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# Contesting Citizenship: Educational practices in an indigenous Mixtec community in Mexico

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the engagement of a social movement in the contestation of citizenship by means of education, in the context of broader indigenous struggles in Latin America. I examine citizenship formation as social practice in an alternative educational project in an indigenous Mixtec community in Mexico. The counter-hegemonic citizenship project aims to create citizens with communal and indigenous identities as well as with critical and democratic dispositions. This project takes on unexpected forms because of the ideological gap between activists and the local community. I show how different citizenship models interact in a dynamic process wherein aspirations of activists are actively negotiated, contested and redirected to respond to specific local realities. This ethnography of citizenship raises critical questions about theories that understand indigenous struggles over the meaning of citizenship in unequivocal ways. These tend to be incompatible with the complexities and inconsistencies of local realities and people engaged in everyday practices of social transformation.

## **Keywords**

**Citizenship, alternative education, social practice, indigenous struggles, popular contestation, Mexico**

*Dedicado a Bety Cariño y a todos ellas y ellos que siguen sembrando sus semillas de resistencia en las tierras de la Mixteca.*

## I. Introduction

Three years ago, the civil society organization *Centro de Apoyo Comunitario Trabajando Unidos* (CACTUS) founded a school in the indigenous community of Santos Reyes Tepejillo in the dry and mountainous Mixtec Baja region, located in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. Tepejillo is no normal indigenous community: it has two hotels, a gas station, paved roads and stunning residential houses. To quote a member of CACTUS: “The deterioration process of communal ways of life and indigenous culture is in an extremely advanced stage because of American influence and the inflow of drug money”. Tepejillo is an anomaly in the Mixtec region that is known for conditions of extreme poverty. The school located in Tepejillo, is not just any school. Liberating education [*educación liberadora*] is the name given to the combination of the teachers’ educational and political practices. From August 2011 to the beginning of January 2012, I conducted fieldwork at the school, in collaboration with CACTUS, to gain insight into the aspirations and motivations of passionate activist teachers and their encounters with the local community.

In Mexico, “preparatory school” is the three-year educational program that students follow after secondary school and before university. The communitarian preparatory school of CACTUS is a small school; there are four, five and ten students respectively in the first, second and third group. Their ages vary from fifteen to nineteen years old and the vast majority are girls. It is an exciting year, since the first class will graduate in the summer of 2012.

The school is founded on the basis of two objectives articulated by CACTUS. On the one hand, the teachers envision the school as a necessity that aims to respond to the right of indigenous people to quality education. On the other hand, the teachers aspire to emancipate the students and trigger a political process. This is articulated in the educational model and the organizational structure of the school that are based on notions like autonomy, social critique and the strengthening of indigenous identity, knowledge, language and communal ways of life. In the last decade, Mexico has experienced a rise of alternative educational projects initiated by civil society of which this school is an example. This phenomenon is an integral part of indigenous struggles over the meaning of citizenship and the concurrent reconfiguration of indigenous peoples’ relation with the state.

The rise of multicultural, neoliberal states in Latin America since the 1990s made room for indigenous people to redefine the meaning of citizenship (Jackson and Warren 2005, Mattiace 2003, Postero 2007, Van Cott 2005, Warren 1998, Yashar 1999). Whereas before indigenous peoples had to sacrifice their cultures to be part of a homogeneous nation-state, nowadays struggles are waged for an alternative citizenship model in which indigenous identities are recognized and economic and social resources redistributed (Jackson & Warren 2005, Mattiace 2003). In this struggle, indigenous movements contest the boundaries and practices of citizenship and a key field where this contestation takes place is that of education. Social movements have taken education into their own hands as a response to the partial exclusion of indigenous peoples from the public education system in Mexico and their unequal treatment within it. Alternative educational projects are often inspired by the vibrant tradition of popular education in Latin America, which explicitly links education to social and political transformations that favor popular classes.

Public schooling is often understood in terms of a citizenship factory (García 2005:12). What does that mean for social movements’ engagement in the field of education? Spindler (1987) told us long ago that from an anthropological perspective, all education is citizenship education. As

such, alternative educational projects are inherently about the creation of alternative identities and the consolidation of alternative societies, which makes them counter-hegemonic citizenship projects. The engagement of social movements in contesting citizenship through education is the key topic in this thesis. With the alternative educational project, the teachers of CACTUS fill in the gap where citizenship formation takes place, normally dominated by the state. To gain insight into this process I examine what kinds of citizens, with what kind of knowledge, values, political agency and dispositions the teachers seek to shape, thereby building on the approach proposed by Levinson (2011).

Following the footsteps of Lazar (2010), my intention is to contribute to the ethnographic work that explores citizenship as social practice (García 2005, Holston 2008, Lazar 2010, Ong 2006, Postero 2007). Of particular relevance in these works is Ong's (1999) argument that citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within power relations linked to the state and its subjects. Following this logic, I analyze the school of CACTUS as a field of encounter and conflict: the place where the contestation and negotiation of the meaning of citizenship takes place between state, social movement and local community. In the indigenous community Santos Reyes Tepejillo, these negotiations result from distinct aspirations and perceptions of schooling by activist teachers, students and parents. The main question raised in this ethnography of citizenship is: how can the educational and political practices of the teachers of CACTUS be described and explained in relation to citizenship formation and local community contestation?

The structure of this thesis is as follows. First, current academic debates relevant for this research are outlined. I examine scholarly literature about the engagement of indigenous movements in contesting citizenship, I explore how citizenship formation is discussed as social practice and how this plays out in the context of education in and outside the classroom. After these theoretical explorations, I sketch my research methodology before continuing to the second part of this thesis. The bulk of ethnographic analysis starts with a historical portrayal of CACTUS' broader politics and citizenship claims and a description of how these politics eventually took the form of alternative schools. Then I introduce the community Santos Reyes Tepejillo and analyze the differences in citizenship models envisioned by the teachers and community there. Subsequently, I analyze how the process of citizenship formation takes place by means of the curriculum, pedagogies and organizational structure of the school and how this process unfolds within negotiations between teachers, students and their mothers. As a way of concluding this thesis, I will reflect on what we can learn from my analysis of what makes citizenship tangible in the classroom, and what this tells us about general assumptions on indigenous struggles in Mexico.

