutions had been stagnant for too long, the university gradually shifted its focus to other ambitions.

This study looked at social contestation over notions of legitimate authority and the particular ways in which organizations strove to institutionalize them. My understanding of the concept of political authority helped me to grasp the diversity of their activist practices and the ideals that drive these practices. Policing was not only about keeping citizens safe while intercultural education served as a platform for broader political struggles beyond the classroom. I believe that the concept proved especially useful for understanding the case of Upoeg, given the shifting nature of its claims and activities of policing, upscaling, assemblies, and legal activism. I was able to give a balanced account of the organization that does not foreground one aspect of its activism, that is, its mere use of force as an armed actor. In this sense, my approach can be of use for other political anthropological studies of the pluralization of authority. In reference to the work of Kyed (2018), I have expressed doubts about the usefulness of sovereignty to understand grassroots activism in settings such as Guerrero. I prefer the concept of political authority because I argue that the notion of sovereignty has some setbacks. First of all, it is strongly defined by its conceptual history based in coercion and violence. Sovereignty is therefore particularly useful in understanding the violent aspects of state and non-state actors. But, when armed activism is studied through the lens of competing and negotiated claims to sovereignty, one particular kind of asserting power might be foregrounded in the analysis, that is, the way power is exercised through violence and the threat thereof. Second, the concept is intrinsically related to the image and idea of the sovereign state. Sovereignty may draw too much attention to how grassroots politics resemble the kind of power originating from such a state. This may inhibit the study of the full range of grassroots political efforts, ambitions, and imaginations.

Then there are the doubts about governmentality approaches that study power as diffused throughout society. The contributions of analyzing the diffused character of power are unquestionable. By building on Foucault's theories to analyze how power is exercised in plural violent orders, studies concentrate on the complex entanglements and networks, which make up new governing arrangements, and the dispersed nature of that power. The focus on networks and dispersion, however, may present a problem. Following in the footsteps of Kyed (2018) once more, I have argued how it might shift attention away from the distinct and localized characteristics of social contestation, politics, and authority making by, for instance, community policing groups. Studying power as integrated in networks of pluralized authority may come at the detriment of an empirically grounded analysis of specific actors within these networks. Furthermore, Foucauldian approaches tend to privilege the study of how diffuse forms of power enable and constrain everyday life rather than accounting for the dynamic and collective ways in which people contest power (Li 2007, 25–26). By employing the notion of political authority, I was able to concentrate on the distinct ways in which collective actors mobilized to remake power to change their living conditions, and how they consciously seize political opportunities in plural orders. As mentioned before, new gaps and margins are likely to appear in settings of pluralized networks of authority. I examined the political possibilities that emerged in such networks. To fully grasp the wider political impact of Upoeg and Unisur, I linked their activism to the risks and challenges of ethnic activism in Latin America in general, and Mexico in particular. Let me now turn to the contributions of my dissertation to debates about multiculturalism.

3. Engaging Multicultural Contradictions

In the last decades, the politics of multiculturalism brought about positive changes for indigenous peoples in Latin America. Indigenous people, and increasingly Afrodescendants, experienced increased levels of social inclusion and acquired new institutional and legal spaces. Nevertheless, grassroots organizations faced a dilemma. Effective mobilizations for cultural rights did not often result in transforming oppressive social and institutional hierarchies based on culture, ethnicity, gender, and class. Could intercultural education and legislation that granted some degree of legal pluralism—the result of longtime indigenous struggles and “neoliberal multiculturalism”—be redirected toward more radical political alternatives? Guerrero provided a case study for this critical question. Here, I reflect on what Upoeg's and Unisur's experiences contribute to current debates about the transformative potential of multiculturalism in general, and indigenous autonomy and rural democratization in Mexico more specifically.

I have studied how Unisur and Upoeg played into multicultural policies, rights, and legislation for their activist projects. Both organizations made claims on the basis

of multicultural frameworks at different stages. When the state launched a policy to open intercultural universities, the eventual founders of Unisur seized the opportunity. The project started out as a struggle over the meaning of cultural recognition. Unisur leaders united diverse social groups around the project and connections to leaders and communities affiliated to the Crac-PC, Consejo de Pueblos Nahuas del Alto Balsas, Afromexican groups, CG500, and, later, Upoeg showed the objectives of the university. It would serve more ends than the socio-cultural inclusion of indigenous youth since it was also meant to deepen struggles over indigenous autonomy, territorial rights, and democratization. At an early stage, however, the state acted as the key arbiter in matters of multiculturalism in Guerrero. It decided against this university project and opened another one. Ever since, the university found itself outside the scope of multicultural legislation and sought to obtain recognition under it, but on their own terms.

Upoeg's engagements with multicultural policies were different. Initially, the organization tapped into conditions of insecurity. With violence increasing in Guerrero, Upoeg responded by politicizing the issue of insecurity. They made spatialized insecurity into a primary issue and helped set up cross-community cooperation for armed interventions in municipal towns. Once established, Upoeg attempted to operate from the legal space that granted indigenous rights and self-determination. Similar to what happened to Unisur, the effort to obtain a legal status for its policing groups initially failed. Upoeg's indigenous rights claims did not match its multi-ethnic support base in all areas where it was active, nor the strict cultural categories prescribed by legislation. By setting up their own university and policing organization together with regional coordinating bodies—Councils of Authorities, the Third Congress—Upoeg and Unisur drew the contours of their projects to turn multicultural spaces into more radical directions. However, they had to deal with the regulatory effects of multicultural policies. I have shown how Unisur and Upoeg sought to circumvent and harmonize these effects. Upoeg, for instance, turned to other laws, such as Guerrero's Organic Law of the Free Municipality, when its claims to multicultural rights were not granted. Unisur made appeals to the autonomy of universities to sidestep the state regulations for recognition. With each having to face its own dilemmas, the results of the projects varied.

Unisur had trouble reconciling the demand for social inclusion with more transformative ambitions. Its leaders became caught up in bureaucratic labyrinths, experienced troubles among its support base, and encountered the limits of their claims. With the legitimacy repertoire of *pueblos*, the university questioned the fixation of cultural difference. It refused to accept certain premises of state-led multicultural policies. However, compared to the notion of "indigenous *pueblos*," *pueblos* did not come with the legal protections indigenous movements had fought for. To realize its objectives, the university was therefore strongly dependent on its social support. Over the years, the institution had fallen into the paradox of seeing its local support decrease because of a lack of state recognition while chances to obtain such recognition could only grow

with the help of that local support. Students and affiliated communities wavered in their support of a project that promised benefits in the long run without bringing relief to more immediate needs. Years before, leaders of the Consejo de 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular (CG500) had done the opposite. In their negotiations with the state, they had often prioritized material demands over activism that granted them political rights over time (Overmyer-Velázquez 2010, 175). Eventually, it had made CG500 dependent on government assistance. Unisur was, unwillingly, spared such state dependency. The university offered critical education to students without access to higher education, according to its own pedagogy and governance model. It meant that more immediate material and social needs—school buildings, educational material, teacher salaries, student diplomas—remained unmet. For Unisur, inadequate results on that terrain unsettled its more transformative ambitions. Lacking state recognition effected Unisur’s political ambitions on the personal, community, and civil society level. After years of experiencing the pitfalls of operating outside a state-sponsored framework, getting graduates their diplomas became the first concern for Unisureños. Meanwhile, students and teachers made an effort to build bridges between personal needs and transformative ambitions in their everyday activities. Students played important roles in reconnecting the university to grassroots struggles and rethinking the pedagogical notions on which intercultural education at Unisur rested. With various obstacles on the road, students invented ways to promote change either as individuals or collectivities. The search for ways to effectively redefine intercultural education on local and state levels continued.

