

SECULARIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN SOUTHEAST MEXICO²

Abstract

The paper explains the process of transition to democracy of a Zapotec community in the deep highlands of Oaxaca, in Southern México. That transition goes hand to hand with profound religious changes. The paper shows how that political transition took place because a strong process of secularization and religious pluralism that modified all the socioeconomics structures of the Zapotec people. The paper shows the transition from a political regimen ruled by Shamans, a theocracy, to a gerontocracy, a regimen ruled by an Elder's Council. And more lately, the transition from gerontocracy to the formation of a direct democracy, a regimen ruled by a People's Assembly, integrated by all the citizens of the Zapotec community.

Keywords: Zapotec people, secularization, Indian communities, direct democracy, government by custom

Introduction

There are many studies on the structures of indigenous government of Mexico, but there are not works on the impact of religion and struggles between religious denominations in the formation and development of those political institutions. The hallmark of this article is that it belongs to the field of political science of religion or politology of religion, which seeks to explain the relationship between political subjects, political institutions and religious communities (Jevtic, 2009).

Secularization is a process of privatization of faith. In the traditional and pre-industrial societies the religion was embedded with the public space. Secularization confines religion to the private field. In this process, the religion, using Max Weber's words, "loses its magic" and suffers a "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*), which consists in the rationalization of the world, in replacement of the sacral vision of the existence and the phenomena of the world. (Weber, 1971: 270).

For many scholars, secularization is a precondition of democracy. A society

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2 I am grateful to Maurina Aragon Ramírez, a student at the "Universidad de la Sierra Sur" and resident of San Juan Guivini, for her work as an interpreter in every one of the interviews conducted in this research

has to be secular to aspire being considered modern and democratic. Obviously, secularization is not enough condition for a democracy, but a necessary ingredient. Secularization brought the separation of the civil government and the religious institutions. Without that process, there is not space for pluralism. Democracy is possible only in a rationalized environment, where the economic, moral and political issues are not beyond the power of human beings.

Democracy, understood as a system of government based on popular sovereignty, is not exclusive to the western liberal patrimony. This work tells the story of a small community of the southern highlands of Oaxaca that has undergone a process of democratization *sui generis*, which is still in a very early stage, but its knowledge can throw light to us on the deep and complex roots of the politics that develops in the deep Mexico, such as the indigenous communities of the Mexican southeast. This article makes an oral microhistory³ rescue of an indigenous community in Oaxaca called San Juan Guivini⁴. Along the pages appear the processes, change and continuity shown in the struggle for power within that community.

Intra-community struggles are presented not only as disputes by prestige and resources, but as the impact of projects on the course that San Juan Guivini should take to survive in the contemporary world. In the investigation, two sides mainly were identified: a) those who believe that the best tactic of community resistance is rejecting to the "Western", to the modernity; b) those who believe that the best way to preserve their identity and distinctive culture is taking pragmatic and discretionary forms of government and economic production of the modern world, as appropriate to their interests.

3 Microhistory is a relatively new branch of the "social history". The founding work of this type in Mexico is "People in suspense" (*Pueblo en Vilo*) by Luis Gonzalez y Gonzalez, which reflects the life of a small town called San Jose de Gracia, in Mexico. The same author defines discipline as "history from below", reserved for objects of study of short spaciousness. It deals with the political and social chronicle of a small community whose main objective is to show how the national or state changes were captured or experienced at the local level" (Gonzalez 1973, 12). Another notable scholars inside the microhistory studies are Giovanni Levi, Carlo Ginzburg and E. P. Thompson.

4 San Juan Guivini is an indigenous community located in the heart of the Southern Highlands of Oaxaca. The legal status of Guivini is "municipal agency", which belongs to the municipal seat of San Francisco Ozolotepec, who in turn is part of the District of Miahuatlán. The latter is the greater political and economic center of the entire region that connects to the Central Valleys with the coast of Oaxaca. San Juan Guivini is one of the more remote communities of the district head called Miahuatlán de Porfirio Diaz, finding approximately 6 hours through a dirt road. It is 9 hours from the capital of Oaxaca and 15 hours from Mexico City. According to the 2010 census it has 702 inhabitants, of which 321 are men and 381 are women. Guivini is composed by 155 particular homes. It is an indigenous community, on par with the democratizing advances that this article points out, in recent years it has achieved remarkable progress in terms of material well-being: Only the 1.04% of the children between 6 and 14 years do not attend school; 62% of the population has access to health services; only 11.61% of homes have dirt floors, when 5 years ago the figure was the 69.44%; 94.1% have piped water and sewer service, when in 2005 only 0.03% had such services; 96% of homes has electricity. Although between 77 and 78% of the population do not have washing machine and refrigerator, just 5 years ago this same figure was 99.07 %. From the perspective of the average urban dweller of Mexico, Guivini population has high levels of poverty, but from the perspective of how was the same community a couple of decades ago, Guivini has made remarkable progress, both in political such as economic areas, the level of official indicators placed that community as a "medium" degree of poverty.

Until the 1960s, it was considered that the political authorities of San Juan Guivini came from the “sacred spirits of nature” (meé –in Zapotec language-) and the power were held by Shamans (Menraskg –in Zapotec language-) that monopolized the communitarian salvation goods. Product of profound food and health crises, which in the early 1970s reduced the population to almost a third, the authority cosmic that traditionally had ruled San Juan Guivini, was strongly questioned by its own inhabitants. In the 1970s there was instituted an Elders’ Council that ended up being diluted and passing to a People’s Assembly at the end of the same decade. That is, the source of legitimacy and power within the community went through, in a relatively short period, from divine legitimacy to the sovereignty of the people. First moved from theocracy to the gerontocracy, then transit to democracy. The process of secularization which became the establishment of a direct democracy, without formal political parties (with all the virtues and defects that this entails), is what is shown and explained in this work.

All the information about the political life of the indigenous community mentioned is a result of interviews and conversations with the inhabitants of this community who observed and / or starred the process of political transition previously described. The process of data collection was in August 2010 to January 2014, where the most arduous task was to gain the confidence of the inhabitants. The information shown in this document is the result of many informal conversations with community members, and my direct observation⁵. There is no material written on the emergence of the People’s Assembly in the Zapotec culture, and much less on the highland communities, as it is in San Juan Guivini⁶. This work aims to preserve, in written form, the oral history on the democratization of a Zapotec government, representative of Oaxacan highland, which are in a constant process of transformation for, paradoxically, survive and retain its identity to the convulsions of the outside world.

Government Zapotec and cosmic legitimacy

The first thing that must be taken into account to understand the functioning

5 The interviewed persons were Jacinta Pérez Martínez, Patricio Mendoza Fuentes, Mauro Mendoza, Eulogia López López, Práxedes Martínez, Alfonso Pérez Mendoza, Marcelina Martínez Mendoza, Juan Cruz Lorenzo, Severo Cortez Martínez, Mauro Mendoza, Julián Aragón Pérez, Patricio Mendoza Fuentes, Franco Mendoza y Vicente Martínez Mendoza. Practically the totality of the interviews they were realized in “zapotec mountain (serrano)”, which is very different from the Isthmus, coastal or the central valleys of Oaxaca variants. Each language implies a different way of thinking and seeing the world, so many of the Zapotec here expressed terms at risk of changing its meaning to have been translated to the English. The work seeks to minimize this fault when attempting to constantly explain the worldview that exists behind certain Zapotecs idioms, not stay in the simple literal translation.

6 As evidenced by extensive and documented research of Colin Clarke and Ugo Pipitone, there are many “Oaxacas”. The construction of the political power and the institutions of government in Oaxaca has taken different ways in each and every one of its 8 regions. So the democratization process that is shown in this paper, should not be generalized to the rest of the communities. Precisely the value of this work is to show the particularities and specificities of indigenous policy of the Oaxacan Highlands. (Pipitone 2007) (Clarke 2000).

of the Zapotec Community Government is, as in most of the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca, religion, politics and the economy are not separate social spheres. They are presented together in indissoluble and symbiotic way. In the community that is being studied in this work, until the 1960s, the entire community life was governed by a mystical conception of the universe. Currently experiencing an accelerated process of secularization which has produced a separation between religion and the rest of the fields of social life, including in the sphere of Government.