## II. Citizenship in Theory

### Contesting citizenship and neoliberal multicultural states in Latin America

Struggles over the meaning of citizenship are a recurring theme in recent literature on neoliberal, multicultural states in Latin America (Fischer 2009, Postero 2007, Yashar 2005). In the twentieth century, Latin American states promised citizenship to indigenous peoples if they gave up their customs, lands and languages. This nationalizing and homogenizing project called *mestizaje*, was initiated to assimilate indigenous people into a mainstream *mestizo* society (Stavenhagen 2002:28). Since the beginning of the 1990s, the terms of this project were altered when various states adopted forms of multiculturalism in an effort to enhance the participation of indigenous people and to remedy histories of ethnic and racial domination. However, several scholars agree on the failure of the constitutional reforms to profoundly change unequal power relations (Hale 2002, Postero 2007, Rockwell 2010). Hale (2002) writes about “symbolic multiculturalism” and Rockwell (2010) about a “depoliticized version of multiculturalism” when referring to the new multicultural states, where cultural difference is recognized in a way that restricts actual possibilities for land reform, local autonomy and material justice in indigenous communities. These failing citizenship models for indigenous peoples sharply contrast with the autonomy-based projects of indigenous movements that fight for the inclusion of indigenous peoples in pluricultural nations (Bertely 2009:181).

Throughout the 1980s, the implementation of neoliberal reforms by Latin American states opened up new spaces for activism and created conditions for new indigenous identities. Neoliberal reforms jeopardized the local autonomy that indigenous communities had carved out over the years and restricted access to state resources. This increased vulnerability, combined with political liberalization that legalized the right to organize, created space for indigenous movements to organize and mobilize (Yashar 1999, 2005).

Citizenship is articulated in new ways by indigenous movements which demand a radical change in their traditional relationships with the state. They seek to rework the meaning of citizenship so that cultural difference is no longer a criterion for exclusion, but one of inclusion in a multicultural political community (García 2005:165). Indigenous movements articulate indigenous citizenship on the basis of cultural identity and a differentiated organization within a country. Furthermore, they want these differences to be protected and recognized by law. Several scholars have studied the tensions that accompany these new articulations of citizenship which are centered on the conflict between enhancing political inclusion in the nation on the one hand and preserving difference on the other (De la Peña 1999, Fischer 2009, García 2005, Jackson & Warren 2005, Mattiace 2003, Postero and Zamosc 2004, Yashar 2005). Smith (2007:240) sums up the core issue: “how can indigenous communities increase their presence in the national community - of citizens, of policy makers - while preserving some measure of political, economic and cultural autonomy?”. Gustafson (2009:232) refers to this issue as “the paradoxical stance of indigenous movements” which make claims on the bases of special, indigenous citizenship, while demanding state resources based on the notion of regular citizens of a country. The underlying anthropological debate revolves around the question of how to reconcile inclusive national citizenship with multiculturalism and measures of autonomy. In this thesis, I analyze how this question plays out in the politics and citizenship claims of CACTUS and hence takes form in their political and educational practices.

## **Citizenship as social practice**

Most social theories emphasize rights and responsibilities in accounts of state-citizen relations. However, scholars are increasingly studying citizenship as a social practice (Holston 2008, Lazar 2010, Ong 2006, Postero 2007). I will draw further on the work of scholars who envision citizenship as a bundle of practices surrounding the relationship between individuals and the state (Lazar 2008:5). Ong has influenced many authors in the field with her analysis of citizenship which emphasizes agency as well as broader power relations: “cultural citizenship is a dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society. Becoming a citizen depends on how one is constituted as a subject who exercises or submits to power relations” (1999:264). Scholars show a particular interest in everyday social practices, where citizenship is produced in negotiations and understood as dialectically constructed by states and subjects. Hence, people are subjected to a kind of citizenship, as well as constructing citizenship by themselves through agency and autonomy. Following this logic, Levinson (2011:280) argues that citizenship is a reciprocally engaged relationship between persons in the public sphere. Furthermore, Lazar (2008:14) argues for a sense of dynamism in understanding citizenship, and the recognition that society works through devices that attempt to make the individual in a particular social image, which may or may not be successful at any one time and individual. These theories on citizenship are explored in this thesis in the specific context of education. I will use the concept of ‘educational practice’ to examine citizenship formation in the school of CACTUS.

## **Citizenship and education**

The study of citizenship has become a prominent topic in political anthropology, but less so in the anthropology of education even though schools are often considered citizenship factories (García 2005:12). According to Spindler (1987), all education constructs identity and orients moral conduct for group life, which makes the study of the relationship between citizenship and educational processes even more important. Levinson defines citizenship education as “(...) efforts of societies and social groups to educate their members to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as (democratic) citizens” (2011:284). The word *educate* is understood in a broad sense since many studies outside school, from religious ceremonies to business activities, are classified as part of citizenship education. Different from the broader definition of education as learning that occurs throughout daily life, *schooling* refers to one particular site for learning, namely schools (Pollock and Levinson 2011:4).

Levinson (2011) argues that anthropologists of citizenship education should focus on what kinds of knowledge, competencies, values, or dispositions are highlighted; and kinds of identities and political agency are fostered in schools. This focus derives from his concern that anthropologists rarely address the broader political implications of schooled identities: “what kinds of citizens, for what kind of democracy, with what kinds of intercultural sensibilities, deliberative competencies and political agency are being shaped in schools?” (2011:283). In addition, Lazar (2010) urges ethnographers to pay particular attention to the aspirational nature of citizenship in schools, based on the assertion that “[...] there is some better, more democratic or more critical kind of political culture or subjecthood that can and should be achieved through schooling” (2010:181-182). She notes that the interplay between variable aspirations of educational programs and local realities often make citizenship formation a surprising process. Lazar’s argument underlies broader educational debates in which schools are understood as arenas of conflict. Apodaca and Rockwell (2012) explain the conflictive nature of schools with the conception of schooling as a social construction. As such, school cultures and governing

structures are reproduced, resisted or re-elaborated in social relations. Teachers, directors, parents, authorities and students each propose and contest the meanings and representations of schooling, leading to multiple school realities (Apodaca and Rockwell 2012:73). In this thesis, I explore how the differences in aspirations of activists and the local community, with regard to schooling and hence citizenship, play out in the conflictive arena of CACTUS' communitarian preparatory school.

### **Alternative citizenship formation by education**

Several scholars have studied the engagement of indigenous movements in the formation of alternative models of citizenship through schooling (Gustafson 2009, García 2005, Bertely 2009, Lazar 2010). Gustafson (2009:216) illustrates how bilingual intercultural education programs in Bolivia constitute a platform for the production of alternative models of citizenship by the Guarani movement. He explains this with Holston's (1999:167) concept of insurgent citizenship: "(...) these are forms found in organized grassroots mobilizations and in everyday practices that, in different ways empower, parody, derail or subvert state agendas. They are found, in other words, in struggles over what it means to be a member of the modern state (...)". Moreover, intercultural education that accepts cultural differences and encourages the construction of indigenous identities, lies the foundation for indigenous forms of citizenship in Bolivia. García (2005) notes a similar trend in her study on intercultural education in Peru.