While Upoeg managed to use multicultural legislation for its diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and democratic ambitions, it did not work in every region of Guerrero. Policing activities across municipalities and regions gave Upoeg legitimate reasons to upscale local modes of governance. This coincided with the aspiration to strengthen the decision-making power and resources of community, the so-called “fourth level of governance.” In the Centro region, however, the armed takeover of municipal seats and towns caused an armed response from a rivaling policing group. Factional violence became a major problem and source of local polarization. Unlike Unisur, which never took its demands to court, Upoeg added legal battles to its activist arsenal. This was done in the Costa Chica region, because many municipalities in that area have indigenous populations. There, the organization merged itself inside the multicultural framework by holding referendums based on indigenous rights. It did so successfully in Ayutla de los Libres, where it enjoyed broad support. Upoeg’s vernacularization of legal discourses made it possible to build a multi-ethnic support base that worked out in its favor. Promoters used multicultural policies and legislation as a democratizing tool for rural—including non-indigenous—communities vis-a-vis municipal governments. In the process, however, contradictions surfaced. Upoeg largely neglected gender inequality and faced tensions between groups claiming indigenous, community, and women’s rights.

The new political structure of the first municipal government in Ayutla de los Libres that was elected according to *usos y costumbres* in 2018 was an attempt to deal with these issues.

Courts, laws, and referendums—institutions some scholars have qualified as the tools of liberalism (Postero 2017, 16)—were employed to reach beyond state-sanctioned multicultural politics of cultural recognition. Upoeg's diversity in strategies seemed key. For Unisur, education was the center of all its activism. It faced the dilemma of how to overcome the divergence between working toward utopian horizons and the reality of everyday needs. Upoeg was able to bridge that gap. It adjusted its strategies of activism to specific regions, audiences, and opponents. The interplay between strategies and societal conditions was essential for the results and their political impact. Only when it combined the political openings produced by fragmented authority with specific multicultural legislation was Upoeg able to radically restructure municipal governance. What I like to conclude more generally is that, when studying grassroots engagements with multicultural legislation, it is not a question of whether these are recognized or not, but what such processes bring about. Granting or a denial of recognition does not end activist creativity. Rather, my analysis has shown it opens the already mentioned margins and gaps in which groups insert themselves to try new things. It is in these margins and gaps Upoeg and Unisur found their way to specific peoples and places to further their grassroots projects. Inter-ethnic alliances were forged, legal constructions tried out, and new demands raised. Such openings, in turn, generated problems and contradictions concerning legality, poverty, conflicts, and violence. With my dissertation, I have given ethnographic insights into the political dynamics that take place at these moments. I hope that my analysis serves as input for ongoing discussions on the challenges of multiculturalism, which are still considerable, in Latin America. While multicultural regimes tend to facilitate remedies for those who fit institutionalized cultural and ethnic categories, the question remains how to actually transform long-standing hierarchies based on intersections of culture, ethnicity, gender, and class. Understanding grassroots efforts that want to answer this question is an important step.

4. The Walls of Autonomy

The previous reflections lend themselves to a wider argument about historical and contemporary struggles over (local) autonomy in Mexico. Struggles over municipal power date back to before the Mexican revolution (1910–17). Guerrero's popular movements have long protested against threats to municipal autonomy and waged struggles for the deepening of local democracy. They encountered difficulties in the forging of links between diverse social groups and demands. In postrevolutionary Guerrero, peasants mobilized around socioeconomic demands, while others pushed for political liberties as citizens.

This divergence worked against the unification of struggles against a local political system dominated by corporatist and *cacique* interests (Bartra 1996, 13). Occasionally, struggles converged, such as during the 1960s, when diverse social actors fought for economic justice, political participation, and women's rights in the Asociación Cívica Guerrerense (ACG). The ensuing dirty war separated the groups again. This raises the question of how aspirations and alliances for local autonomy and the deepening of democracy evolved under Guerrero's current conditions of multiculturalism and violence.

In the last few decades, struggles over autonomy have often been waged under the banner of indigenous rights. For the case of Oaxaca, Juan Martínez (2013, 141) writes about the way in which the municipality turned into the so-called floor and ceiling of autonomy, when indigenous action and representation remained confined to community and municipal levels. In Guerrero, the Crac-PC obtained indigenous self-determination over security and justice by building a regionwide institution in the Montaña region. In a similar vein, Unisur tried to achieve self-determination over intercultural education, and its leaders expanded the initiative across Guerrero's Montaña, Costa Chica, and Norte regions. By setting up Councils of Authorities, Upoeg initially sought to create new regional political associations in the Centro and Costa Chica regions. Such bodies were supposed to represent interests of rural villages beyond matters of security and justice. But, in conflicts and negotiations with state-level officials, Upoeg was forced to redirect its attention to the municipal level. As mentioned before, some scholars argued that the legal design of the municipality is unable to account for the diversity in governance models practiced by indigenous and multi-ethnic communities (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2013, 57–58). Through strategic litigation, Upoeg managed to turn the municipal government into a space where political power was restructured according to the diversity of local wishes. Ayutla's new governing structure was coordinated by representatives diverse in gender and ethnic identity, operating under the authority of all community leaders. While the municipality remained the so-called "ceiling" of autonomy, Upoeg was able to expand its reach toward non-indigenous populations and reconcile various claims for justice. I therefore argue that Upoeg broke the walls of autonomy established by multicultural legal arrangements rather than any potential ceiling. In other words, Upoeg was unable to build stable supramunicipal bodies but it did expand in horizontal ways, in terms of territory and by pushing ethnic-cultural boundaries. For Unisur, the establishment of relations of mutual respect with state-level institutions proved most challenging. In some communities, university departments reached *de facto* self-determination over education through active local participation and with the help of teachers from Mexico City. Nevertheless, without proper funding, the communities were weighted with a heavy responsibility in the long run. In the next section, I take a look at the latest developments around both Unisur and Upoeg and offer some ideas to build further on the results presented in my dissertation.

5. Revisiting Guerrero and Future Research

When my fieldwork ended in December 2015, I continued to follow the organizations under study mainly through news reports and Facebook updates. Being in the Netherlands, it was hard to establish the impact of certain events or developments. Nevertheless, since then, some events have confirmed the arguments I have made in this dissertation, whereas others have indicated new directions taken by the organizations. I first look at Unisur, especially at its recent strategies for university recognition as well as new engagements with Afromexican struggles. I then turn to Upoeg's policing activities, which have grown ever more complicated, and address the emerging connections of the organization to nationwide networks that promote indigenous autonomy.

Before the start of the academic year 2018–2019, Unisur teachers and students decided not to send out a call for new students and temporarily halt classes. The local press reported that this decision was made to reflect on internal university affairs and to develop a new strategy to obtain state recognition.³⁵² I already described the ups and downs teachers and students experienced in making Unisur work. In all those years, the university never took the far-reaching decision to interrupt classes. As such, the 2018 decision was a significant break from the past. However, in the ongoing search for state recognition, the university continued to draw on older strategies. In times of electoral shifts, university supporters attempted to work from within state institutions. During the 2018 elections, Mexicans not only elected Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) as their new president. In many states, including Guerrero, state and municipal elections were held. One of the newly elected local deputies in Guerrero was a Unisur supporter and she prepared a proposal for Unisur's recognition for Guerrero's Congress. She also requested funding for the university from various government bodies. On the federal level, AMLO's ambitious "Fourth Transformation" generated hope. AMLO announced the Programa de Universidades para el Bienestar Benito Juárez García, which involved the opening of one hundred public universities in the remotest areas of the country. In this context, Unisureños again appealed to federal government agencies for Unisur recognition. They saw opportunities in the policies announced by the new national government in the area of education and human rights.³⁵³

On the local level, Unisur continued to establish links with grassroots organizations. The university organized events to facilitate dialogues and collaboration between local organizations, and it supported efforts to make the rights of Afromexicans effective in

³⁵² Sarabio, Miguel 2019. "Continuara gestionando unisur de cuaji su reconocimiento." *El Faro de la Costa Chica*, January 14, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://en.calameo.com/read/000970727b87623b624af>.