The ancestors of San Juan Guivini (originally Guieyvinn, meaning "small hill")⁷ came from a place called *Lachpachilshiuszan* which can be translated as "the place of our roots", "those who raised us", "our mothers" or "ancestors". The explanation they gave to their origin was that the first settlers sprang from nothing in this place, like mushrooms on the hill. The place referred to is just an hour drive east of San Juan Guivini. According to the oral tradition, which was transmitted from generation to generation, when the inhabitants of Guivini came out of the *Lachpachilshiuszan* not conceived to death as the end of life for them was not something that causes fear, but it was considered as a natural process of reintegration of human beings with the spirits of the universe. The grandparents of the community celebrated ball games and the losing team in the game was food for the other. The extinction of their being was made voluntarily or at least they tell the elders of the community.

The ancestors of Guivini community, as the other ancient cultures, attempted to explain the origin of life and the natural events. Such was the case of the explanation for the origin of the Sun and the Moon, as you can view the following information provided by Patricio Mendoza Fuentes:

In ancient time, a man and a woman came out of Guieyvinn which currently is in the field of the community of Santiago Lapaguía. They went to live under this hill, where the river runs surrounded two boulders which in turn are caves, where the man and the woman formed their home. With the passage of time, they had a son. When their son grew up, married and had two children, a woman and a man. They called the woman Moon and to the man Sun, but something unexpected happened: the parents of these two little ones died and grandparents were responsible for them.

The grandmother called Ngostaclach⁸ and their activities were spun,

7 The official history of Miahuatlán translates Guivini as "little flower." (Rojas Mijangos 1992, 43). But that is a translation not only wrong, but that does not make sense with what is the community of Guivini. Guivini's name comes from the fact that originally the community stood at a "small hill" surrounded by big mountains in the Oaxaca highland, but the elders have that once there was a great flood, and everyone had to move to a high mountain. This explains the name of San Juan Guivini although at present is at the top of the mountain.

8 Ngostaclaches is literally "echo". But then the settlers of San Juan Guivini not conceived to the echo as the return of the sound waves, but as a magical being that repeated things and that were considered a companion in solitude. Currently it is used as adjective to refer to the children when they start talking because only repeat what they hear.

prepare food and take them to the field where the grandfather worked. The grandfather had as name Mdús (ground snake). Children were growing up and began to accompany the grandmother to leave food on the field, but one day the grandmother said their grandchildren "staying awhile to work with your grandfather". The children obeyed. When the grandmother of the children had already left, Sun and Moon observed that Mdús did nothing, he had powers, towards which the hardware was working for itself, while he was resting under a tree. This bothered to two children, because the one that really was working was Ngostaclach. The children, who love very much to their grandmother, tried many times to kill the grandfather, but they failed. When the grandfather found out, he was so angry that began chasing them. For the grandfather did not hurt them, Ngostaclach helped them climb to the sky and from that day, the sun greets his people by day and the moon accompanies her people by night. Ngostaclach remains in the boulder. The two boulders carried the names of the two smalls: one is the house of the Moon (lich mee) and the other house of the Sun (lichmvich).

The community is characterized by functioning as a whole, if one of its parts is changed this affects all its members. Therefore, it has always tried to maintain homogeneity because the cosmic order is seen in terms of the degree of uniformity exists for each of the members of the community, causing it to be moved under the same logic⁹.

Until the 1960s the life of members of the community is governed according to the will of a divine order, therefore, considered that the activities performed were predestined. When planting would leave offerings at the sacred places (the hills sacred that are described in the myth of the echo-*Ngostaclach*) to request that the crops were prosperous. In this structure of thought shamans were the ruling classes. Shamans were dedicated exclusively to interpret the will of the spirits and try to explain natural phenomena, while the other members were engaged in materially productive activities.

9 This type of social organization comes closer too much the ideal type "Gemeinschaft" conceptualized by Ferdinand Tönnies, which refers to a community and traditional group composed of human beings united by bonds that they consider natural and immutable. That is to say, the community is joined by social links foreign and independent from the will of the individuals who integrate it. The community is not a product of a contract effected between free and autonomous individuals, but a "natural" structure that precedes them. Its characteristic are strong personal relationships, united families and community institutions relatively simple. "Gemeinschaft" social relations are characterized by having a strong sense of loyalty and become attached to the community on the part of the individuals who integrate it. The opposite concept is "Gesellschaft", which describes a form of "artificial" social organization composed by impersonal bonds and individuals rid of any tie (political, moral or economic) not acquired voluntarily. In the world "Gemeinschaft" the bonds or links between the agents are "natural agreements" (institutions created by God or the nature), while in the "Gesellschaft" they are "carried away contracts" that can be revocable. (Tönnies 2001).

According to the oral history of the elders of San Juan Guivini, until the 1970s, the Indian authorities had never been elected by the people. *Dad Guexch* or Municipal agent, which is the greater position within the Government of the community, had a period in the post for one year. When had 11 months in office, they spent four weeks looking for the right person to relieve him during the coming year. But it is wrong to think that was a hereditary government or based on cronyism, because what did the Municipal Agent was consulted shamans of the village (*Menrakg* or *Menrboocuentt*)¹⁰ and these in turn examined the designs to indicate their spirits through "oracle of destiny", which is a circular table where are dropped corn kernels and, to date, few people know how to interpret the position of the seed and the wishes of the spirits.

In the Zapotec worldview, *Dad Guexch* or Municipal agent was considered a protector of the village, in the parental sense of the term. Therefore, when the *Menrakg* said that a certain person was adequate to be *Dad Guexch* involved say that he was able to be the guide of the members of the community, as well as a father protects and cares for his children¹¹.

The *Menrakg* named to the Government authorities of San Juan Guivini. The first of January the transfer of power was made. That day they were going to the city of Miahuatlán of Porfirio Díaz (that is since immemorial time and until today, the center of political and economic power from the district which Guivini belongs). They walked all day, evening regularly forced them to spend the night in San Lorenzo Mixtepec. In this village they asked inn and the next day, at five in the morning rebooting their way to the municipal seat.

The reason why moved to Miahuatlán de Porfirio Díaz, was to present to the authorities of the municipal seat. The costs - both the travel and the ceremonies -, coming out of the pocket of the members of the authority of San Juan Guivini. Later, they returned to their place of origin, but they rested in San Pedro Mixtepec. They came out of there early and in the evening arrived in San Juan Guivini.

10 A *Menrakg* or *Menrboocuenttes* is a person who has the knowledge to interpret future events. That wisdom was transmitted orally for centuries under the logic master-apprentice. There is a big difference between what is known as "healer" and the *Menrboocuentt*. The first serves health problems and only recommended some medical herbs. The second one was recommending traditional medicines but in addition was recovering from spiritual form, was rubbing an egg to the patient, determining the reason of the disease. In the Zapotec world view the disease was a fault of a malignant spirit or a punishment for having committed a moral offense. The idea that if a person committed an offense to someone else, a spirit or a holy place, the negative action would return to the offender. Then it was necessary to go to leave a gift of flowers an incense to the caves of the hill where it was believed that the gods lived. If the disease was serious, the sacrifice of an animal was made. Regularly hummingbird feathers were used as an offering to the gods to ask forgiveness for the misconduct. There was no fixed number of *Menrakg*, but ranged from 3 to 6, when Guivini then had about 100 inhabitants, according to estimates by the elderly, as there are no records of births and deaths over that period. At the time of conclusion of this research, there were several elderly people who still do not have record of birth, baptism, or a document that could leave written record that ever existed

11 In parallel, community members made animal sacrifices, rituals in sacred sites (springs and caves of the "sacred hill" is the mountain in front of San Juan Guivini) to give thanks and ask for protection from deities. When a person was designated by the gods to be Municipal Agent, the *Menrakg* did a ritual on behalf of all the people to earn the mercy of the deities, and that the activities during that year were prosperous.

Thirty minutes north of San Juan Guivini there is a place called "The Well of the Virgin" (*Guioniznahsx*). When the community authorities arrived to this place, the first thing that they did was burn fireworks in order that the rest of the community know. In that place there were three caves (two of which were destroyed by the construction of highway currently connects San Juan Guivini with its municipal seat, San Francisco Ozolotepec) where rested the authorities. There they put an offering of flowers and animals. The wives of the new authorities made enough tortillas for all the people. The outgoing authorities (Menyoo) were who would absorb all costs for receiving the new authorities¹².

It is necessary to know all the costs and resources involving the rituals of power transmission to understand why were subsequently undermined that tradition. Very early, authorities stood and bathing in the *Guioniznahsx*. They wore new clothes, like symbol that they were the new authorities and were coming at eight o'clock in the morning where they were resting¹³. At the same time, the village was preparing to receive the new authorities. The other members of the community came out with music (the instrument used were the flutes, which were manufactured in the same community with reeds). They carried flowers and ground bean tortilla smeared with avocado leaf; but there were years in which the beans were not present, then they decided to consume boiled egg. It had to prepare the food they needed to reach for all who would receive the new authorities, which were almost all the people.