Whereas Gustafson and García studied formal school programs, Bertely (2009) examined an alternative educational project that strengthened existing indigenous forms of citizenship in Maya communities, which she defines as "democratic communitarian citizenship". The *bien comun* [communal wellbeing] has a central place in this citizenship model associated with communitarian forms of democracy and indigenous forms of organization. In this form of democracy, the supreme value is social participation and citizens submit themselves to community control exercised by the people and founded in self-government (2009:184-186). This is contrasted by Bertely to liberal democracy, where citizens are defined as individuals and the ideal leadership model is representative and party-based. Lazar (2008:8-13) also taps into the discussion of liberal and communitarian senses of citizenship. She identifies the tension between an individual sense of citizenship that centers on individual interests, and a collective sense of citizenship based on a relational sense of self founded in obligations to the group. Bertely (2009) argues how the alternative education project in Chiapas, is constructing - actively, solidarily and from below - alternate models of society, citizenship and democracy. Furthermore, Lazar (2010) contributes to discussions on alternative citizenship formation in schools with her study in a Bolivian school where popular education methods are applied. She questions if the practices of political socialization in schools enable or stifle critical citizenship as encoded in critical pedagogies: the ability of students to critique the social and political context in which they are located.

I will use the concepts introduced by these scholars to explore how citizenship models are being contested in the alternative educational project of CACTUS. In doing so, I aim to contribute to the ethnographic work that explores indigenous struggles over citizenship in the field of education.

### **Research methodology**

Santos Reyes Tepejillo is an indigenous municipality located in the Juxtlahuaca district, in the mountain range of the Mixtec Baja, located in the northwest of the state of Oaxaca. I spent a total of five months living in Santos Reyes Tepejillo where one of the communitarian preparatory

schools of CACTUS is located. In the weekends, I often visited the nearest city which was a bumpy three-hour ride from the community through vast plains only occasionally alternated with small indigenous communities. Huajuapán de León is the most important city in the region, and the place where the head office of CACTUS is situated. Furthermore, I occasionally made trips to other alternative educational projects in the state of Oaxaca and the neighboring states Guerrero and Puebla.

My research participants consisted of former and contemporary members of CACTUS, with a special focus on the teachers of the preparatory schools, as well as the students and parents engaged in the alternative educational project. On a daily basis, I worked as teacher of the communitarian preparatory school of CACTUS and as such took part in all school activities. I taught English to all three groups and also gave classes on other subjects when needed. I chose this participatory approach to deepen my insight into the thoughts and experiences of the teachers, to build rapport with students and parents as well as to contribute to the project. Even though I made my identity as an anthropology student very clear, for the community I was just another teacher affiliated with CACTUS.

I lived in the house where all CACTUS teachers lived, which was located in the center of the community, next to one of the buildings used by the school. Consequently, I was always at the heart of all school activities which made participant observation and informal conversations a constant activity in the classrooms, in the teachers' accommodation and the garden where everyone hang-out. Furthermore, I conducted open ended, in-depth interviews with teachers and other members of CACTUS, as well as with some students and their parents, depending on how comfortable they felt with regard to interviews. I also conducted in-depth interviews with intellectuals of other alternative educational projects in the region to gain insight into CACTUS' position within these regional activities. Additionally, I took part in weekly meetings of mothers of the students about the school, as well as monthly meetings about the preparatory school with members of CACTUS in Huajuapán. Further methods used were the gathering and analysis of educational material used in class; assignments handed in by the students; and documents, leaflets, presentations and films made by CACTUS about their past activities.



### III. An Ethnography of Citizenship

#### 1. Getting to know CACTUS

##### **CACTUS' politics rooted in Zapatista struggles**

In 1998, the civil society organization CACTUS was officially founded, although it had already started working with indigenous communities in the Mixtec Baja in 1993. Luis Ramírez, a *mestizo* Mexican and Marista, was the founder of CACTUS.<sup>1</sup> He was part of El Patronato, a Marista religious institute which sought to address the educational needs of children and youth in disadvantaged areas.<sup>2</sup> CACTUS was founded to expand the work in the Mixtec region in the areas of agricultural production, health and education. At this stage, CACTUS' main function was the improvement of the situation of poverty and marginalization among indigenous peoples in the mountainous Mixtec Baja, where extremely dry land and few water resources made for hard agriculture conditions.

CACTUS' character changed fundamentally when Bety Cariño, an indigenous woman born in the Mixtec region, and her partner Omar Esparza became involved in CACTUS in 2001. Emilio, a member of CACTUS, recounted the importance of her arrival:<sup>3</sup>

“Before, the work of CACTUS was not very political, it was nothing more than responding to the necessities of the communities and obtaining resources. But Bety and Omar already had a political background and ideology. They participated a lot in the *Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional* (EZLN), not directly but as part of civil society that helped out our Zapatista friends. The Zapatista discourse was always very present in their work: the vindication of indigenous autonomy and the rights of the pueblos. From the moment they entered in CACTUS, a logic that was more political was set in motion”.<sup>4</sup>

In 2005, Ramírez handed over the coordination of CACTUS to Bety Cariño. She transformed CACTUS into an organization that overtly worked for indigenous rights and autonomy and thus against the marginalization of indigenous peoples by the government. In that context, CACTUS participated both in The Other Campaign of the Zapatistas and in the vigorous social movement The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) in 2006.<sup>56</sup>

CACTUS became involved in the new politics of social movements that developed in response to neoliberalism (Stahler-Sholk *et al.* 2007:5). These new oppositional politics are distinguished by their emphasis on autonomy from political parties and other institutions, decision-making through participatory and horizontal processes and a quest for solidarity that goes beyond classes (Dinerstein 2010, Monteagudo 2011, Stahler-Sholk *et al.* 2007, Stahler-Sholk 2007). Furthermore, the locus of political struggles has shifted from vanguard models organized to seize state power, towards novel relations to the formal political realm by fundamentally reworking relations of power. The Zapatistas are an explicit example of this new form of politics. Autonomy is central in their struggle since they demand the right to govern themselves locally and regionally according to traditional laws, to control the resources essential for their livelihoods, and to enjoy the recognition of indigenous customs, traditions and spirituality (Mattiace 2003, Bertely 2008).

Furthermore, the Zapatistas do not seek to seize state power; they rather aim to democratize power relations in every sphere of society. In accordance, they reaffirm the authority of affiliated communities by the commitment to lead by obeying [*mandar obedeciendo*] (Harvey 2005:14).