³⁵³ Sarabio, Miguel 2019. "Unisur gestiona becas para estudiantes de Cuajinicuilapa." *El Faro de la Costa Chica*, February 21, 2019. Accessed May 17, 2019. <https://elfarodelacostachica.com.mx/2019/02/21/unisur-gestiona-becas-para-estudiantes-de-cuajinicuilapa>.

constitutional amendments. In 2019, two senators set up a consultation to reform Article 2 of the Mexican constitution to recognize Afromexicans as a cultural group. Unisur and other organizations expressed their support, and also demanded active involvement of Afromexican communities and organizations themselves in the process. This new cycle of negotiations over multicultural reforms is reminiscent of the contestation over multiculturalism that started with intercultural universities some twenty years ago. With experience in dealing with the possibilities and pitfalls of such political openings, Unisur might be able to play a role in finding legal pathways for the benefit of the manifold demands and struggles examined in this dissertation. The recognition of Afromexicans in the Mexican constitution should also be a focal point of future research. The state constitutions of Guerrero and Oaxaca have recognized Afromexican cultural rights. Attention is now focused on the federal state. Building further on the activist experiences presented in this dissertation, it would be of interest to study how Afromexican organizations deal with the possible constitutional changes.

In the meantime, Upoeg's community policing has increasingly come under fire. In 2019, Upoeg is still deeply enmeshed in factional conflicts and struggles over territory, especially in the Centro and Acapulco regions. In June 2019, for instance, a confrontation in El Ocotito between Upoeg and another group, which seems to be a renewed version of the Fusdeg, left three people death on both sides.³⁵⁶ According to state officials, organizations such as Upoeg are a cause of concern because, currently, eighteen criminal groups are said to control half of Guerrero's municipalities, among others through armed organizations that present themselves as community police or self-defense forces.³⁵⁷ They see Upoeg as part of armed branches of paramilitary and criminal groups engaged in violent confrontations with others.

The conditions in which Upoeg operates have changed significantly. In 2013, Upoeg was the first community policing organization that took up arms against organized crime. A report of the National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH) then counted "at least six community police and self-defense forces" operating in forty-six municipalities in Guerrero.³⁵⁸ Since then, the landscape of armed actors has grown even more fragmented. According to recent journalistic accounts, twenty-four community police or self-defense groups are active in Guerrero nowadays.³⁵⁹ All the while, insecurity has remained deeply

³⁵⁶ Flores Contreras, Ezequiel. 2019. "Enfrentamiento entre grupos de autodefensa deja seis muertos en Guerrero." *Proceso*, June 18, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/589066/enfrentamiento-entre-grupos-de-autodefensa-deja-seis-muertos-en-guerrero>.

³⁵⁷ Flores Contreras, Ezequiel. 2019. "Segob reconoce presencia de grupos paramilitares y delincuenciales en Guerrero." *Proceso*, January 31, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/569844/segob-reconoce-presencia-de-grupos-paramilitares-y-delincuenciales-en-guerrero>.

³⁵⁸ Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CNDH). 2013. "Informe Especial sobre los Grupos de Autodefensa y la Seguridad Pública en el Estado de Guerrero." D.F Mexico. Accessed July 21, 2017. http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/2016_IE_gruposautodefensa.pdf.

³⁵⁹ Flores Contreras, Ezequiel. 2019. "Segob reconoce presencia de grupos paramilitares y delincuenciales en Guerrero." *Proceso*, January 31, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/569844/segob-reconoce-presencia-de-grupos-paramilitares-y-delincuenciales-en-guerrero>.

troublesome. By 2018, the number of kidnappings, rapes, assaults, violent robberies, and extortions put the state on the list of the most unsafe places in the country.³⁶⁰ Between 2015 to 2018, Guerrero has counted six thousand homicides and an unknown number of disappeared people.³⁶¹ Meanwhile, the 2018 local elections did not result in significant political changes. *Proceso* reported that newly elected mayors and local deputies were from the same *cacique* networks as before, some of them allegedly linked to organized crime.³⁶²

In January 2019, Upoeg celebrated its sixth anniversary. According to Upoeg leader Bruno Plácido Valerio, the organization was active in twenty municipalities by then, with six thousand five-hundred police members.³⁶³ Upoeg announced plans to combat the theft of petrol, a nationwide cause for concern that was high on López Obrador's agenda.³⁶⁴ At the same time, Upoeg continued its upscaling strategy and focus on community assemblies.³⁶⁵ In September 2018, for instance, Upoeg, together with the Crac-PC, expanded their policing activities to the northern city of Tlapa. According to the founder of Human Rights Center Tlachinollan, anthropologist Abel Barrera Hernández, they did so on the request of family members of disappeared persons who were confronted with government inaction.³⁶⁶ Upoeg continued to face the need to legitimize its presence and actions, especially in non-indigenous settings. Discussions about insecurity, ethnic rights, and legitimacy are still taking place. Now, however, even more so than a few years ago, their activities unfold in an ever more fractured landscape of violence. Approximately six years after Upoeg, as the first community policing group, started to confront organized crime, and after which others followed, future research into the nature of the great variety of armed groups in Guerrero seems more than ever necessary. One can only understand the local impact and meanings of the pluralization of authority and armed groups by studying their distinctive everyday activities and claims. In other words, we need to focus on what it is they do and pursue rather than on what they resemble as an armed group.

³⁶⁰ López, Ixtlixóchitl. 2019. "En Guanajuato, Guerrero y Baja California, los municipios más violentos del país." *Proceso*, February 7, 2019. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/570909/en-guanajuato-guerrero-y-baja-california-los-municipios-mas-violentos-del-pais>.

³⁶¹ Flores Contreras, Ezequiel. 2018. "Guerrero: al poder, los caciques de siempre. Reportaje Especial." *Proceso*, July 20, 2018. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/543399/guerrero-al-poder-los-caciques-de-siempre>.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Sin Embargo*. 2019. "La UPOEG llega a su sexto aniversario con más de 6 mil elementos en 20 municipios de Guerrero." January 5, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.sinembargo.mx/05-01-2019/3518942>.

³⁶⁴ Téllez Adame, Dassaev. 2019. "Presenta Upoeg su estrategia para el combate al pillaje de carburantes." *La Jornada Guerrero*, January 17, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/index.php/sociedadjusticia/item/5735-presenta-upoeg-su-estrategia-para-el-combate-al-pillaje-de-carburantes>.

³⁶⁵ During the anniversary, Upoeg restated its willingness and plans to strengthen popular participation and to expand to regions plagued by violence and insecurity.

³⁶⁶ Yener Santos, Eduardo. 2018. "Incurción de UPOEG a Tlapa se debe a vacío del poder: Tlachinollan." *Quadratin*, September 14, 2018. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://guerrero.quadratin.com.mx/incursion-de-upoeg-a-tlapa-se-debe-a-vacio-del-poder-tlachinollan>.

This is even more important in a context that either understands community policing, self-defense forces, and criminal groups as fixed categories or lumps them together as one and the same.

Upoeg's activities on other terrains have also developed. The Communitarian Municipal Council of Ayutla de los Libres has continued to raise public and academic attention (Gaussens 2019). Upoeg's community lawyer proceeded to search for legal openings whenever the Council encountered difficulties.³⁶⁷ Furthermore, Upoeg promoters attended academic and civil society events to exchange experiences and discuss future pathways for indigenous self-determination and governance structures.³⁶⁸ As such, the Ayutla de los Libres model became part of a countrywide network of lawyers, academics, and grassroots organizations. In terms of future research, it is of great public and academic interest to study how the Ayutla de los Libres model unfolds. What are the specific legal and social challenges, and what are the effects on gender and multi-ethnic dynamics in local governance? And, how can developments in Ayutla be understood in relation to broader demands to restructure and democratize municipal administrations? I would specifically suggest to study not only indigenous settings, but also intersectional coalitions working toward municipal democratization.