When the new authorities came to the holy caves, the members of the community receiving them and spent time with them there. The traditional drink consumed in all occasions was amaranth tepache and tepache prepared with onions and canary chili. Of course in this event could not miss the mezcal. It was given a hard-boiled egg and a tortilla for each member of the community. Foods consumed were accompanied by atole de panela¹⁴. When ending the gathering in that place, they moved into the community. The first place that entered the municipal authorities was the church to give thanks to the gods. It used to perform mass to pray for the health and welfare of the community and its new authorities. Last but not least, before entering the municipal agency within the church authorities they received the "stick" which was a staff symbolizing power and mandate of the community.

12 At that time used the term Menyoo to refer in the outgoing authorities or persons who are to retire from the charge. Today it is a term in disuse within the Zapotec vocabulary in his highland dialect.

13 As a result of the absence of clocks, the Menrakg calculated the time to perform rituals, taking as a reference a very bright star that is located to the Northwest of San Juan Guivini.

14 At present, the beverage more used in the community is coffee. The elders of the community said that the coffee is something that was not known before the decade of 1970. Before, the atole was consumed every morning and, in special occasions, atole of cheese. Members of the community planted reeds and grinded to obtain their juice, which put to boil on the fire in a large clay pot. When it was starting boiling the foam was raised and they were adding bits of reeds. When it came to that point, they removed it and put it in molds and the product obtained from this process of transformation is called "panela", both in the community of San Juan Guivini and the surrounding villages.

The relation that had San Juan Guivini with the Mexican State was coming down that the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), it developed a relation with the community that was consisting of exchanging votes towards this party in exchange for autonomy to reproduce its traditions and customs. The PRI was not interested in the method by which the authority of the community was elected. The important thing for the party was that Dad Guexch, every 3 years, was delivering to them a full ballot box with the votes of all the adults marked with preference towards the PRI. Similarly, the community did not care who ruled at the state or federal level. The important thing for the community was that they were giving full freedom to live in agreement to their traditions and ancient culture. At that time PRI did not even have that carry products or goods to buy the vote or the loyalty of the population. Autonomy and self-government were sufficiently valuable to the Community authorities were willing to give their support to the party.

The penetration of the Catholic religion in the community had been hitherto quite superficial, and in fact were decades without a Christian priest, so the Menrakg held real power to monopolize the goods of salvation of the whole community. However, in the 1960 San Juan Guivini was attacked by a measles epidemic that left dead unquantifiable. The elders tell that from 3 to 5 persons were burying everyday but there are no written records of what happened. To the measles an infection added in the feet, because all the people went barefoot (damages were caused by parasites that lived among the nails of the feet).

Because of these diseases, the population did not increase their number. Babies, children, young people and adults were dying constantly. The average number of children that had was between twelve and fifteen, of which only came to be adults 4 or 5. As a result of the high rate of mortality, positions in the community office system of charges (stewardships) had to be occupied several times by the same person in a mandatory way.

The origin of all these diseases was explained of mystical form as punishments that were sent by deities, as moral offenses committed by settlers. Constantly had to find a way to please the 'nature' to feel protected and do not disturb the balance of the cosmic order. When a family member got sick there was no alternative than talking to a Menrakg, which every time were less capable of giving satisfactory answers and protection to the community on the calamities that were suffering.

Constantly the members of the community were afraid to the future events; therefore, every decision that was taking was consulted by the Menrakg. To have a clearer idea about the role that had the decisions of the Menrakg, even for the most intimate spheres of life, the elderly mentioned that when a young man saw a woman who liked to be his wife, he said to her nothing, but to his parents, who in turn consulted the omen of the Menrakg. According to the predictions to be made, parents could decide if they asked the hand of the girl or not, making the

treatment between the heads of household, without consulting at any time to the women involved. In the same way when someone asked a young woman with matrimonial purposes, her parents consulted immediately to a Menrakg, and depending on the prognosis, it is decided whether the man who was desirable or not. Also a consultation was done when a house was constructed, when a baby was born or when a member of the community was going to sow. In their worldview an individual did not have the power to decide on his life, but that the path that had to cover every human being, as it was determined by the divine. The task of the individual was discovering what its destiny was, not build it.

To please the divinity in the community of San Juan Guivini there were about thirty musicians took turns holding the Rosary every day in the mornings and afternoons. As regularly was fear of future events, the charges of stewardships (*Shidio* and *Vishquel*) were so important for members of the community, which at that time the inhabitants not complained to serve these charges as they began to make when the regime of the Menrakg declined, as will be seen later. Conversely, every member of the community put all their hopes in deity to bless his family by performing community service.

Occupy a stewardship, although it generated prestige or social honor, caused the ruin of the family economy of those who were in the system of charges. At that time did not receive absolutely a budget by the municipal government, state or federal, by what the expenses were exclusively to account for the butlers. In the celebrations they had to feed to practically the whole community, besides providing with firewood, candles and everything necessary to carry out the rituals which had as objective the village received the favors of the divinities. In addition, stewardships absorbed most of the time those who occupy those positions, what was that while they were in community service they had to neglect its main economic activity: agriculture. They planted, but did not start weeding regularly on the dates indicated so that cornfields give the best fruit. Finally, but not less important to understand the economic crisis that suffered San Juan Guivini at that time, the mystical rituals were including large quantities of alcoholic beverages (tepache, tequila and pulque), causing many men in the community spent weeks in unproductive.

Several anecdotes of the elders testify to the hard economic situation in which the residents of San Juan Guivini were. For example, Zacarías Fuentes Ibáñez mentioned that in that time, the majority of the population just had a change of clothes. When someone was going to take a bath and had to wash their clothes, must wait until was drying off. Those who were economically well positioned had at most two or three changes of clothes and had a beast of burden¹⁵. In the community almost nobody had money. Commercial transactions were exclusively through barter. The wealth of a family was measured by the

¹⁵ Julián Aragón Pérez mentioned that in that time to have a truck was equivalent to have a van at present.

amount of food that had, like grains of corn, beans, turkeys or chickens. For the parents of a young woman in age of marriage (between 11 and 15 years at that time), it was a privilege when their daughters were married with the son who possessed these foods, because when they asked hers hand, they carried lived or prepared turkeys in meal. On many occasions have daughters were a support to ask for grains of corn.

All those who occupy a stewardship with the approval of the Menrak, but did not have to cover the costs inherent to the position, asked for credit the corn to the to Jose Guadalupe Lorenzo and his brother Anacleto, which were the only people that had large amounts of food, because the whole people was working for them in exchange for corn. While the vast majority of the community for the system of charges and the Government of the Menrak brought material poverty, for a handful of people meant power and reproduction of its domain on the rest of the community. Almost all those who were butlers during the government of the Menrakg had later had to work for the brothers Lorenzo in order to feed their families. From January through April a "bushel" of corn as a salary was paid for each day worked¹⁶. But for May - July the corn was beginning skimping therefore paid approximately half bushel of corn per day.

Corn was a product highly demanded by the people of San Juan Guivini since to date is their main food. A sacred value was attributing to the corn, beyond the simple utility for the reproduction of the biological life. Parents instilled their children to value it and making sacred it. For members of the community, the shortage of corn was indication that something was not pleasing to the deities that ruled the universe.

The majority of the members of the community did not think more than on daily subsistence and how to cover the costs that were implying the civic-religious duties. They were not two separated matters. They thought that without the blessing of the gods could not cover their basic needs. It is important to understand that element of their worldview, to explain why destined major resources for festivities and rituals while they lived surrounded by multiple deficiencies. The previous thing also largely explains why members of the community did not participate or involved in activities that were made in the municipal agency. Everything about government business was exclusive to a handful of families and Menrakg. The Dad Guexch or municipal officers who were elected by the Gods (according to shamans), invariably came from the same families since time that elders currently living in San Juan Guivini are not able to track.

The elders say that the vast majority of the residents were afraid to leave the community, because it was believed that there existed "magic beings" (*duendes*) who were taking the persons. In the afternoons it was not advisable to leave, because it was believed that goblins lived in the forest and some people constantly

¹⁶ "Bushel" is a unit of measure that is currently still used by older persons. It is approximately equivalent to four kilos.

disappearing and thought that they were carried by supernatural beings. As at that time there were very few people (less than 300), the houses were scattered among the town. The interviewed people say that when they were children, their parents scared them with the edge of the owl in the afternoon to sleep. From children, they grew up with the mentality that the community was a refuge in which sheltered to not be exposed to the dangers of the outside world.