Inspired by the Zapatistas, the oppositional politics of CACTUS took the shape of community work where the Zapatista ideals were put into practice. In various communities in the Mixtec region, CACTUS worked in five areas with the aim of grassroots empowerment: *human rights for justice and dignity*, in the form of workshops and other activities concerning indigenous rights; *indigenous and popular communication*, the start and support of community radios; *education for autonomy*, the two communitarian preparatory schools and monthly lectures referred to as peasant school; *communitarian economies*, the initiation of community saving groups; *food sovereignty*, agricultural projects for autonomy in the production of food.<sup>7</sup> In addition to these main activities, CACTUS participated in several temporary collaborations and networks with other organizations.

When I asked the members about the objectives of their community work, their answers were twofold. On the one hand, they told me that their work responded to direct necessities in indigenous communities which the government failed to address like education, food, health and information. The members described this as “the exercise of rights”. CACTUS requested government funds to carry out community work, i.e. made claims on the government. These claims made on the basis of constitutional rights of national citizens points to the struggle for the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the Mexican nation-state (De La Peña 1999, Fischer 2009, Mattiace 2003). On the other hand, members told me that the community work had yet another objective. As Emilio recounted:

“It functioned as a conduit for political work, a pretext to raise awareness and get the communities organized for indigenous resistance. [...] We wanted them to demand their rights as indigenous *pueblos* and denounce injustices, like a big rebellious picnic”.

As such, the community work was a starting point to engage the communities in the struggle for the defence of their culture, indigenous rights and autonomy. Through community work, CACTUS aimed to strengthen indigenous identity and organize the communities to make claims on the government on the basis of indigeness. This points to a quest for indigenous citizenship, consistent with the broader hemispheric resurgence of indigenous movements (García 2005, Jackson & Warren 2005, Postero and Zamosc 2004, Yashar 2005). Consequently, CACTUS took on a paradoxical stance by making claims on the bases of special, indigenous citizenship, while demanding state resources based on the notion of regular citizens of a country (Gustafson 2009:232).

### **Education as guiding principle**

Education has always been a central element in CACTUS’ politics. The Maristas established their work on the popular education tradition, initiated by Paulo Freire. The diversity of projects and endeavors receiving the label of popular education makes the term difficult to define.

In general, popular education is a process which aims to empower people who feel marginalized - “the oppressed” - to take control of their own learning and to effect social change (Kane 2000). Ramírez had already embraced these ideals when he founded CACTUS and made popular education an integral part of the organizational model. Bety Cariño was also a pedagogue, which was no coincidence since Ramírez arranged a scholarship for her to study pedagogy.

Members told me that methods of popular education were used in all of CACTUS’ community work. Furthermore, the grassroots mobilization strategy of CACTUS was embedded in popular education by the emphasis on the political education of the younger generation. As a way to involve new youngsters and extend political influence, CACTUS engaged in the political education of young, often indigenous, people in order for them to become the new leaders of the indigenous resistance. The members of CACTUS described this as “the making of political cadres [*cuadros políticos*]”, a practice García (2005:152) refers to as a political identity project. I often heard members describe Bety Cariño as the outcome of Ramírez’ political education, while the same members described themselves as being products of Bety Cariño’s political education. Mateo recounted his experience:

“Bety was not just any indigenous woman, her charisma was infectious. In the time we worked together, she infected me. I received political education from Bety during everyday activities, at breakfast or during bus trips. She politicized me by sharing her experiences with me, not by talking down to me”.

The making of political cadres can be understood according to Holston’s (1999, 2008) concept of insurgent citizenship. CACTUS tried to engage young people to become insurgent citizens who could subvert state agendas in struggles over what it means to be a member of the modern state (Holston 1999:167).

Since education was an integral part of the politics of CACTUS, it seemed only logical to respond to a request from the indigenous community Santa Cruz Mixtepec in 2007. After ten fruitless years of asking the Oaxacan government for a preparatory school, the authorities of Santa Cruz Mixtepec requested CACTUS to found a preparatory school in their community. Two years later, the authorities of the nearby indigenous community Santos Reyes Tepejillo approached CACTUS with a similar request. In this way, CACTUS extended its oppositional politics to the classroom in the form of two communitarian preparatory schools. Several members of CACTUS became teachers with the aim of continuing the making of insurgent citizens in schools. However, this proved to be a difficult endeavor. As Emilio told me: “The idea was that the schools became part of a wider project of indigenous resistance, however this never fully took shape”. Due to various circumstances, the schools turned out to resemble ordinary schools.

In 2010, the organization was turned upside down when in a dramatic incident Bety Cariño was killed because of her political activities. The Mixtec region proved to be a dangerous place for political activists. CACTUS had set up a communitary radio project in the Triqui community San Juan Copala, located in the Mixtec Baja. In 2006, the Triqui community declared themselves autonomous as a response to the repression of the Oaxacan state. Ever since, dozens of inhabitants have been killed and hundreds displaced because the community became the target of violent attacks by several paramilitary groups (López Bárcenas 2010).

On 27<sup>th</sup> April 2010, a human rights observation caravan headed towards San Juan Copala, organized by several organizations including CACTUS. The caravan was ambushed by paramilitaries and Bety Cariño was killed by a shot to the head (Bricker 2010, Amnesty International 2010).

Bety Cariño's murder was a massive blow for the organization as well as for individual members. Emilio elaborated on his traumatic experience: "We felt like orphans after her death, we did not know what to do and were overwhelmed with grief". As leader, Bety Cariño used to take all the decisions and the gap she left with her death proved hard to fill. From various places in Mexico and around the world, activists came to support the members of CACTUS during these hard times. The campaign 'Communitarian and Global Action for Justice and Dignity' was initiated to demand justice for Bety's murder.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence of all these troubling developments, the only community work that has continued, are the communitarian preparatory schools. The newly involved activists, in collaboration with older members, have blown new life into the schools.

### **CACTUS politics in school**

The teachers of CACTUS share the view of public schools as tools of statist control, inculcation and domination (Pollock and Levinson 2011:6). This became clear in the statement of Jairo: "A child goes to school to become a worker; they learn to obey, to keep silent and to not criticize. They are being domesticated". Although public schools as they currently function are seen as spaces for domination, the teachers enhance the view that schools can become a space for liberation and empowerment by practicing alternative forms of education (Pollock and Levinson 2011:6).