6. Methodological Remarks

Fieldwork under violent conditions requires constant caution and preparation. No matter how cautious and prepared one is, however, it will always come with complications, dilemmas, and risks. In my research, this need for constant consideration took place in conjuncture with questions about my engaged research and collaborative efforts. In this final section, I want to reflect on what we can learn from my research in terms of engaged approaches in violent and politically tense research settings.

In chapter 2, I distinguished between more product-centered and more process-based approaches to engaged anthropology. Practitioners of the former draw on critical writing, theory building, and policy and advocacy work, whereas practitioners of the latter see the research process as a space for liberating and collaborative practices. Before going into the field, I wanted to follow in the footsteps of anthropologists such as Joanne Rappaport (2008) and her process-based approach to unsettle research hierarchies by turning to collaborative efforts and building political alignments. As it turned out, the university

³⁶⁷ Cervantes, Zacarías. 2019. "Pide el Concejo de Ayutla a relatora de la ONU que intervenga para que el Estado lo reconozca." *El Sur de Acapulco*, June 15, 2019. Accessed May 16, 2019. <https://en.calameo.com/read/003058254123f3811f923>.

³⁶⁸ CIESAS organized the event "Construyendo Autonomías Indígenas: Las experiencias de Cherán, Ayutla y Oxchuc," on May 9, 2019. It was announced it on its website: <https://www.ciesas.edu.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/conversatorio.pdf>.

was a fortunate setting to organize collaborative activities and my alignment with Unisur was almost natural. It seems unlikely that researchers unwilling to participate would have been allowed to study the project. I experienced the collaborative interactions with my participants as thought provoking, sometimes unsettling and uncomfortable, but always politically and academically rewarding. I therefore strongly recommend collaborative approaches to anyone interested in remaking anthropological modes of doing research.

I also learned that not every setting or organization lends itself readily to such approaches. A collaborative approach was less suitable for my research activities with Upoeg. My engagements with Upoeg members were shorter in terms of time, more fragmented in terms of place, and increasingly depended on students' whereabouts and shifting situations of insecurity. The violent incidents that started to occur during my research forced me to rethink my personal ethics, safety, positions, and scholarly responsibilities. I found it hard to translate the complexity of the situation on the ground into an alignment. In the course of time, I drifted toward a more "product-centered approach." Rather than collaborative engagements, critical writing seemed more in line with what the situation demanded and I could offer. I therefore want to stress that the possibilities and specific choices for engaged ethnography are prone to changes that occur during the period of fieldwork.

Finally, my collaborative research efforts with Unisur remained limited to the fieldwork stage of this research project. In any future research project, I hope to extend it to the processes of analysis, interpretation, and writing. I especially look forward to experiments with jointly writing. This dissertation, however, is the result of my own analytical efforts. I hope nevertheless that civil society organizations will find some value in it and use it as input for new discussions and reflective dialogues on the topics of intercultural education and community policing. I especially hope it will help my participants to keep alive the struggles studied in this dissertation.

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Resumen

Esta disertación presenta un estudio etnográfico de activismo educacional y seguridad en la región de la Costa Chica de Guerrero, México. Analiza el papel de la Universidad Intercultural de los Pueblos del Sur (Unisur) que atiende a estudiantes de varias etnias (Nahua, Tlapaneco, Mixteco, Amuzgo, Afromexicano y mestizo) quienes estudian carreras académicas que les permiten convertirse en agentes del cambio. Varias organizaciones sociales están afiliadas al proyecto de la universidad, como la Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero (Upoeg). En ese escenario de creciente violencia e inseguridad, la Upoeg emergió como la primera organización de policía comunitaria que se atrevió a confrontar al crimen organizado en el estado. La universidad y el proyecto de seguridad encarnan respuestas cívicas a necesidades locales que sobrepasan la seguridad y la educación culturalmente relevante y accesible. Su activismo permite adentrarnos en la manera en que ciudadanos diversos de Guerrero buscan re-formar sus identidades cultural-étnicas, relaciones políticas, e instituciones a nivel local y regional. Basada en once meses de trabajo de campo entre 2014 y 2015, el estudio examina lo que ocurre cuando la gente en el Guerrero rural repiensa la educación y seguridad en contextos de multiculturalismo institucionalizada y violencia.

El Capítulo 1, *Contestación social, autoridad política y multiculturalismo en el Guerrero rural*, presenta el marco teórico al explorar dos campos académicos con relación a la Unisur y Upoeg; a saber, los debates en antropología política sobre el poder y la contestación social, que relaciono a discusiones sobre la política multicultural en América Latina. Primero, evalúo aproximaciones actuales a la pluralización de autoridad. Tras un repaso de las limitaciones de acercamientos basados en conceptos como soberanía y gobernabilidad, el de la autoridad política queda como el más adecuado para analizar cómo se contesta el poder en contextos como el de Guerrero. Argumento a favor de estudiar reclamos aspiracionales relacionados con la autoridad legítima y las prácticas sociales a que recurre la gente para tener la última palabra sobre asuntos de seguridad local, educación y gobernancia. La exploración de cómo esto se escenifica en el interjuego con la sociedad civil, los grupos armados y múltiples actores del estado, resalta la dimensión política de la actividad policiaca y del activismo educacional.

Segundo, la contestación social que estudio se entreteje profundamente con la política multicultural. Los años de luchas por los derechos indígenas y de los Afromexicanos, con las reformas multiculturales, han logrado importantes mejoras sociales, pero traen nuevos retos. Discuto los potenciales efectos de regulación surgidos cuando el activismo político enfrenta discursos sobre los derechos, y cuando se introducen categorías culturales en marcos legales. Los pueblos indígenas, especialmente, han ocupado espacios institucionales relevantes, como la educación intercultural y grados de pluralismo legal, pero esto sólo ha satisfecho parcialmente el abanico de sus demandas económicas, sociales y culturales. Significa que organizaciones como Unisur y Upoeg enfrentan el reto

de reorientar espacios circunscritos—ganados mediante la lucha por sus derechos—hacia alternativas políticas más radicales. Así, la disertación también pregunta si remedios multiculturales son capaces de lograr la restructuración de jerarquías institucionales y sociales, también más allá de sus dimensiones culturales y étnicas, en términos de género y clase.

La disertación luego se divide en tres partes; primero contextualizo el estudio y describo la metodología adoptada para realizarlo. El Capítulo 2, *El trabajo de campo etnográfico: un 'arte de lo posible' en la Costa Chica de Guerrero*, reflexiona sobre mi forma de hacer etnografía, mi posicionamiento y los dilemas vividos durante mi trabajo. Examinó los debates antropológicos sobre la investigación comprometida (*engaged scholarship*), donde distingo dos tipos: unos centrados en productos, otros enfocados en procesos. Explico mi decisión de escoger un acercamiento colaborativo para tratar de lidiar con las desigualdades de mis relaciones en el sitio. Luego, detallo los métodos, los diversos sitios de trabajo de campo, y los acontecimientos ocurridos durante la investigación. Terminó analizando las consecuencias para mi aspiración de lograr una investigación comprometida, también bajo condiciones de inseguridad, y como cuestiones de género y etnicidad moldearon mis interacciones. Así, mi trabajo de campo implicó un proceso de re-pensar y balancear, mis metas, mi ética, mi propia seguridad y mis responsabilidades.

El Capítulo 3, *Preparando el escenario: luchas populares por la democracia, la justicia económica y los derechos en Guerrero*, ofrece una narrativa histórica del activismo político en Guerrero y de los amplios antecedentes de las organizaciones analizadas. Regreso a los conflictos que elevaron a Guerrero a un estado independiente en la federación mexicana (1849) y rastreo las peculiaridades de ese estado respecto del activismo y la formación del estado hasta hoy. Las demandas de campesinos, maestros y pueblos indígenas coadyuvaron a moldear los conflictos políticos en el período postrevolucionario. Cuando, en décadas recientes, las reformas neoliberales restructuraron la economía y política del país, organizaciones indígenas en Guerrero resignificaron sus demandas de autonomía, democratización y derechos sociales culturales. Luego discuto los dilemas que vivieron las organizaciones populares para decidir cuáles niveles administrativos serían los más apropiados para tratar la autonomía indígenas, las tendencias localistas versus movilizaciones regionales, la dependencia del estado, la remunicipalización, y la construcción de coaliciones que cruzan líneas étnicas, de clase y las demandas e identidades de género. Unisur y Upoeg se erigieron sobre las experiencias de antecesores revolucionarios y reformistas para reconstituir el poder local, pero enfrentaron nuevas condiciones societales. Las secuelas de la “guerra contra las drogas”, el neoliberalismo intensificado, y la próspera economía del narco propiciaron una violencia extrema e impredecible en el Guerrero contemporáneo. Estos elementos conforman el fondo violento y multicultural contra el cual se evolucionaron los proyectos de la Upoeg y Unisur.