The Council of Elders: the sovereignty emanating from Gods to men

The whole food and health crisis that endured the population of San Juan Guivini in the decade of 1960 is key to understand the end of the government of the Menrakg. As has been pointed out, the system of charges on which the government of the shamans was based turned into a heavy slab that the community could not already load. Although it is not possible to have documents or hard data on the deaths of those years, the elders estimate that more than half of the population of Guivini died, while the rest barely managed to survive. Faced with this emergency situation the elders of the community met and took a drastic and painful decision, but necessary for San Juan Guivini survive: they were going to eliminate the community and religious practices that consume more resources (such as community offering to the divinities that daily had to be done with flowers and food).

A decision of such importance could only have been produced and executed with success thanks to another important event in the community: the return of Catholic priests to San Juan Ozolotepec after decades of absence¹⁷, product of the “new evangelization” emanated from the Second Vatican Council¹⁸. The contact that was San Juan Guivini with the Catholic Church before the 1970s was reduced to a priest who lived in San Juan Ozolotepec was attending each year at the feast of the Patron Saint (Saint John the Baptist). But at the end of the Decade of 1960 and at the beginning of 1970, some missionaries began catechism sessions to youth in the community, which meant attacking many of the distinctive elements of the government of Menrakg. Obviously many cultural and religious elements of the ancient Zapotec worldview prevalent even to this day, but in

17 When the fact that Catholic priests arrived in San Juan Guivini until the second half of the twentieth century was discussed in interviews, despite the fact that the spaniards arrived in America from the sixteenth century, the elders of the Community answered that “their grandparents, and grandparents of their grandparents” had already heard about a new religion, but that each that the missionaries tried to convert them to Christianity, many people preferred to commit suicide.

18 Another factor that perhaps influenced to give this change was the reform of the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council, which is announced on December 25, 1961 by Pope John XXIII, who led a process of discussion of three years (1960-1965). The points that they tried to “update” to the Church were: a) to look that the priests, deacons and other members of the clergy are native of the localities; b) to value the local cultures and the elements that of they can be incorporated into the mass and other Christian liturgies; c) to evangelize being adapted to the needs and proper peculiarities of the locality; d) not exert coercion on someone to accept “the word of God”; e) to decentralize to the church and to be provided with indigenous dioceses (Morello 2007, 81-104).

relation to the structures of Government, the food crisis, epidemics and the penetration of Christian religions (later incursion of Protestantism will be analyzed), came together to bury the domain that the Menrakg had on the community.

The Dad Guexch which came in that year (Vicente Martínez) commented that he was afraid to not continue with traditional rituals. He accepted the office under the condition that if something was wrong, the following year it would continue with the tradition. While many members of the community felt dissatisfied by the decision to change the “customs and habits” of the community, ended up accepting it because it was a decision taken by the elderly, together with the influence of the new members of the community who were evangelized, which were the people who, having successfully met with each and every one of the positions of the community office system (some 2 or 3 times the same place), had a strong and authoritative voice. So it was that the power vacuum left by the Menrakg was covered by the Council of Elders. But the Council was a transitional institution, as it continued reproducing or leaving without resolve many of the problems that brought down the regime of the Menrakg.

The figure of Dad Guexch or Municipal Agent, since the end of 1960s, was not designated by a divine order, but for the elderly who previously met all positions of the hierarchy of positions that receive the honorary name of Mengool¹⁹. The mechanism to choose the authority was the following one: As before the Council of Elders, in the night of the last day of October the authorities met and convened to the Mengool to see what people were missing from positions in the system of charges²⁰. To occupy a particular position, it was necessary that that person had previously complied with the lower charges. For example, the Visxquel and Major positions were not elected for the Mengool but by individuals who ended the management period designated someone in the place. These two charges involved personal expenses without any salary. This could be considered a “community service” in most cases was not voluntary. The men who were elected commonly bothered because the system of charges involved a considerable economic decline for them. Many times the nominees even ended up beating those who appointed them as their successors.

Despite the discontent, the elected had no choice and had to serve the community. If someone was opposed (and it happened with enough frequency) arguing that did not have with that to settle the expenses that the position was demanding, immediately the Major and its Topiles (sheriffs) were putting in the

19 Not every elder is a Mengool, nor all that had elderly were part of the Council of Elders. Only they were those who had complied with all the stewardships of the system of charges, up to coming to Dad Guexch.

20 The system of charges in San Juan Guivini consisted of following stewardships in strict vertical hierarchy, starting with the lowest position: Shidio (police or church Topil); Major or Agency Topil; Councilor; Lieutenant or Judge, Visxquel (Prosecutor of Church); Mayor and finally the Municipal agent or Dad Guexch. As can be seen in the names of the charges, the system is not purely indigenous, but it is the mixture of pre-Hispanic charges with others who were brought by the Spaniards, as Ugo Pipitone has documented in his investigations on the Oaxaca's political system. (Pipitone 2007, 14-21).

jail the necessary days until he was accepting to serve, borrowing for years to solve the community's commitment. In some cases, the candidates for the positions were not present in the community, because as soon as they know of his appointment they fled to not meet the heavy burden the stewardships represented. Despite those problems, once someone had been elected, the Topiles went for him, having to be of service a year, resting to the next, and thus consecutively assigned him other stewardship to comply with all of the posts of the system of charges, having to repeat the same position on several occasions.

First place, Shidio, was held between 14 and 16 years, while the latter, Dad Guexch, could be reached to the nearly 60. This reflects that the charges system dictated that all men, from youth to old age, had the obligation to provide a service in the community. In their worldview individuals were born, grew up and died to keep and serve the community. The individual as being autonomous and independent of the collective body was inconceivable. In fact, signs of individualism, as they were attempts to enrichment or self-improvement, were interpreted as a threat against the order which has traditionally prevailed in the community.

Mengool is similar to a Sage in the Zapotec conception of that time, therefore they were who analyzed and discussed if a person could be Dad Guexch. The criteria of the Council of elders to choose someone to fill that position were no longer linked to spiritual elements they were result of material and specific needs that the community had in that period. The elements that were taken into consideration were the performance of the candidate in the previous charges who has occupied and to have expired with each and every one of the positions of the charges system. The marital status of the person is also analyzed preferably had to be married, because Dad Guexch be involved responsibility for the wife who occupied the charge. When it was a religious festival or event, the wives of the authorities were responsible to bring tortillas and make food for the rest of the population. The office of mayor was also proposed by the Mengool. Other offices were occupied by persons proposed by the same persons who left office.

The form in which this appointment was organized was the following one: about five or six o'clock in the evening, when the 1st of November was coming, they had to look for the persons who were going to take charge of the needs of the people. The *Mennashin* (political authorities) met in the municipal agency (*Iennyuú loó*) with the objective to search for responsible persons for the direction of the people for the following year²¹. At that time the Municipal Agent outgoing suggested to the Mengool the person who he considered was suitable for the post. Subsequently, the Mengool analyzing the profile of the nominee. It was very important to the candidate the behavior that had with other members of the community, for example, that he had never committed adultery or some

21 The meaning of the word *loó* is understood as "something that is public", what is for all or concerns all.

other moral fault. In case that the candidate was not welcomed by the Mengool, they then discussed and proposed to another person. When finished to appoint men to occupy the charge of Municipal Agent and Constitutional Mayor, the outgoing agent gave the order to the judge to bring the elected one, the one who in turn transmitted to the *Topiles* to bring two persons who were appointed and assumed their charges.

In many cases the elected persons learned of the appointment long before the *Topiles* find them. If the candidates did not want to accept the charge they were hiding and going to another place. When the *Topiles* arrived at home of the elected person and could not find him, at that time they asked with their neighbors in the community or to those who are sowing near its cultivation to know where he had gone. When they gave with the elected person, with torches of wood were going to bring him so that he was appearing in the municipal agency before the Mengool and the Municipal Agent.

The Mengool said to the elected person: "accept your cigar²²". When nominees refused accept the cigar and *mezcal* (an alcoholic beverage) in the hands of the outgoing agent all present Mengool told him "receives your cigar that we are here to support and obey your orders". When finally the nominee received the cigar and the *mezcal*, gave him his appreciation for represent the people and repeat the process with the person that would be the Constitutional Mayor. After all this process there was done a record of appointment of the new authorities.