After Bety Cariño's murder, new efforts were made to make the schools into what Bety Cariño had hoped them to become: spaces to strengthen indigenous identity and to make political dispositions for the indigenous struggle. The teachers teach what they call "liberating education" [*educación liberadora*] defined as education focused on social critique and the need for social change. This is related to the concept of critical citizenship, encoded in various critical pedagogies as the ability of students to critique the social and political context (Giroux 2006, McLaren 2007). Jairo, twenty-eight years old and originally from Michoacán, is the contemporary coordinator of the communitarian preparatory school in Santa Cruz Mixtepec. He recounted his first experience with liberating education:

"In preparatory school, I had two professors - amazing liberators, revolutionaries - who experimented with other forms of teaching. They spoke to us as equals. They brought articles, music and documentaries into class that critically analyzed our reality. We learned to reflect upon reality and to question authority. From their hands, I received the first book of Paulo Freire and other literature based on critical thinking. [...] I realized that a teacher can also be a revolutionary".

The intention of the current teachers differs from CACTUS' earlier aim to make political cadres. Nowadays, the teachers do not want to have a dominant role in the education process and neither do they want to impose revolutionary ideas on students.

This became clear by statements during interviews: “we should not impose or force any ideas on the students, we do not read them the Marxist manifesto” and “our role is not to indoctrinate [...] we should not tell anyone how they should behave, instead students should convert themselves into autonomous beings”. As such, the teachers rejected the terms ‘education’ and ‘formation’ because of the association with a dominant role for teachers in the education process. Rather, they sought to empower the role of the students in their own political development, as Elena explained: “We want to give the students tools so that they themselves can decide to become either a revolutionary or a capitalist”. This is clearly expressed in the text [*convocatoria*] the teachers wrote to attract new volunteer teachers for the schools, which explicitly asked them to *accompany* and *facilitate* the learning process of the students. Therefore, rather than having the intention to make insurgent citizens, current teachers are engaging in the education of critical citizens. This idea derives from critical pedagogies in which the role of teachers is to elicit the students’ critical capacities through valuing the experiences that they bring to the educational encounter, rather than imposing their own version of knowledge and thereby enacting symbolic violence (Giroux 2005, McLaren 2007). However, in practice I often noticed a tension in the endeavour of the teachers. It appeared hard to only engage in the education of critical citizens, when in their hearts, the teachers all dreamed of the students becoming insurgent citizens, even revolutionaries.

### **The search for a sense of community**

Another key element in the politics of CACTUS is the search for community identity, characteristic for new social movements (Stahler-Sholk 2007:50). Martha, a twenty-eight year old *mestizo* woman is the coordinator of the preparatory school in Tepejillo. She has lived most of her life in cities in the north of Mexico, where she was haunted by feelings of desperation, “as if something was missing”. When Martha did her social service as part of a university program, she was introduced to an indigenous community. Here, she met another reality where relations were based on mutual aid, reciprocity and solidarity. Furthermore, she liked her work to be “something social and useful”, which gave her satisfaction. In indigenous communities, she found what she had missed, namely a sense of community that stood in stark contrast to the individualism of city life. Instead of choosing for a career laid out for her in a university, she preferred to work together with CACTUS. Martha decided to start working as a volunteer at a school, often literally working day and night and in relatively poor conditions because: “Here, I learned what it means to live communally [*en comunidad*] [...] I learned to dream and to imagine that other ways are possible”.

Indigenous communities are often associated with communal forms of living and communitarian identities and interests (Gustafson 2009:112). Intellectuals in the region of Oaxaca define this notion as *comunalidad*: “the essence of being Indian, the will to be collective and to conceive of life and social organization in this manner” (Maldonado 2002:30).

Other scholars associate this with a communitarian view in which the communal wellbeing has a central place, in contrast to liberal views based on individual interests (Apodaca 2008, Bertely 2009, Lazar 2008). Lazar (2008:8-13) relates this to different experiences in citizenship: whereas in a liberal sense of citizenship the self is an interest bearing individual, a collective sense of citizenship is focused on the achievement of common interests. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss whether these categories reflect reality. However, it is of relevance since I noticed that the members of CACTUS aspired to generate a communitarian sense of citizenship, in their own lives as well as for the people they worked with. I often heard the sentence “It should strengthen *lo comunitario* [the communal]”, when the teachers referred to the educational practices in school. This originated from their personal search for a sense of community and coincided with the aim to strengthen indigenous identities, associated with communal forms of social life.

In this section, I sketched a historical portrayal of the politics and citizenship claims of CACTUS. The oppositional politics of CACTUS are introduced as embedded in indigenous struggles and new politics of social movements and inspired by popular educational traditions and critical pedagogies. This shows that a political organization can be contesting dominant citizenship models in Mexico in multifaceted ways and at various levels of their political activities. CACTUS’ broader politics are based in the paradoxical struggle for indigenous and Mexican citizenship for indigenous peoples, in which one of their strategies has been the making of insurgent citizens. Furthermore, these politics are translated into the educational methodologies of two communitarian preparatory schools, where in addition critical and communitarian models of citizenship are pursued. I now turn to an in-depth analysis on how CACTUS’ activities express themselves in the local reality of the communitarian preparatory school in Santos Reyes Tepejillo.

## **2. The communitarian preparatory school in Santos Reyes Tepejillo**

### **A migration community in the Mixtec region**

The streets of Tepejillo are quiet on an ordinary day. Its population of Mixtec people *Ñuu Savi* [People of the Rain] was last counted in 2010 and estimated at 1,213 persons of whom 890 spoke the indigenous Mixtec language. The total area of the municipality covers 89,31 km<sup>2</sup> and is located at a height of 1940 meters.<sup>9</sup> When you walk through the streets, you smell the scent of fresh made tortillas and you see some old people sitting on their porch weaving sombreros and baskets. In addition, you come across many abandoned houses and there are remarkably few men around. The Mixtec region has been known for its high levels of migration to the north of Mexico and the United States for more than three generations (Stephen 2007). Tepejillo is no exception since the harsh agricultural conditions have driven many inhabitants to migrate. Migration rates in Tepejillo are qualified as ‘very high’ since in the period 2000-2005, 587 inhabitants migrated.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes entire families migrate, but more often men leave their families behind to send them money.

However, rather than finding work as farmers or wage labourers, many men in Tepejillo have become involved in the selling of drugs in the United States. Consequently, remittances have been substantially higher than in other communities and Tepejillo has become the richest indigenous community in the Mixtec region. Even though poverty persists, the view of Tepejillo as an ordinary indigenous community is disturbed by the presence of a gas station, some residential houses, paved streets and the enormous amounts of money spent on ceremonial festivities. Full of pride, inhabitants identify themselves as inhabitants of Tepejillo. The community identity is ever present, ethnicity is not usually a form of self-identification among Mixtec peoples (Nagengast, Kearney 1990:73).