En la segunda parte presento el estudio empírico de la Upoeg. El Capítulo 4, *Upoeg:*

policía regional más allá de la seguridad, resalta su surgimiento como organización policiaca regional y acontecimientos relacionados. Mi análisis de prácticas y políticas del espacio permite ver cómo las afirmaciones de legitimidad de la Upoeg resonaron en comunidades rurales. La Upoeg hizo de la inseguridad ‘espacializada’ una preocupación primaria e intentó establecer su autoridad como proveedor de seguridad mediante un modo específico de gobernanza local legítima; a saber, asambleas comunitarias. La mayor parte del capítulo analiza cómo la Upoeg se extendió desde la esfera de la (in) seguridad para recomodar las relaciones políticas entre comunidades rurales y centros municipales. Entre las notables características que desarrolló la autoridad de la Upoeg encontramos su capacidad de movilizarse en distintas regiones y su giro hacia espacios urbanos conflictivos y de importancia económica. Examinó el desenvolvimiento de esta nueva estrategia—forjada en tiempos de intensa violencia criminal—mediante interacciones con oficiales del estado, el ejército, grupos criminales, el sector comercial, y la sociedad civil. Sostengo que la expansión de las prácticas policíacas de la Upoeg generó aperturas que permitieron, en un nivel, renegociar las relaciones con el estado y, en otro, complicar el paisaje político en ciertos lugares.

El Capítulo 5, *La Upoeg: activismo legal para redirigir el multiculturalismo*, continúa el estudio de la Upoeg, pero enfocado en la organización inter-étnica, otro componente de su acción policiaca. Estudiar cómo la Upoeg emplea el activismo legal me permite examinar la atracción de modelos de los derechos indígenas para organizaciones multiétnicas de este tipo, cuyos líderes reclaman leyes multiculturales para legalizar sus grupos policíacas a través del derecho indígena a la autodeterminación. Cuando su base de apoyo no coincidía con las categorías culturales y étnicas del marco legal, la Upoeg apelaba con más éxito a la Ley Orgánica del Municipio Libre, aunque para lograr sus pretensiones más allá de la actividad policiaca, recurrió al litigio. Analizo los antecedentes y la evolución de dos consultas sobre el gobierno indígena. La Upoeg promovió en lengua vernácula el discurso legal de la consulta para buscar apoyo entre la población mestiza. Durante esas consultas, tensiones entre los derechos comunitarios, indígenas y de la mujer se convirtieron en temas de debates públicos. En Ayutla de los Libres, la consulta se convirtió en un vehículo de renegociación local de los mecanismos de representación política de las comunidades rurales. Allí, la Upoeg modificó la noción oficial de gobernanza legítima en que descansaba el gobierno municipal, e hizo efectivo los derechos indígenas para su diversa base de apoyo.

En la tercera parte, analizo a la Unisur. El Capítulo 6, *Unisur: luchas por la gobernanza universitaria más allá de la educación intercultural*, estudia el origen de la universidad y el conflicto con el estado sobre el significado y futuro de la educación intercultural. La Unisur figuró un modelo de gobernanza universitaria desde los pueblos, dirigido por los pueblos, en un intento por modificar las relaciones políticas entre estado y campo, y los pueblos indígenas y Afromexicanos. El estudio de la construcción y manejo de la institución y del apoyo de la comunidad para dos Unisur sedes específicos me lleva a

elucidar cómo se desarrolló el modelo de la universidad. Luego, el enfoque cambia a la búsqueda de la Unisur de reconocimiento ante el estado y un examen de sus interacciones con múltiples actores del estado, también en el momento y contexto de Ayotzinapa. Demuestro cómo la Unisur se vio atrapada en laberintos burocráticos y alcanzó los límites de sus reclamos. Experimentó el dilema de tener que resolver la divergencia entre dos metas: realizar sus ambiciones más utópicas y satisfacer necesidades inmediatas. Ante esto, los estudiantes y profesores intentaron recuperar la universidad apelando a la autonomía de otras universidades; también superaron disputas locales y se hicieron esfuerzos de re-establecer la vinculación con movimientos sociales y comunidades. Cuando se estancó sus pretensiones de democratizar radicalmente las universidades públicas, la Unisur desplazó su enfoque gradualmente hacia otras aspiraciones.

En el último capítulo etnográfico, el 7, *Unisureños: negociaciones de las funciones de la educación intercultural*, analizo las experiencias cotidianas y académicas de los estudiantes de la Unisur, así como la pedagogía y las ambiciones académica-políticas que reflejan la aspiración de lograr una inclusión transformativa, y como los estudiantes darían forma al programa de estudio. La Unisur invitó a los estudiantes a participar en representaciones culturales-políticas, mejorar sus comunidades, participar en organizaciones sociales, y convertirse en profesionistas académicos. Al describir estudios de caso, fragmentos etnográficos de la vida universitaria, y una sesión de investigación participativa, dirijo la atención a las posibilidades y contradicciones que evolucionaron en el programa de estudio de la Unisur donde los estudiantes oscilaban entre varias ambiciones que la institución trataba de armonizar. Participaban en repensar las ideas dominantes sobre mejorías comunitarias, mientras balanceaban su compromiso a luchar con sus necesidades personales, aunque el hecho de no recibir sus diplomas disminuía sus posibilidades. Aquí elucidado, las dificultades que encaró la Unisur al tratar de reconciliar las demandas de inclusión sociocultural con sus aspiraciones transformativas. En respuesta, tanto estudiantes como profesores aprovecharon su creatividad para renovar las nociones en que se basaba la educación intercultural en la universidad.

El estudio concluye con el Capítulo 8, *Reflexiones finales*, donde combino mis análisis de la Unisur y la Upoeg para mostrar dos contribuciones a las discusiones académicas. La primera es que mi trabajo complementa otros análisis político-antropológicos de la pluralización de autoridad. Mi enfoque analítico me permitió examinar las aperturas políticas que emergieron en contextos de redes de autoridad pluralizadas para iluminar el carácter diverso de las organizaciones analizadas. Sostengo que este acercamiento conceptual es especialmente útil para contextos donde grupos armados son concebidos como entidades casi idénticas e indiferenciadas, o interpretados a través de categorías fijas. Respecto de la segunda contribución, argumento que los estudios de confrontaciones locales con los derechos multiculturales y la legislación deben enfatizar lo que ocurre en el proceso del otorgamiento o negación de reconocimiento en un marco multicultural. Allí, precisamente, surgen nuevas demandas, se forjan alianzas inter-étnicas, y se derrumban

los muros de la autonomía local. Las descripciones etnográficas de esas dinámicas—con todo y sus problemas, conflictos y violencia—hacen avanzar los debates académicos que buscan desenredar el potencial del multiculturalismo latinoamericano para remediar varias formas de injusticia social, cultural y económica.

Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift is een etnografische studie naar activisme in het onderwijs en op het gebied van veiligheid in de Costa Chica regio in Guerrero, Mexico. Ik bestudeer de *grassroots* interculturele universiteit Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur (Unisur) die studenten van diverse afkomst (Nahua, Tlapaneco, Mixteco, Amuzgo, Afromexicaans, en mestizo) een studieprogramma aanbiedt om sociale verandering te initiëren. Verschillende sociale bewegingen zijn betrokken bij de universiteit, waaronder de Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero (Upoeg). In de maatschappelijke context van toegenomen onveiligheid en geweld is Upoeg de eerste *community policing* organisatie geweest die het opnam tegen georganiseerde misdaad in Guerrero. In dit proefschrift komen het educatie- en het politieproject samen als burgerinitiatieven die over meer gaan dan kwesties als veiligheid en cultureel relevant onderwijs, en toegang daartoe. Hun activisme biedt inzicht in de manier waarop etnisch-culturele identiteiten, politieke verhoudingen en lokale en regionale instituties geherstructureerd worden op lokaal niveau. Op basis van elf maanden veldwerk in 2014 en 2015, bestudeer ik wat er gebeurt wanneer mensen in Guerrero's rurale gebieden intercultureel onderwijs en politiewerk radicaal herzien, dit binnen de context van geïnstitutionaliseerd multiculturalisme en geweld.

In Hoofdstuk 1, *Social Contestation, Political Authority and Multiculturalism in Rural Guerrero*, zet ik het theoretische kader van dit proefschrift uiteen. Twee vakgebieden worden aangewend om Unisur en Upoeg te onderzoeken. Ik bespreek debatten binnen de politieke antropologie over macht en vormen van verzet, en verbind deze met discussies over multiculturalisme in Latijns Amerika. Als eerste bespreek ik benaderingen waarmee de *pluralization* van autoriteit wordt bestudeerd. Nadat beperkingen van soevereiniteit en *governmentality* benaderingen aan bod komen, conceptualiseer ik politieke autoriteit om te bestuderen hoe macht wordt betwist in Guerrero's complexe realiteit. Ik pleit voor het bestuderen van ambities en claims van legitieme autoriteit in relatie tot de sociale praktijken die mensen inzetten om het laatste woord te hebben over kwesties als veiligheid, educatie, en openbaar bestuur in het algemeen. Door te analyseren hoe dit plaatsvindt in wisselwerking met *civil society*, meerdere statelijke actoren en gewapende niet-statelijke groepen, doorgrond ik de politieke dimensie van lokaal politiewerk en onderwijsactivisme.

Ten tweede, het activisme dat centraal staat in dit proefschrift is nauw verbonden met multiculturele politiek. Jaren van inheemse en Afromexicaanse strijd voor rechten en multiculturele hervormingen hebben belangrijke sociale verbeteringen teweeg gebracht, maar ook nieuwe uitdagingen. Ik bespreek de mogelijk regulerende effecten die het gevolg zijn van politiek activisme dat gebruik maakt van rechten discours, waarbij culturele categorieën in wettelijke kaders worden geplaatst. Met name inheemse mensen hebben daardoor belangrijke institutionele ruimtes verkregen, zoals intercultureel

onderwijs en vormen van juridisch pluralisme, die echter slechts gedeeltelijk tegemoet komen aan hun economische, sociale en culturele behoeften. Hierdoor staan organisaties als Unisur en Upoeg voor de uitdaging om de beperkte ruimtes, zichzelf eigen gemaakt door jarenlange strijd om rechten, om te buigen naar radicalere politieke alternatieven. Dit proefschrift haakt daarmee in op de vraag of multiculturele maatregelen kunnen leiden tot de herstructurering van institutionele machtsrelaties en sociale hiërarchieën, ook buiten etnisch-culturele dimensies, bijvoorbeeld in termen van gender en klasse.

De rest van het proefschrift is opgebouwd uit drie delen. In het eerste deel reflecteer ik op mijn methodologie en presenteer ik de contextuele achtergrond van deze studie. Hoofdstuk 2, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: an 'Art of the Possible' in the Costa Chica of Guerrero*, geeft inzicht in mijn veldwerk, mijn positionering, en de dilemma's die zich voordeden tijdens het onderzoek. Antropologische debatten over betrokken onderzoek komen hierbij aan bod. Ik onderscheid de benaderingen die meer product- of procesgericht zijn, en licht mijn keuze toe, waarom ik voor een participatieve aanpak koos om de ongelijkheden in mijn onderzoeksrelaties te ontregelen. Vervolgens beschrijf ik mijn methoden, diverse veldwerklocaties en belangrijke ontwikkelingen op mijn onderzoekslocatie. Ik bespreek de consequenties van het doen van onderzoek onder onveilige omstandigheden, voor het onderzoek zelf en voor mijn participatieve ambities. Verder reflecteer ik op hoe kwesties omtrent gender en etniciteit mijn onderzoeksrelaties vormgaven. Tijdens mijn veldwerk balanceerde ik op het smalle koord tussen mijn voornemens, ethiek, veiligheid en verantwoordelijkheden.

Hoofdstuk 3, *Setting the Stage: Popular Struggles for Democracy, Economic Justice, and Rights in Guerrero*, gaat over de geschiedenis van politiek activisme in Guerrero en geeft de context aan van de organisaties die centraal staan in dit proefschrift. Ik keer terug naar de conflicten die van Guerrero een onafhankelijke staat maakten (1849) en belicht trends in activisme en staatsvorming door de jaren heen. In de postrevolutionaire periode waren het de eisen van boeren, leraren en inheemse groepen die politieke conflicten ontketenden. Tijdens de meer recente neoliberale hervormingen van Mexico's economie en politiek herdefinieerden inheemse organisaties claims omtrent autonomie, democratisering en sociaal-culturele rechten. Dit hoofdstuk duidt de vraagstukken die zich voordoen onder sociale bewegingen omtrent geschikte bestuursniveaus van inheemse autonomie, lokale tendensen versus regionale mobilisaties, staatsafhankelijkheid, *remunicipalization*, en coalitievorming op basis van etnische, klasse- en gender-gerelateerde eisen en identiteiten. Unisur en Upoeg borduren voort op de ervaringen van hun revolutionaire en reformistische voorgangers, maar zij organiseren onder nieuwe omstandigheden. De nasleep van de "war on drugs", neoliberalisme en Guerrero's groeiende drugseconomie zorgen voor extreem en onvoorspelbaar geweld. Dit alles vormt de gewelddadige en multiculturele achtergrond waarbinnen de projecten van Upoeg and Unisur zich afspelen.

Het tweede deel van dit proefschrift is gewijd aan Upoeg. Hoofdstuk 4, *Upoeg: Regional Policing Beyond Security*, focust op Upoeg's ontstaansgeschiedenis en de

ontwikkeling naar een regionale politieorganisatie. Door het bestuderen van ruimtelijke en politieke praktijken, onderzoek ik hoe Upoeg's uitingen van legitimiteit landen in rurale gemeenschappen. Ruimtelijke veiligheid is voor Upoeg het voornaamste actiepunt. Zij probeert haar autoriteit als gewapende politie-organisatie te positioneren in een specifieke vorm van lokaal legitiem bestuur zoals *usos y costumbres*. Hierna volgt de kern van dit hoofdstuk waarin ik analyseer hoe de organisatie over meer gaat dan alleen veiligheidskwesties, namelijk het streven om politieke relaties tussen dorpsgemeenschappen en gemeentebesturen te herstructureren. Mobiliteit over regionale grenzen heen is kenmerkend voor de autoriteit van Upoeg, evenals de verplaatsing van politiegroepen naar economisch belangrijke en conflictueuze steden. Ik schenk daarbij aandacht aan hoe deze *upscaling* strategie zich uit in een wisselwerking met overheidsbeambten, leger, criminele groepen, bedrijfsleven en *civil society*. Ik benadruk dat Upoeg's politieke praktijken openingen hebben gecreëerd om op hoger niveau te onderhandelen over relaties vis-à-vis de staat, terwijl anderzijds het politieke landschap in specifieke gemeenten verder compliceerde.