When already had men that would serve the following year, the first day of November the new authorities met in the house of the new Agent all new members of the Government engage in friendly relations between them and to discuss about the needs of the people. Days later, the *Topiles* were covering the village for a collection that was used to acquire the animals that was going to be consumed for the event of the change of authorities and to buy the papers that was to be used throughout the year.

In a public way, were no longer made the ancestral practices of the community which consisted of go to leave offerings at the sacred places (hills, natural spring, caves, etc.). Nevertheless, privately the authorities kept on consulting the Menrakg to ask for some advice or protection during the year of service. If the Menrakg predicted some fatal event, the Agent paid them what he could to make they worked to neutralize some or prevent evil omen came true. If the Municipal agent did not have resources to pay for the service, he regaled the Menrakg a piece of ground²³.

22 "Accept the cigar" implied within their culture seal a pact or commitment. The covenant can be from admit to being appointed the authority of the community, to consent to give his daughter in marriage.

23 It is revealing that the information regarding the secret contacts between the municipal Agents and the Menrakg was provided by persons who at present profess the religion Pentecost, since the Catholics up to the date are less opened to speak on this topic. However, the majority of persons interviewed, both Catholic and Protestant, to refer to the Zapotec worldview that prevailed in San Juan Guivini until the 1960s, use terms like "the age in which we were living in the darkness" or "the times of our idolatry".

According to the stories of the elders of the community, the habit of going to the *Guioniznahsx* (the holy well) was already fading away gradually since years ago, by insufficient food that was in San Juan Guivini. Forced by the need to survive, the population began to prefer eating products that give them the divine beings. They also began to prefer to invest their efforts in activities destined to produce an immediate material benefit to them. Until 1961, authorities who had recently occupied their charges got musicians and flowers to bring them to the sacred place which was the *Guioniznahsx*. However, that year the new authorities simply were without warning to the rest of the community, and without carrying the products and music needed to reproduce the traditional ritual of taking possession of their charges. Some members of the community were angered by the attitude of those authorities because they had broken an ancestral tradition. The following year the crops improved and there was enough food to come back to be held the ceremony of transfer of community powers as tradition dictated. But little by little the material shortages caused in 1968 was abandoned in a definitive way the habit of going to receive to the authorities in the sacred hill.

The new political rules of the community were the following: The Mengool gathered in a Council of Elders (no longer the *Menrakg*) possessed a very important political power, because they nominated the two candidates who subsequently would be placed under the scrutiny of the people, so some occupying the charges of Mayor and agent. But beyond the process of election of authorities, the Council of Elders was consulted to take all the relevant decisions of Government. At the same time, many people began to question the traditional system of charges because complying with the responsibilities of the community offices absorbed long and involved neglect their crops. In synthesis, the starvation in times of a strong epidemic forced the abandonment of the old community practices, moving the power of the *Menrakg* to *Mengool* in the Council of Elders. Now remains to know why the power went on from the Council of Elders to the People's Assembly with form of direct democracy, which is the type of government that at present prevails in San Juan Guivini.

The decline of the Council of Elders and the generation of half a century

A key event to understand the transition of the Council of Elders to the People's Assembly that experiment San Juan Guivini in the 1970s, was that in 1956, when was municipal Agent, Maximino Lorenzo, a group of sixty-three children of different ages was sent to the village of Santa Catarina Cuixtla to learn how to read, write and speak in Spanish. The people cooperated to pay for the tutoring with goods, because practically nobody had money²⁴. The form in which the

24 Women had no right to study in spite of the fact that several of the girls expressed a desire to learn. It was argued that it had no case that went to school, because they did not occupy any position within the municipal agency. For adults of that time was important that men know how to read, write and speak Spanish, because they needed when

work of the teacher was evaluated was with the progress of all the children per month. Those children who to half a century had the privilege and the fortune of receiving formal education became for 1970s men who led the opposition to the Council of Elders in particular, and the traditional government system in general.

As has been mentioned, to occupy the highest chargers which were those of Municipal Agent and Mayor was first necessary be appointed by the Menrakg, and by the end of the decade of 1960 to be elected by the Mengool in the Council of Elders. However, it is necessary to remember that regardless of those who chose the community authority, nominees could only come from the members of the community that had successfully complied with each and every one of the stewardships system of charges. Under those rules, who occupied a position not necessarily have enough knowledge to fulfill the tasks inherent in the municipal administration, even by the standards of a small indigenous community. For example, authority did not know how to read or write, they could not interpret any document that was sent by the municipal government of San Francisco Ozoloteppec, much less elaborate a letter on their own (such as birth or death certificates) and had to ask to Malaquíás Martínez (at that time the chieftain of San Juan Guivini), that was the only one who knew spanish, o assist them in the development of the writing that was needed. It is not difficult to imagine the enormous power that Malaquíás Martínez had to monopolize the communication (together with the commerce) between the community and the outside world.

The authorities of San Juan Guivini, aside from having the approval of the divinities first, and of the Council of Elders after, once elected they had to have the support of the chieftain Malaquíás Martínez, to assist in the realization of important tasks of government. When a formal authority of the community did not obey the chieftain or did something he did not like, this one was going in the municipal agency to threaten until he was paying attention of the expressed order. Formally was the Council of Elders who took the decisions, but everyone in the community knew the real power which Malaquíás Martínez exerted.

The way in which the Council of Elders led the community had many disadvantages that ended up generating discontent in large sectors of the population. For example, the decisions were imposed, many times was not taken into account the opinion of those who were not Mengool, thus it was assumed from the fact that those who were not old did not know what was right or important. Practically all of the times they chose someone to be the authority of the community, the elected person did not want the charge. It must be remembered that the conflict had already been in San Juan Guivini since a long time ago, but it was

leaving the community to defend the interests of San Juan Guivini or to make requests to the municipal authorities. Classes were held for two years and two months. During that time the parents of the children had many difficulties to pay the profesor. The master gave classes for some months without pay, until there came the moment in which they stopped giving the classes to the children of San Juan Guivini. Despite the fact that the children received classes only by little more than a couple of years, perhaps most importantly, the habit of reading, mostly from religious texts that Catholic priests they provide.

limiting itself to the stewardships of low status of the system of charges.

That someone occupied the position of Agent or Mayor against his will many times meant that did not have a commitment to their duties. If someone came to occupy the charge of municipal agent, on some occasions this told the Mengool: "you put me in charge, if I don't do anything or do it wrong, do not claim me". It is necessary to be in mind at all times that they were put without remuneration and they had to do strong sacrifices to expire with the community responsibilities.

To illustrate this point, I point out the case of Filiberto Pérez Carmona, who was elected to be Dad Guexch. Instead of celebrating or be considering to be a winner by its appointment like the maximum authority of Guivini, Filiberto commented that the first thing he thought was "already screwed me". The fact that the Council of Elders was doing elections of a unilateral way caused that the responsibility for the good or bad management of the officials would fall, in view of the population, in the electors, the Mengool, not the people who occupied the charges.

Before the widespread dissatisfaction, the Mengool decided to summon for the men that were 15 years old from now, so they vote two candidates nominated by the Council of Elders. That way the responsibility for the management of the Agent and the Mayor no longer fall exclusively in the Council of Elders but was shared by an assembly that legitimized the decisions of Mengool.

Since then, every October 28 the *Topiles* were covering the whole community to warn that November first they were going to choose new authorities for the community and it was necessary that the chief of every family attend. If in a family there was a male who was already in age to give a service to the community, he was invited to attend the meeting that validated the candidates nominated by the Council of Elders. The morning of the first day of November was the date of the election of the new authorities. Major called the meeting with a horn and shouted "come to the Assembly"²⁵

Despite the establishment of the Assembly, due to the fact that the role of the same was only to validate decisions that previously had already taken by the Council of Elders, many and important members of the community were dissatisfied with the way in which San Juan Guivini was governed. Their dissatisfaction included attack to the figure of Malaquíás Martínez. Changes of greater depth were presented as urgent.

Almost all members of the aforementioned generation of 1956 had started to give service to the community in the system of charges from middle of the

25 "Assembly" is the word used by members of the community who currently speak Spanish to refer to the meeting of all adults to decide on issues related to the community. But the word in Zapotec that used to refer to the Assembly is not literally a gathering of people, but that is "*loó*". As mentioned previously, *loó* is "something public" or that "concerns the whole community". Therefore, in the Zapotec culture when it says "we're going to the Assembly" does not have in mind to go to a simple meeting, but the concept implies going to deal with issues within its competence and affect the entire community.

decade of 1960. In 1979 almost all the members of that generation were heads of family and had reached certain social weight. They began to object mainly by the indispensable criterion for eligibility for the highest charges of the community government: Having passed through all the stewardships. The members of the generation of 56 questioned the knowledge and the authority of the Mengool, that were persons who could neither read nor write, much less to do it in Spanish.