The cultural expressions of inhabitants of Tepejillo are a combination of Mixtec traditions and American popular culture. Festivities, traditions and communal values that express indigenous Mixtec culture are still very evident. However, especially among the youth, you find American-style clothes, American music, electronic devices and even sometimes the use of English. According to Pombo (2010:153), migration has introduced new values associated with money, individualism and consumerism in the Mixtec region. This is evident in Tepejillo as an inhabitant sadly recounted: “Values have changed, people only think about money these days”. Several inhabitants revealed their dream to convert Tepejillo into the first town of the region with shopping mall, football pitch, highway and entertainment venues. Even though many inhabitants would love some entertainment, doubts are also raised about this potential development because of the dangers associated with cities.

Tepejillo retains indigenous self-governance structures defined as *usos y costumbres*.<sup>11</sup> “We are not affiliated with any political party, in that sense we are very indigenous”, here the president referred to the large amount of *de facto* autonomy held by the community because they live according to their own customs. Important policy decisions are made by a general assembly that includes all families. All men and women perform unpaid labor in the *tequio* [compulsory collective work] and fulfill *cargos* [communally appointed leadership roles] on multiple occasions during adult life. This method of community organization is often associated with a strong sense of community solidarity and collective ways of life (Bertely 2008, Lazar 2008). However, migration sometimes proves to be incompatible with the governing structures in the Mixtec region (VanWey, Tucker, McConnell 2005:84). In Tepejillo, I often heard concerns about the communal social fabric being under pressure, like when an inhabitant told me: “Many people would rather move to the United States instead of fulfilling their responsibilities in the community”.

This brief sketch of the community shows that migration is shaping indigenous culture and ways of organization. Although some inhabitants resist these developments, most inhabitants in Tepejillo warmly welcome the cultural and financial influx from the United States. As one might expect, the situation in which Tepejillo fares stands in stark contrast to the oppositional politics of CACTUS, and so many other indigenous movements in Mexico that struggle for indigenous rights, autonomy and inclusion in pluricultural nations (Bertely 2009, Mattiace 2003, Yashar 2005). Obviously, there exists an ideological gap between the social movements and the indigenous peoples in whose name the social movements acts in Tepejillo.

### **Everyday forms of peasant resistance**

Before the foundation of the communitarian preparatory school, there was no such school in Tepejillo. The government only starts preparatory schools when there is a sufficient number of students, a requirement Tepejillo cannot fulfil. In general, it is rare to encounter a preparatory school in indigenous communities in Mexico. Indigenous youth often do not continue studying because their parents cannot afford to send their children to the cities where preparatory schools are located, or they simply do not want to because of the insecurity associated with cities. By the absence of a preparatory school in Tepejillo, the only possibility for girls after graduating from secondary school was to get married. Most of the boys just ended up hanging around on the street or going for America to sell drugs, a dangerous activity which frequently led to imprisonment.

One of the objectives of the communitarian preparatory school is to fill the gap the state leaves. The school was founded to broaden the options for young people in Tepejillo by offering the possibility to continue studying. The school is registered as an extension of a private preparatory school Lázaro Cárdenas, located in nearby Tlaxiaco. In this way, the school obtains the famous *clave* [code] that is needed to be recognized by the government and can thus issue formal diplomas. Previously excluded from these possibilities, the alternative educational project provides the indigenous youngsters with possibilities to continue studying like other Mexican youth. In this sense, the school facilitates access to a national citizenship status in which every child in Mexico has a right to education. This can be understood as a struggle to contest a citizenship model in which the state differentiates between citizens, leading to first and second class citizens (Holston 2008:5).

The mothers of the students have what Lazar (2010:195) calls an instrumental approach to education, in which schooling is understood as attracting new members to the club of educated modernity. Accordingly, the school is a conduit to social mobility and progress. The mothers dream of their children becoming professionals. This was expressed in the importance the mothers ascribed to Spanish, English and computer courses, which were seen as prerequisites to obtaining jobs. Since the majority of the mothers only had primary education and could not read nor write, they often contrasted this dream to their own lives, like Doña Monica recounted:

“If she [her daughter] could work in an office, how beautiful would that be, or in a factory, or in a bank. Then she could work in the shadow, we work in the sun all day, it makes us ugly. We are humble, ignorant people, when you study, you can make something of your life.”

Most students articulated the same reasons as their mothers for their enrolment in the preparatory school “to become someone and achieve something in life”. Furthermore, the students often expressed their enjoyment of school, mainly because it was an opportunity to “hang out with friends” and because it was a means to escape the responsibilities of labour at home.



We can understand the enrollment of students in preparatory school in Tepejillo as what Scott (1985) terms as “everyday peasant resistance”. Gledhill (1994:77) draws further on this notion by explaining that dramatic forms of conflict which mobilize large numbers of rural people in violent attacks on the system typically occur only when the structures of repressive power are perceived as weakened or disorganized. However, that does not mean that people do not engage in less overt forms of foot dragging resistance in a continuous effort to improve their situation. The school can be viewed in this light since for both female and male students, going to preparatory school is a quite revolutionary effort to fight their situation of poverty and exclusion in the local context of Tepejillo.

Many mothers understood going to preparatory school and subsequently getting a job, as a way for their daughters to become independent of men. Doña Camila explained her attitude:

“It is better to be able to decide what you want to do with your life. Not like a donkey, wait till your husband gets home or sends you money. Someone who does not help you or care about you. I do not want her [her daughter] to become dependent of a husband, I want her to make her own life”.

The mothers were quite progressive in their thinking since many inhabitants in Tepejillo were of opinion that girls should ‘marry well’, rather than continue studying and find work. This made going to preparatory school often a bone of contention for female students in Tepejillo, who were occasionally insulted for being *solteras* [spinsters]. One of the students, Juanita, expressed her troubles:

“Marrying, we grew up with this idea, all the people in the street will tell you that, this idea is hard to break. My parents do not want me to marry, we never talk about it at home. I wanted to marry, but my thoughts have changed in preparatory school. I keep telling myself, I need to study, I need to study. But I often get angry at myself, since sometimes I still think of marrying”.

Also for male students, going to preparatory school was not the norm. The heavy involvement of international migration contributes to a cultural milieu in which young males invest more faith in foreign wage labour than in Mexican education as a strategy for socioeconomic mobility (Dyrness 2012:43). Mothers who had sons in secondary school frequently expressed worries about their sons, who did not want to continue studying but were rather very eager to leave for America.

Thus, the communitarian preparatory school is seen by students and their mothers as a response to a failing citizenship model which excludes indigenous peoples and blocks progress. In the local context of Tepejillo, these ideas that avoid engagement in dangerous activities abroad and include women in the move towards social mobility are out of the ordinary and quite revolutionary. For most families, the students are the first family members to go to preparatory school, which makes it unknown terrain - equally exciting and uncertain. Thus, although the community does not take part in widespread indigenous struggles over the meaning of citizenship, that does not mean that community members are not contesting the boundaries of citizenship in their own ways.