In Hoofdstuk 5, *Upoeg: Legal Activism to Redirect Multiculturalism*, vervolg ik de studie naar Upoeg en concentreer ik me op inter-etnisch activisme als belangrijk onderdeel van hun politiewerk. Ik onderzoek het juridische activisme van Upoeg en identificeer de waarde van multiculturele rechten en beleid voor multi-etnische organisaties als Upoeg. Upoeg leiders gebruiken multiculturele wetten om hun politiegroepen te legaliseren, gebaseerd op het recht van inheemse mensen op zelfbeschikking. Wanneer Upoeg's achterban niet binnen de etnisch-culturele categorieën van het wettelijk kader past, doet de organisatie een succesvoller beroep op een andere wet, namelijk de Organic Law of the Free Municipality. Hun aspiraties reiken verder dan alleen politiewerk en daarom gaat Upoeg ook over tot strategisch procederen. Ik analyseer het verloop van twee referenda over inheems bestuur. Upoeg gebruikt een specifiek discours om de steun van *mestizos* te winnen voor het referendum. Spanningen tussen gemeenschaps-, inheemse- en vrouwenrechten worden het middelpunt van publieke debatten. In Ayutla de los Libres wordt het referendum uiteindelijk als voertuig gebruikt om lokale politieke verhoudingen opnieuw in te richten. Upoeg slaagde erin de officiële notie omtrent legitiem gemeentelijk bestuur te wijzigen en zorgde ervoor dat inheemse rechten van toepassing zijn op de diverse achterban.

In het derde deel van dit proefschrift ligt de focus op Unisur. In Hoofdstuk 6, *Unisur: Struggles over University Governance beyond Intercultural Education*, analyseer ik de oorsprong van de universiteit en het conflict met de staat over de betekenis en toekomst van intercultureel onderwijs in Guerrero. Unisur streeft naar een universitair bestuursmodel "door en voor de *pueblos*" om de politieke relaties tussen de staat en rurale, inheemse en Afromexicaanse gemeenschappen te herzien. Ik laat zien hoe het universitaire model zich heeft ontwikkeld door institutionele opbouw, management en lokale ondersteuning van twee Unisur-departementen te onderzoeken. Dit hoofdstuk

richt zich vervolgens op de zoektocht van Unisur naar erkenning door de staat. Ik analyseer de interacties met statelijke actoren door de jaren heen, ook in de context van het Ayotzinapa-drama. Ik laat zien hoe Unisur verstrikt raakt in een bureaucratisch doolhof en de grenzen van haar claims bereikt. De universiteit staat voor de vraag hoe de afstand tussen utopische aspiraties en meer acute lokale behoeftes te overbruggen. Studenten en docenten hervinden de universiteit door een beroep te doen op de autonomie van andere universiteiten, lokale verdeeldheid te overwinnen, en connecties met sociale bewegingen te versterken. Wanneer Unisur er niet in slaagt om publieke instellingen radicaal te democratiseren, verlegt de universiteit geleidelijk haar focus naar andere doelen.

In het laatste etnografische hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift, Hoofdstuk 7, *Unisureños: Negotiations over the Functions of Intercultural Education*, leg ik de focus op de academische en dagelijkse ervaringen van Unisur studenten. Ik bespreek Unisur's pedagogiek en academisch-politieke ambities waarmee transformatieve inclusie wordt nagestreefd en hoe studenten dit programma invullen. Studenten worden betrokken bij cultureel-politieke representaties en sociale organisaties. Unisur leidt professionals op die zich ontfemen over lokale gemeenschappen. Met behulp van case-studies, etnografische fragmenten van het universitaire leven en een participatieve onderzoeksessie, vestig ik de aandacht op de mogelijkheden en tegenstrijdigheden die zich voordoen in het programma van Unisur. Studenten worden heen en weer geslingerd tussen de verschillende ambities die Unisur probeert te harmoniseren. Zo onderzoeken studenten heersende ideeën over lokale verandering, en zijn zij op zoek naar een evenwicht tussen het ondersteunen van activisme en hun persoonlijke behoeften, terwijl het uitblijven van diploma's hun opties beperkt. Het hoofdstuk laat zien hoe Unisur moeite heeft om het verlangen naar sociaal-culturele inclusie te verzoenen met meer transformatieve aspiraties. Als reactie daarop vallen studenten en leraren terug op hun eigen creativiteit en heroverwegen zij de noties waarop intercultureel onderwijs in Unisur is gebaseerd.

Deze etnografische studie eindigt met Hoofdstuk 8, *Final Reflections*. In dit laatste hoofdstuk breng ik mijn analyses van Unisur en Upoeg samen en haal ik twee bevindingen naar voren. De eerste betreft de manier waarop mijn studie andere politiek antropologische studies naar de *pluralization* van autoriteit kan aanvullen. Mijn conceptuele focus op politieke autoriteit stelde me in staat om politieke openingen te bestuderen die zich voordoen binnen een context waarin complexe autoriteitsnetwerken bestaan. Dit kwam duidelijk naar voren bij het bestuderen van uiteenlopende kenmerken van de organisaties. Ik beargumenteer dat de conceptuele benadering vooral nuttig is in situaties waarin diverse gewapende groepen als één en hetzelfde worden gezien, of aan de hand van vaststaande categorieën worden geclassificeerd. Ten tweede benadruk ik hoe belangrijk het is dat er onderzoek plaats vindt naar grassroots engagements met multiculturele rechten en wetgeving wanneer er erkenning verleend of geweigerd wordt op basis van multiculturele kaders. In dat spanningsveld worden nieuwe eisen geformuleerd, inter-etnische allianties aangegaan en vormen van lokale autonomie

geconstrueerd. Etnografische inzichten in dergelijke dynamiek – inclusief de problemen, conflicten en vormen van geweld die kunnen ontstaan – brengen debatten over het vermogen van Latijns-Amerikaans multiculturalisme ten aanzien van sociale, culturele en economische onrechtvaardigheden een stap verder.

Summary

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of educational and security activism in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero, Mexico. I study the grassroots and intercultural university—Universidad de los Pueblos del Sur (Unisur)—that invites students from various backgrounds (Nahua, Tlapaneco, Mixteco, Amuzgo, Afromexican, and mestizo) to study an academic program that enables them to become agents of change. Various grassroots organizations are affiliated to the university project, such as the Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero (Upoeg). In settings of increased violence and insecurity, Upoeg became the first community policing organization to confront organized crime in Guerrero. Taken together, the education and security projects embody civic responses to local needs beyond safety and culturally-relevant, accessible education. Their activism offers insight into the way rural citizens in Guerrero seek to reshape cultural-ethnic identities, political relations and institutions at the local and regional levels. Based on eleven months of fieldwork between 2014 and 2015, this dissertation examines what happens when rural and ethnically-diverse citizens rethink education and security in settings characterized by institutionalized multiculturalism and violence.

In Chapter 1, *Social Contestation, Political Authority and Multiculturalism in Rural Guerrero*, I present the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Two scholarly fields are explored to study Unisur and Upoeg. I employ debates in political anthropology about power and social contestation, and connect these to discussions about multicultural politics in Latin America. I first examine current approaches to the pluralization of authority. After discussing the limits of approaches based on sovereignty and governmentality, the concept of political authority emerged as the most suitable one for studying how power is contested in complex settings like that of Guerrero. I argue in favor of studying aspirational claims around legitimate authority and the social practices enacted by people to obtain final say over local questions of security, education and governance more generally. Exploring how all this takes place through interplay with civil society, armed groups and multiple state actors brings the political dimension of both policing and educational activism to light.

Second, the social contestation studied herein is deeply entangled in multicultural politics. Years of struggle for indigenous and Afromexican rights and multicultural reforms have caused significant social improvements, but also brought new challenges. I discuss the potential regulating effects that occur when political activism takes on discourses on rights, and when cultural categories are placed into legal frameworks. Indigenous people, especially, have obtained important institutional spaces, such as intercultural education and degrees of legal pluralism that, nevertheless, have only partly satisfied the range of their economic, social and cultural demands. This brings organizations like Unisur and Upoeg before the challenge of how to redirect the limited spaces—won through struggles

to gain rights—towards more radical political alternatives. This dissertation, therefore, taps into discussions about whether multicultural remedies can lead to the restructuring of institutional and social hierarchies, also beyond cultural-ethnic dimensions, in terms of gender and class.