When members of the generation of half a century began to occupy the stewardships of medium category as there were the charges of Councilor or Secretary, they were not calling the Mengool to ask for any advice or to request for their approval. As mentioned previously, when elected to the governing authorities (Agent and Mayor), these were to Mr Malaquíás Martínez home to bring certain goods in exchange for his support in the preparation of documents and make arrangements or requests to the municipal seat. For 1979 the eligibility requirement was modified to occupy the high charges in the community, because instead of being people who had covered the whole system of charges, chosen persons who could read, write and speak Spanish. Those who occupied charges, that were a member of the generation of half a century, had certain knowledge that were allowing them to realize their functions as authority without the services of Malaquíás Martínez.

The new generation that began to climb positions in the government of San Juan Guivini not only sought to break with the traditions and customs that prevailed in the community, as the chieftaincy and the system of charges, but they dreamed with three projects that from his perspective would significantly improve the lives of all the inhabitants: a) build a road to communicate to San Juan Guivini with the outside world; b) provide a system of running water to the community; finally but perhaps the most important c) having a school for the children of the people.

Zapotec democracy: the construction of the People's Assembly

The men of the generation of half a century dreamed of a better life for themselves and their families. Many of them developed a confidence in themselves superior to that of the rest of the persons in the community, which was manifested in who dared to leave San Juan Guivini to work on coffee farms or to trade their crops in the village markets surrounding²⁶. The contact with the exterior

26 In the decade of 1980 and 1990 this change was more intensive and deep, as a result of the introduction of the cultivation of poppy by several residents of San Juan Guivini. In recent years the activity has decreased greatly as a result of the operations conducted by the National Army because of the Drug's War of the Federal Government. However, the two decades of boom that the crop mentioned served for the community was capitalized (although modestly) and experienced certain economic and material modernization. Many families now have houses of partition and ceiling tile, When before there were only wood and without firm floor. Some few (approximately 10%), even have television, DVD player and computer. Many ex-sowers of poppy, with the knowledge and the capital obtained during

opened their horizons to them and increased their expectations to them, because it woke up the desire to have the comforts that were in other places. The confrontation with the defenders of tradition (the chieftain and the Council of Elders) was inevitable.

In 1979 Alejandro Ramírez García began organizing other heads of family of the community with the aim of solving the water problem. Until that time the residents had to wake up very early to go more than half an hour toward the so-called “river of milk”. The idea of building a pipeline that distribute drinking water in San Juan Guivini seemed to the Council of Elders absurd and unworkable. But in 1980, a Committee to build a community water system was self-appointed, without even asking permission to the Council of Elders. The water committee was integrated in the following manner: a) President: Alejandro Ramírez García b) Secretary: Rutilio Mendoza c) Treasurer: Venancio Lorenzo Pérez d) The first Chair: Abdón Ramírez Cruz e) The second Chair: Fidencio Hernández Martínez f) Third Chair: Enedino Aragón López. All of them were members of the generation of half a century.

The persons previously mentioned were commissioned to ask permission to San Francisco Ozolotepec to take water from its spring. At the same time they went to the capital of Oaxaca to seek resources for the first time for the abandoned and marginalized people of San Juan Guivini. After months of request, achieved that San Juan Guivini received 45 000 pesos, which at that time was a huge amount for them.

At that time existed near San Juan Guivini a breach built by persons who rose to the highland to cut down trees of precious woods (like mahogany) of an illegal way. That breach was next to the so-called “tomato river”, five hours from San Juan Guivini. The members of the community had to do free community work (*tequio*) to move the material on foot (rod, cement and piping) from the mentioned breach until their community. The excavation for the plumbing was distributed by meter to every family in the community. The sand and the gravel were transported from hills near to San Juan Guivini. They hired a construction teacher for building the tank. January 30, 1981 is a date that all the adults and elders who at present live in San Juan Guivini remember emotionally in their hearts and their eyes are still wiped when talking about the subject. That day the piped water was distributed in the main streets of the community. Faucets were placed in strategic places so that the members of the community had access to the vital liquid.

The persons did not have already to go so early to realize the long and heavy walk to the creek, they obtained it on the faucets to the center of the community. It was a hard blow to the credibility and legitimacy of the Council of Elders

last decades (the persons who showed them how to sow and to take care to the poppy, taught them also the use of fertilizers and pesticides, elements completely unknown until then), at present they have legitimate business; some of them even sent their children to study up to the university, obtaining currently jobs outside of San Juan Guivini.

that the leaders of the generation of half a century were used to continue with their dream of having a highway. Increasingly the Mengool were less taken into consideration and the People's Assembly, that at the beginning it was only to legitimize the decisions of the Council of Elders, it was becoming stronger and becoming the supreme authority.

The *coup de grace* to the Council of Elders was the construction of the highway. In the Assembly realized in the year 1981 was discussed the need that the highway was coming to the community, however the Mengool strongly opposed to this proposal, stating that it was not only unnecessary, but it would also be reason for conflict with others villages and would be a danger for San Juan Guivini because it would lead to the arrival of new people to the community²⁷. Also they were arguing that with this work the areas destined for the sowing would erode for the trees chopping. In addition to that, there was no money for the construction of the highway, it would be necessary to do *tequio* (free communitarian job), which was publicized by the Council of Elders as a punishment for the rest of the settlers. In the Assembly several took the word to indicate the changes that had been made in the last times, in addition to the importance of naming the young people and with knowledge for the charge of Dad Guexch. The discussions were so heated that the Assembly was dissolved. Days later the Assembly without the Council of Elders was installed, whose place was supplied by a polling location. Not only were excluded from the decision to elect the next Dad Guexch and on the topic of the highway, from that event were left to consult in a definitive manner with what the assembly became the organ of consultation for all the actions of government, as for the designation of the community authorities. Since 1981 and up to the date the polling location is the one that coordinates the assembly. The first Dad Guexch or Municipal Agent of the generation of the 56 was Severo Cortés in 1982.

At present none is already alive of those who in 1981 were Mengool. But those who now have advanced age say than in that historical assembly "the elders cried and their hearts was filled with sadness" to be displaced and marginalized by the government of the community.

On the subject of primary school, already from 1975 a teacher had come to the community sent by the federal government, but the classes lasted only two months a year, in addition the professor only spoke Spanish, therefore the advances were exceedingly scarce. For the decade of 1980 there was already present in the mind of the population of San Juan Guivini the requirement that the

27 The settlers of San Juan Guivini historically have had bad relation with the nearby community of Santiago Lapagüa, which belongs to the municipality of San Juan Ozolotepec. The elderly narrate endless stories of kidnapping of women, robberies and murders that over the years have caused the feud between residents of both communities. The absence of State institutions that can mediate or regulate conflicts in this area, causes people to have to make "justice" by his own hand, what provokes endless cycles of revenges that can go so far as to exterminate entire families. Faced with this scenario, the Mengool believed that with the highway the conflicts could be extrapolated to more distant communities.

community will be allocated a place as a professor and that classes were bilingual (Zapotec and Spanish). The new People's Assembly, under the total control of the then-young, gave the order that the women were to the school just as the men.

It also stipulated that parents who do not send their children to primary school were sent to prison. If a child was missing classes one day the father had to pay 20 pesos, unless it was due to illness.

Throughout the decade of 1980 the new People's Assembly was dedicated to managing resources and services for San Juan Guivini, both to its municipal seat San Francisco Ozolotepec, as to the state and federal governments. In some occasions they went to Mexico City to realize protests to press in the solution of their demands. For the realization of these recent political actions, personages of the community like Julián Aragón Pérez, Juan Cruz Lorenzo, Agustín López Fuentes, Franco Mendoza Cruz, Eulogio García Pérez y Primitivo Martínez Mendoza, joined with the pressure group Rural Torch (*Antorcha Campesina*) and with them they maximized their aptitude to impact the extracommunity world, although in the long run, as will be shown later, also generated certain vices that currently suffers the government of Guivini.

Among the achievements of the new ruling generation of the community emphasize the opening of an establishment CONASUPO (known at present like Popular Shop)²⁸, the introduction of electric energy to the community²⁹ and the creation of a rural clinic³⁰.