### **An ordinary school or political project?**

The members of CACTUS share the vision of the students and mothers whereby the school is a tool to overcome exclusion and poverty by providing inclusion in national citizenship through education (De La Peña 2006). However, in the previous section I have already shown that the school is more than merely an ordinary school. Although this is never explicitly mentioned to the community, the anomaly of the school is hard to overlook. The teachers do not look like ordinary Mexican teachers because of their unconventional appearances - like Juan with his wild beard and sloppy clothes or Martha with her big earrings and colourful dresses. Neither do they act like ordinary Mexican teachers since classes are often taught outside and the teachers are not strict when it comes to rules. Most teachers have little experience in teaching and do not possess formal qualifications. Furthermore, students can wear whatever they like rather than uniforms and are allowed to speak the Mixtec language in class, something not allowed in state-run schools. Most teachers come from different places in Mexico and are *mestizos*, but some even come from other parts of the world and do not speak Spanish properly. And to make the list of abnormalities complete: inhabitants often see new faces, since the teachers rotate with members of CACTUS who live in Huajuapán, the nearby city.

These unusual aspects raise suspicion among the inhabitants of Tepejillo about the objectives of the teachers as well as their organization. An old man explained his doubts to me: “The initials of CACTUS mean something, but we do not know what they stand for”. Even though most inhabitants told me the teachers are simply here because they want to help poor children to education, rumors echoed around about the teachers being guerrillas. This is not surprising. When entering the house of the teachers in the centre of the community, you can see decorations of Zapatista images and impressive posters of activist events. During interviews, I sensed that some mothers of the students had the same doubts about the intentions of CACTUS. However, the determination to provide access to education for their children and the commitment they saw in the work of the teachers overcame any restraints. Also the common affectionate relationships between mothers and teachers - as Doña Teresa said “they [the teachers] are like my children”- contributed to the trust of the mothers. As for the students, they quickly adopted to the fact that their school was “different”. Most students positively compared the teachers with those they were accustomed to in secondary school. However, discontent was often expressed about the poor physical condition of the school which had no official building and few educational materials due to a lack of funds.

The school is an area of potential conflict because it is simultaneously an ordinary school that provides access to constitutional rights of citizens, as well as a political project that originated in the struggle for indigenous citizenship. As such, the school has an ambiguous status in the community and is a clear manifestation of the paradoxical stance of indigenous movements (Gustafson 2009:232). The teachers constantly balance and negotiate their twofold objectives during educational practices. This was clearly expressed during an event on the day when Mexico celebrates the start of the Mexican revolution in 1910. In Tepejillo, the day is abundantly celebrated with colorful civic parades, traditional dances and theatrical performances. In the morning, students of primary, secondary and preparatory school all gather around on the central “*cancha*” [court] in Tepejillo.<sup>12</sup> As tradition dictates, they sing the national anthem and listen to the official speeches of the authorities while lined up and dressed in neat school uniforms. Dressed in whatever they like and not regimented, students of the preparatory school always seem a strange sight on celebrations such as these.

But not today, since Martha had a surprise for the students. Befriended activists made black T-shirts for all the students with the image of Zapata, the leading figure of Mexico's agrarian revolution and the person to whom the Zapatistas owe their name. The students loved their new school uniforms and proudly showed them off all day. These T-shirts embody the ambiguous status of the school by sending out the complex message of the preparatory school as ordinary school where students wear uniforms, but also points to the political project of indigenous resistance.

This section demonstrated that there exists an ideological gap between activists and the local community that is heavily impacted by migration. The community does not take part in broader struggles of indigenous resistance and therefore does not seek a citizenship model based on indigenism. The school is a potential site of conflict since it is rooted in this objective. However, teachers, students and mothers do share the objective whereby the school is a tool to overcome exclusion and poverty by providing access to the constitutional rights to education. The engagement of students and mothers in contesting the failing citizenship regime can be viewed as a everyday form of resistance in the local community. As such, in the hands of a social movement as well as in the hands of students and their mothers, the contestation of citizenship takes on various forms in the communitarian preparatory school. In the remainder of this analysis, I will explore how this process unfolds in educational practices by analyzing the curriculum, pedagogies and the organizational structure of the school.

### 3. Citizenship formation through the curriculum

#### **The alternative curriculum**

I hardly saw any daylight for four days when I accompanied the teachers on a work trip to Puebla at the beginning of the new semester. The teachers worked non-stop and wholeheartedly to create an alternative curriculum for the communitarian preparatory school. The standard curriculum taught in Mexican schools is understood by the teachers according to Rockwell's (2010:162) logic: it imposes subtle cultural meanings and practices identified with the western, white, masculine world and hence dispossesses indigenous youth from their own culture, language and own way of seeing and experiencing the world. With the alternative curriculum, the teachers aim to contest this citizenship model normally learned in schools. The teachers of CACTUS get help from two inspiring intellectuals, Benjamín Berlanga and Victor Hernández Martínez. They are part of El Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural (CESDER), an education institution and development agency in Puebla, with a mission statement that reads: "Form and consolidate social subjects which are capable of transforming their reality with projects of good life [*buena vida*]"<sup>13</sup> Benjamín and Victor often help the teachers of CACTUS since "they stole our hearts with their passion and commitment".

A glance at the alternative curriculum gives insight into what type of identity the teachers aim to develop and what kind of political dispositions they foster. Levinson (2011:284) classifies these elements as constituting citizenship formation in schools.

The alternative curriculum includes topics on women, mega projects, transgenic seeds, war, climate change and capitalism from a perspective that questions dominant ideas and encourages social critique. As such, the teachers' aspiration is that the students should reflect critically on the position of indigenous peoples within society, identify existing problems and grasp that these problems have solutions. This can be understood along the concept of critical citizenship formation (Giroux 2005, McLaren 2007). In addition, the alternative curriculum consists of the history of indigenous pueblos and indigenous rights; biology based on indigenous cosmovisions; Mixtec literature and a Mixtec writing course. This leads us to the conclusion that the school can be seen as a project to strengthen indigenous identification (Apodaca 2009:24). Furthermore, communal ethics are included, and assemblies and social service for the community are an additional part of the curriculum. This emphasis on communal values and communal forms of organization in which communal interests are central, point to the encouragement of a communitarian sense of citizenship (Bertely 2008:184).