The rest of the dissertation is divided into three parts. In the first part, I reflect on my methodology and present the contextual background of this study. Chapter 2, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: an 'Art of the Possible' in the Costa Chica of Guerrero*, offers insight into my practice of doing ethnography, my positionality and the dilemmas experienced during the research. First, anthropological debates about engaged scholarship are discussed. Here, I distinguish two engaged approaches, one more product-centered, the other more process-based, and explain my choice of a more collaborative approach to deal with the inequalities present in my research relationships. Subsequently, my methods, diverse fieldwork sites, and developments during fieldwork are addressed, as are the consequences of doing research in conditions of insecurity for my research and engaged research ambitions. Finally, I reflect on how issues of gender and ethnicity shaped my research interactions. Altogether, my fieldwork became an act of balancing and rethinking my various goals, ethics, safety, and scholarly responsibilities.

Chapter 3, *Setting the Stage: Popular Struggles for Democracy, Economic Justice, and Rights in Guerrero*, offers a historical account of political activism in Guerrero and broadens the background of the organizations studied. I go back to the conflicts that made Guerrero an independent state within the Mexican federation (1849) and trace Guerrero's particularities in terms of activism and state-formation up to the present day. Peasant, teacher and indigenous demands shaped the political conflicts in the post-revolutionary era. When neoliberal reforms restructured Mexico's economy and politics in recent decades, indigenous organizations in Guerrero re-signified demands for autonomy, democratization and social-cultural rights. This chapter presents the dilemmas experienced by grassroots organizations concerning the most appropriate administrative levels for indigenous autonomy, localist tendencies versus regional mobilizations, state dependency, re-municipalization, and the building of coalitions across ethnic, class and gendered demands and identities. Unisur and Upoeg built upon the experiences of their revolutionary and reformist predecessors to reconstitute local power, but they faced new societal conditions. The aftermath of the "war on drugs", coupled with intensified neoliberalism and a thriving *narco* economy are the causes of extreme, unpredictable violence in contemporary Guerrero. Altogether, I frame this as the violent and multicultural background against which the Upoeg and Unisur projects unfolded.

The second part is dedicated to the ethnographic study of Upoeg. Chapter 4, *Upoeg: Regional Policing Beyond Security*, focuses on the emergence and developments of Upoeg as regional policing organization. By studying spatial practices and politics, I examine how Upoeg's assertions of legitimacy resonated in rural communities. Upoeg made spatialized

insecurity a primary concern and attempted to locate its authority as a security provider in a specific mode of local legitimate governance: community assemblies. The longest section analyzes how this organization moved beyond the sphere of (in)security issues to rearrange the political relations between rural communities and municipal centers. Mobility across regions became a characteristic of Upoeg's authority, together with its movements towards economically-important and conflictive urban spaces. I study how this strategy, forged in times of intense criminal violence, plays out in interactions with state-level officials, the military, criminal groups, the business sector, and civil society, arguing that the upscaling of Upoeg's policing practices generated openings to renegotiate state relations on one level, while deeply complicating the local political landscape in certain areas.

In Chapter 5, *Upoeg: Legal Activism to Redirect Multiculturalism*, I continue the study of Upoeg, but focus on inter-ethnic organizing as another component of its policing. By studying how the organization employs legal activism, I examine the appeal of models of indigenous rights for multi-ethnic organizations like Upoeg, whose leaders turned to multicultural laws to legalize their policing groups on the basis of indigenous rights to self-determination. When Upoeg's support base did not fit the cultural-ethnic categories of the legal framework, it made more successful appeals to the Organic Law of the Free Municipality. But to accomplish its aspirations beyond policing the organization turned to litigation. I analyze the run-up to, and unfolding of, two referendums about indigenous governance. Upoeg vernacularized the legal discourse about the referendum to reach out to *mestizos* for their support. The referendums made tensions between community, indigenous and women's rights the center of public debates. In Ayutla de los Libres, the referendum became a vehicle to renegotiate local mechanisms of political representation for rural communities. There, Upoeg altered the official notion of legitimate governance on which the municipal government rested and made indigenous rights effective for its diverse support base.

In the third part of the dissertation, I move the analysis to Unisur. In Chapter 6, *Unisur: Struggles over University Governance beyond Intercultural Education*, I examine the origins of the university and its conflict with the state over the meaning and future of intercultural education in Guerrero. Unisur envisions a university governance model "from the *pueblos*, directed by the *pueblos*" to rearrange the political relations between the state and rural, indigenous and Afromexican people. By studying the institution-building, management and community support of two Unisur departments, I analyze how the university model developed. This chapter then focuses on Unisur's search for state recognition, and presents the interactions with multiple state actors over time, also in the context of the Ayotzinapa drama. I show how Unisur became caught up in bureaucratic labyrinths and reached the limits of its claims. It faced the dilemma of how to overcome the divergence between utopian ambitions and satisfying immediate needs. In response, students and teachers reclaimed the university by making appeals

to the autonomy of other universities, overcoming local disputes, and reconnecting to social movements and communities. When Unisur's project to radically democratize public university institutions stagnated, the university gradually shifted its focus to other ambitions.

In the last ethnographic chapter, number 7, *Unisureños: Negotiations over the Functions of Intercultural Education*, I move on to analyze the academic and everyday experiences of Unisur students. I examine Unisur's pedagogy and academic-political ambitions that reflect the aspiration for transformative inclusion, and how students give shape to Unisur's program. Students are invited to engage with cultural-political representations, improve their communities, participate in social organizations, and become academic professionals. By presenting case-studies, ethnographic fragments of university life, and a participatory research session, I draw attention to the possibilities and contradictions that developed in Unisur's program. Students oscillated between various ambitions that Unisur sought to harmonize. They engaged in the rethinking of dominant ideas about community improvement, and balanced their commitment to struggles with personal needs, while the lack of diplomas narrowed their possibilities. This chapter shows how Unisur had trouble reconciling demands for social-cultural inclusion with more transformative ambitions. In response, students and teachers drew on their creativity to renew the notions on which intercultural education in Unisur rested.

This ethnographic study concludes with Chapter 8, *Final Reflections*. In this last chapter, I bind my analysis of Unisur and Upoeg together to elucidate two contributions to scholarly discussion. The first concerns the way my study can complement other political anthropological studies of the pluralization of authority. The analytical focus on political authority enabled me to examine political openings that appear in settings of pluralized networks of authority in a way that illuminated the diverse character of the organizations studied. I argue that the conceptual approach is especially useful for settings where armed groups are increasingly lumped together as one and the same, or understood according to fixed categories. For the second contribution, I argue that studies of grassroots engagements with multicultural rights and legislation should focus on what happens in the process of being granted or denied recognition within a multicultural framework. Precisely here, new demands are raised, inter-ethnic alliances are forged, and the walls of local autonomy are broken down. Ethnographic accounts of such dynamics—including the problems, conflicts and violence that may emerge—take scholarly debates a step further towards unraveling the potential of Latin American multiculturalism to remedy various forms of social, cultural, and economic injustices.

Author Biography

Merel de Buck was born in Amsterdam, on March 27th, 1987. She holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology from Utrecht University (UU) and followed the Research Master Cultural Anthropology Sociocultural Transformations. Her master's research focused on popular education, indigenous politics and social change in a preparatory school in Oaxaca, Mexico. Merel worked for a year for the Dutch labor union FNV before she started her PhD research at the department of Cultural Anthropology (Utrecht University) in 2013. During her PhD project, she also worked as lecturer in the bachelor program and organized workshops about public and engaged anthropology in cooperation with the Dutch Anthropological Association. In 2019, Merel started working as investigative journalist at Platform Authentieke Journalistiek based in Utrecht.