If an average inhabitant of Mexico City visits San Juan Guivini, will see it like an extremely backward and desolate place, but for those who knew the community a pair of decades ago, Guivini is an unrecognizable town and with many improvements. By the beginnings of the decade of 1990 it was already provides with constant resources on the part of the Municipal seat, and its population had grown in number as a result of the collapse of infant mortality.

To date, the members of the generation of half a century that transformed San Juan Guivini in just a few decades enjoy the recognition and respect of the members of the community. During the meetings of the People's Assembly the

28 The National Company of Popular Subsistences or CONASUPO was a public company that offered products of the first need to low cost, thanks to a politics of subsidies and reduction of prices. With the arrival of the Conasupo to San Juan Guivini the nearby peoples like Santiago Lapaguia, San Francisco Ozolotepec, Santa Catarina Xanaguia, San José Ozolotepec, San Felipe Lachillo, Santiago Xanica and San Andres Loveni, went constantly to San Juan Guivini to make their purchases.

29 With electric power and the resources originated from the plant cannabis and the poppy that were mentioned previously, several persons acquired television, with that spent the nights watching programs where they knew how people lived in the rest of Mexico. Also the duration of the day extended, because with a simple bulb extending their activities up to where they wanted to, already not up to where the nature was allowing them.

30 Is achievement managed that the state government had paid a doctor for San Juan Guivini began to treat common diseases but which ended with several lives until then such as flu and diarrhea. By the middle of the decade of 1980 they began vaccinating the newborn babies, children, young persons and adults of the community. Until the time of writing these lines there have been no new cases of measles or rubella in San Juan Guivini.

opinions of these persons have a notable weight and commonly they turn into resolutions.

The foregoing has turned into double-edged sword, because if it is true that for a time they realized profitable actions for the population, over the years some members of the generation of the 56 have become a strong group that imposed their opinions and prevents the survival of groups or actors dissidents within the community. The rules that currently govern San Juan Guivini, made in the last decades and established by a small number of persons, are publicized like "traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation". Beyond that indigenous discourse, the information showed along this paper displays that the idea of that the People's Assembly is a government product of an indigenous ancestral tradition is only a legitimizing myth.

In the last two decades there are new the challenges and problems that face the young and fragile direct democracy³¹ of San Juan Guivini, as a result of the emergence of two new phenomena: the religious diversity and the arrival of federal resources.

The challenges of Zapotec democracy: The limits of the assembly rule

The key event to understand the current dynamics of the People's Assembly in San Juan Guivini is the religious plurality. If previously the struggle for power was among indigenous young Catholics versus the defenders of the traditional Zapotec cosmic order, now the dispute is between the new chieftaincies Catholics who are trying to defend their reserves of power, against the Protestant groups that are fighting for open spaces in the government of the community. It is not more a struggle for change the regime of government (the rules that make up the government), but for being included in that regime.

The Protestant religion arrived in San Juan Guivini in 1988 through a pastor from Santa Catarina Xanagua. It is a neighboring village who received Americans missionaries who went to evangelize the native people since many years ago. Alfonso Pérez Mendoza was the first in San Juan Guivini in converted to the Pentecostalism. He pointed out that "since we received the word of God" changed the way of working in San Juan Guivini. The resources that were spent on liquor and festivities now are destined by the Protestants for saving, invest-

31 Direct democracy as the governing regime presents variants but its characteristic feature is a deliberative assembly not representative, that is, the power that applies is only that of the members who constitute it. That Assembly is considered "the people" as a whole, not as a representation of the same. As a result, its authority is supreme; its decisions are considered to be the will of the community. The supporters of direct democracy consider it more "pure" than that consisting of elected representatives. Do not confuse direct democracy as a System of Government, with the "instruments" of direct democracy (referendum, plebiscite, etc.) that can be found within the regimes of representative and liberal democracy. The first is a form of self-government of relatively small and homogenous communities, while the second is only a set of instruments that complement to the proper democracy of pluralistic societies. (Lijphart 1984, 12-24).

ment in new crops, or purchase products destined for the welfare of the family.

The changes introduced by young Catholics to the Zapotec traditional structures caused drastic changes in the Government of San Juan Guivini regime, but still persist to this day among Catholics many beliefs that are vestiges of the ancient Zapotec religion³², as the idea of the divine predestination. Remember that the Menrakg argued that the deities had charted a plan for each one of the members of the community, destination from which it was impossible to escape. Even if it were possible, it was not desirable. In contrast, the Pentecost Protestants have the idea of that the decisions of every believer construct or destroy the salvation and the destination of each Individual (this way, with capital letter).

The separation between the civic and religious sphere until the 1990s was very weak in San Juan Guivini. The official celebrations of the community were the Catholic feasts, which are made, to date, with money from the Community Government (in fact, the construction of the Catholic Church was with public resources). The Protestants began questioning essential practices for the reproduction of several structures of power in the community. For example, they refused to that their taxes were destined to the Catholic Church. Also attacked publicly the payment for religious services, as well as the waste of human resources, material and financial in the festivities in a community with so many needs and deficiencies. In the same way that Catholics looked with scorn at the ancient cosmic order of the Menrakg, and then with mistrust to the Elder's Council, Protestants thought that Catholics were "pagans and idolatrous" whose practices thrusting to San Juan Guivini in poverty. The foregoing explains in large measure why the Protestants have been seen by the current leaders of Guivini like a threat to the community order. Also initially responds to the why, to date, they are excluded by the elite community to occupy the main political positions of San Juan Guivini, although they represent between 40 and 45 % of the whole population.

The second major challenge facing democracy of San Juan Guivini is the factional fight for the federal resources with which now the community is provided. Until the 1990s, an office in the Community Government was something practically honorific. If a charge was dealing it was to serve to the community, not only without economic compensation, but occasionally contributing with their own resources to expire with the acquired commitment. But in the first decade of the XXI century things changed dramatically with the arrival of federal resources. To receive money of extra community institutions was an event for which their traditions and structures of government were not prepared. Traditionally, the communities granted tribute, they did not receive subsidies. Any form of indigenous government (Menrakgs, system of charges, Elder's Council or People's Assembly) was imagined or designed to process the struggle for the power and resources

32 For example, until the end of the decade of 1990, the authorities elected by the popular Assembly, as part of the ceremony of taking possession of the charge, they had to bathe to cleanse themselves (although no longer in the sacred well *Guioniznahsx*) and pray a full Rosary on front of the whole community.

originated from the exterior. Those Zapotec regimes of government were responses of their time on problems of its time, pretending to be forms of organization which solved specific material deprivations in a relatively homogenous community (in ideological and religious terms). They were never thought to face the plurality and the competition that have turned currency in the community during the last years.

Since 1999 came to the community the National Program of Education, Health and Nutrition of Social Assistance (PROGRESA, today OPORTUNIDADES)³³. This public policy directly provides money to the community without intermediation of the municipal seat or of the state government. But it was until 1999 that an organization led by Juan García Martínez, Victorino Hernández, Práxedes Martínez y Cornelio Hernández spread in the community the idea of fight because the community enjoyed the sector 28³⁴ and 33³⁵, whose existence was unknown until then³⁶.

At that time, the popular Assembly control rested on the figures of Casimiro Cortés y Alejandro Carmona who had developed links with the Organization PRI's Rural Torch. These two people were receiving the money corresponding to the 28 sector and 33 from long ago, but as only they had knowledge of the existence of these resources, exert them fully and discretionary³⁷.

Casimiro Cortés has been commissioned to discredit the group linked to the PRD that directs Juan García Martínez, using all the loyalties that he gained through the granting of favours while having the monopoly control of federal resources. Because numerous members of the opposing group profess the Protestant religion, Casimiro Cortés and his group of loyal has promoted in the community the fear that some of them assume a position of government in San Juan Guivini.

Alejandro Carmona is currently pastor of another Protestant group, which

33 It is important to point out that the community of Guivini is cataloged with a grade of "high marginalization", when the rest of the agencies and of the same municipal seat, San Francisco Ozolotepec, have the status of "very high marginalization". In other words, while Guivini's population still has considerable problems of poverty, are lower than in its neighboring localities. (CONAPO 2010).

34 The sector 28 is the federal contribution to local governments for their free exert. Commonly in local government in Oaxaca is used almost the entire sector in current spending, as in the case of payment of payroll. (Moyado 2010).

35 The sector 33 comprises seven funds: contributions to basic and normal education, health services, social infrastructure, strengthening of municipalities and territorial demarcations, multiple support, technological education and of adults, finally a fund of contributions to public security. Of all these funds, correspond directly to the municipalities contributions for the social infrastructure and strengthening to the municipalities. (Ditto).

36 The group that was formed to demand resources for San Juan Guivini, although it was integrated only by men of the community, was encouraged and advised by the engineer Salomon Jara Cruz, President of the Union of Democratic Peasants (UCD) and congressman Rey Morales of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

37 Nowadays, Severo Cortés owns the line of trucks that monopolizes the transportation between San Juan Guivini and the municipal seat. Some members of the community, whose names asked to be kept anonymous, suspect that the necessary resources for the initial investment of the business came from the federal resources at the time that the rest of the community did not know who received them. Today Severo Cortés is who handles the federal resources to finance the agricultural activities in the community.

separated from the Church of Pentecost. Although the division of Protestantism in San Juan Guivini had its origin in theological differences between the religious leader Abel Aragón, the schism was seized by Casimiro Cortés to ally with Alejandro Carmona and, in that way, be supported of an important group of non-Catholic inhabitants in the community, at the time that weakened the Protestant opposition of Abel Aragón Pérez.

The group of Juan García, thanks to the structure of the UCD of the PRD, began alliances with another fourteen agencies of the municipal seat of San Francisco Ozolotepec. Their mobilizations, that were including placing children and women at the head of the manifestation with the target to make politically more expensive for the state government suppressing them violently, gave results to achieve that in the 2000 San Juan Guivini received federal resources directly, without the intermediation of Rural Torch's leader, that is to say, the PRI.

As it is observed, the fact that officially San Juan Guivini has the status of "Government by Customs and Habits", ruled by "Customary Law"³⁸, where supposedly the parties do not exist, it does not mean that, in practice, extracommunity political organizations as the PRI and the PRD engage with intra-community agents. Political parties possess and exert a very strong influence on the internal politics of San Juan Guivini. "Customs and Habits"³⁹ and political parties are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they have wrought a symbiotic patron-client relationship than of be ignoring, makes very difficult to understand the dynamics and the internal logic of the policy that is carried out in the indigenous communities of Southern México.

At present, the People's Assembly is controlled by Casimiro Cortés and Ale-

38 Customary Law is a legal system where the norms are the product of the repetition or routine of behaviors of those who integrate a community. It is a source of law opposite to the written law, as the normativity is commonly oral and is based on tradition or "local knowledge". The orality of the customary law does not do it of lax application. On the contrary, its strength resides in that all the members of the community have full conscience of the punishable laws and its obligatory nature (Orozco 1983, 12-24).

39 Customs and Habits (*Usos y Costumbres*) is a form of self-government consisting of the institutions and political practices that have had the indigenous communities separated from those developed by the nation-State. That is, the public charges, its functions, the duration of the charges of the public servants, the requisites to be elected and the mechanisms of voting of the communities that are governed under the regime of Customs and Habits, are not the ones that the Constitution and electoral laws (state and federal) stipulate, but those that the Customary law sanctions. That is, the system of government is based on the tradition existing in each community. (Gómez 2011). Currently, both the Federal Constitution as the State of Oaxaca recognize the right of communities to be governed under its own regulations always and when "human rights are respected and the guarantees that the same Constitution gives". However, that does not prevent that in practice, under the banner of the Customs and Habits and the right of the communities to the self-determination, appear multiple cases of abuses and violations of the individual rights perpetrated by the same indigenous authorities. A paradigmatic case is that of Eufrosina Cruz Mendoza, native of Santa María Quiegolani, community of the Southern highland and belonging Federal Electoral district of Miahuatlán de Porfirio Díaz. In 2007 Eufrosina gained the municipal elections, but she was not allowed to occupy the charge of Municipal President because "the ancestral tradition does not allow it". When in January of 2010 I met with the then municipal president of Quiegolani, Eloy Mendoza Martínez, I asked him what the political rights of women in your community are. His response was: "Have all the rights. They can vote but by tradition they cannot be voted. Here things have always been done as well, and nobody will not come to tell us how we should live nor govern ourselves. We are going to defend our identity like people, although it does not seem to them".

jandro Carmona, which exert a secularized chieftain power. Its domain over the community "has lost the magic" (the "disenchantment of the world" inherent in the secularized process as described by Max Weber) that had the Zapotec authorities in the past, whose legitimacy was encouraged by the belief in the deities and the weight of the tradition. These neo-chieftaincies are legitimized by an Assembly which monopolizes the positions of the executive board that way they have the control of the decisions, excluding the Protestants and PRD which have become in opposition to the Community Government. Casimiro and Alejandro get fidelity of important sectors of the population towards them distributing materials for construction, food, clothes and even cash obtained through the PRI. As in the past, to that political party does not care the method for choosing the local authority, any time they have the guarantee of which the votes for the state and federal elections are to the PRI. That way, although the Assembly supposedly is the maximum organ of decisions where any citizen can attend, in practice, the power is use by a small group of people who have the loyalty patronage of the majority of the assistants.

For someone to gain a position in the government of the community today, does not obtain it like result of the "people's will" shown in the full Assembly. When someone wants a charge (which now is quite attractive as it means having a fixed salary and federal funding), has to open negotiations and commitments with the group of Casimiro Cortés and Alejandro Carmona. Each of these personages puts to a candidate for each of the positions of the community government. Later the Assembly "decides" between those that previously they lobbied with the group of the PRI that monopolize the executive board, ensuring that, regardless of the outcome of the vote, they do not lose the power of the Community Government. Until the moment of writing these lines, they have not allowed that to be registered any person or sympathizer of the group of opposing Protestants.

Epilogue

There is an additional element of assemblyism that is practiced in San Juan Guivini which is a source of conflict: the voting system. The election to raised hand, although it can have the virtue of practically annulling the possibility of fraud, also exhibits the voter in public. It is impossible to vote in secret and consequently, neither is possible to do it freely. Because in case of do it, there is a risk of obtaining the hostility of the dominant actors.

The direct democracy, based on the assembly work, has a defect of origin and design: it is the tyranny of the majority, a slightly favorable area for the survival and strengthening of the opposition. They have no institutional mechanisms to protect to the minorities opponents nor to process the conflicts and the strug-

gles for the resources with which now the community government is provided⁴⁰. The young and fragile democracy Zapotec, so different from those of Western Court, in the facts is far from the romantic scene that idealizes the solidarity and community cooperation. The government by popular assembly is democratic in the sense of ownership of the power is of the "people". But if we move from ownership to the exercise of power, the Assembly, in the current form, does not serve like method to "the people" has control on its leaders and rulers.

The inhabitants of San Juan Guivini have important challenges of institutional design in its community government. However, as shown in this micro-political history the indigenous are quite far from being passive political actor. The process of democratization of the community does not present signs of stopping and as San Juan Guivini there are dozens (perhaps hundreds) of communities with characteristics and similar political developments, at least in the Southern Highlands of Oaxaca, where the Assembly is a "modern" institution but that is being legitimated as "traditional". Although poverty and marginalization causes that the indigenous are easy prey for clientelist practices of parties or corrupt leaders, the Indians has proved to be a people who struggle, resists and constantly its modified, contrary to the idea that indigenous structures by "Customs and Habits" are static or opposed to change.

40 Precisely the reason why Giovanni Sartori, when he wrote his famous book "Theory of Democracy", said that the democracy was a confused concept, was because the second half of the XXth century was dominated by the idea of that two types of democracies existed: the "pluralist" and the "popular". The first were integrated by institutions that were giving capacity to the election campaign. The pluralist democracy is characterized by competition and opposition. On the contrary, the popular democracies (Typical of the anti-liberals systems), have a conception of the "people" as an "indivisible community", with a single will. That is why in the "popular democracy" the opposition is marginalized, excluded or suppressed. "A democracy without respect for minorities is the tyranny of the majority" (Sartori 1988, 170).

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СЕКУЛАРИЗАЦИЈА И ДЕМОКРАТИЗАЦИЈА У ЈУГОИСТОЧНОМ МЕКСИКУ

Сажетак

Овај рад објашњава процес транзиције у демократију Запотек заједнице у планинским крајевима Оакса, у југоисточном Мексику. Транзиција иде руку под руку са важним верским променама. У овом раду аутор показује како је политичка транзиција почела због јаког процеса секуларизације и верског плурализма који је променио социо-економске структуре Запотек заједнице. Рад се бави транзицијом из теократије, вођене од стране Шамана, ка геронтократији, режима вођеног од стране Већа старца. Касније, дошло је до транзиције ка директној демократији, режима вођеног од стране Народне скупштине која представља све чланове Запотек заједнице.

Кључне речи: Запотек заједница, секуларизација, Индијанске заједнице, директна демократија, обичаји

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