The teachers are restricted in their freedom to arrange the curriculum as they would wish. They often expressed to me how they would love to integrate all the separate courses into research projects in which students learn the curriculum in the form of investigations. This method is used by other alternative educational programs in Mexico who have the objective to educate students to tackle social problems in society.<sup>14</sup> CACTUS cannot organize the curriculum in this manner since they need to answer to the requirements of the private preparatory school of which they are an extension, if they want to be able to issue diplomas. Consequently, the teachers combine their alternative curriculum with an ordinary curriculum set by the private preparatory school. Thus, the resulting educational practices are embedded in the dichotomy of whether the communitarian preparatory school is a normal school or political project. How do the students respond to these educational practices and hence distinctive citizenship models?

### **Critical dispositions**

All the way from France, Adam teaches classes on natural sciences. On this particular day, they were talking about oil and its relation to war. The students were scattered around in the classroom and messing around. In one corner, Daniela and Jacinta, dressed in tight jeans and modern dresses covered with English texts, were whispering about their secret lovers, playing with mobile phones and writing love poems. Their hair was carefully styled and decorated with fashion accessories, and eyes and lips were accentuated by make-up. Then suddenly, the sound of loud American-style hip hop approached the school. Paco, the only male in this group, was late for class. He lived two blocks away but came to school with his big sub-urban vehicle. "*Profaaaaaa!* [teacher]", he yelled when entering the classroom. He whacked Adam on the shoulder as a way of greeting and started entertaining his fellow students by making jokes in the Mixtec language; a language the teachers not speak nor understand. The students were not listening nor participating in class, they were not showing any interest in what Adam had to say about the scarcity of oil and resource wars. The students responded similarly when a documentary was shown of disastrous consequences of mining projects in indigenous territories. Although this was likely to happen to Tepejillo in the nearby future, students were uninterested and escaped from class without asking permission.

When the class finally ended, Adam cried out of frustration: “Everything that is interesting, does not interest them!”. I often sensed feelings of despair among the teachers. These feelings were caused by the realization that the students were not developing in the direction the teachers hoped for, into becoming critical citizens (Giroux 2005, McLaren 2007). One afternoon, Juanita, an inquisitive student, visited the house of the teachers. She was crying her eyes out: “They [classmates] only come to school to make you happy, to make their parents happy, or to get the paper [diploma], they do not want to learn anything!”. Overwhelmed by her words, the teachers Martha and Elena also burst into tears.

Lazar (2010:195) defines humor, messing around and boredom among students in class as constituting a form of resistance. The students themselves referred to these dispositions as “laziness” [*flojera*]. Although the students enacted these dispositions in many classes, it often happened with topics that aimed to arouse social critique. Students were not used to these topics being discussed in school and often impeded educational practices in classes oriented at enhancing critical dispositions. However, that the process is more nuanced becomes clear in several interviews with students, like Thaila who told me: “Martha [the teacher] told us how the government discriminates against indigenous peoples, how they make stereotypes. Before I did not know what a stereotype was”. Also Pia told me about her change in thinking about the relationship between men and women: “I thought that women should stay home, and that men are always first, everything is about men, men, men. But the thing I learned from you [the teachers], is that women are equal to men.” Some students clearly picked up the topics discussed in class aimed to elicit critical dispositions. That subjects can be shaped in ways that are at once specific and diffused, is expressed in the simultaneous resistance and incorporation of educational practices (Lazar 2010:200).

### **Indigenous identities**

One afternoon, Don Fermin, father of two students, took all the students on a trip to visit the *casa de lluvia* [house of the rain], a cave which functioned as a ceremonial site in Tepejillo. The visit was Martha’s idea, to engage the students in community traditions as part of a history class. All the students really seemed to enjoy the visit and the stories told by Don Fermin about ancient times. But as we walked back, one of the students, Estelle, told me:

“I already know everything. At home, my grandfather tells me all about the history of the community. [...] You [the teachers] only teach these topics about our culture since you do not know them, as outsiders. You are interested and want to learn more about it”.

Estelle was not alone in interpreting the educational practices on indigenous culture as the outcome of curiosity among the teachers. Many students gave me similar reasons since they thought it was odd that these topics were discussed in school. Thus, even though most students eagerly embraced the educational practices that aimed for cultural revitalization and hence indigenous identification, they also subverted the meaning. Something similar happened when the teachers decided to integrate a Mixtec writing course into the curriculum.

The teachers fear the disappearance of the Mixtec language since many children in Tepejillo do not speak it anymore. The students of the preparatory school are bilingual since they speak the Mixtec and Spanish language, however they cannot write in the Mixtec language. The teachers perceive writing Mixtec as a way to protect the language from extinction. Consequently, a teacher of the nursery school in Tepejillo was asked to give a course on Mixtec writing. In the first class, students had to write their names on pieces of paper and subsequently cut apart separate letters. In groups, under the sound of loud giggling out of joy, they used the letters to construct words in the Mixtec language. The majority of the students enthusiastically participated in these educational practices, and some even proudly agreed with the teacher: “Yes, we need to preserve our origins!”. However, some students refrained from going to these classes. Like Beatriz, who justified her absence by arguing: “I do not want to learn to write Mixtec! Like I am ever going to use it! As if anyone will ever ask for Mixtec as a job requirement!”. Beatriz refused to learn to write the Mixtec language because it was not useful for her, which points to a functional view of education (Lazar 2010:195). It did not fit in her dream of social mobility and obtaining a proper job, perhaps even in America. Instead of the Mixtec language, she told me that she would rather learn more English, something that would help her move up on the social ladder. So we can see that different citizenship models clashed in this particular situation when the teachers aimed to make indigenous citizens whereas Beatriz had other aspirations. This leads to the point that the school can propose civic identities that may deeply influence students, but alternative imaginaries and counter-publics outside the school often bring such identities into creative contradiction (Levinson 2011:286). The resolution of this issue is an example of how the educational practices are constantly negotiated in the classrooms of the communitarian preparatory school; only when Martha told Beatriz that the government offered scholarships to students who were able to write in the Mixtec language, did she return to class. Thus, the Mixtec writing course became functional for Beatriz and at the same time the indigenous identity project continued.

The way the students subvert and negotiate the meanings of educational practices to strengthen indigenous identities points to Ong’s (1999) argument about citizenship. She argues that citizenship is produced out of negotiation and dialectically constructed between subjects and the state. In the classroom, the same process becomes explicit. But not only the creative interpretations of educational practices by the students make negotiation an inherent part of the citizenship formation project, but also the flexibility of the teachers. This can be illustrated by an event when teachers changed their educational practices in response to negative reactions by students.

Last summer, the teachers included classes on farming in the curriculum to learn the students the value of the work of peasants and indigenous knowledge about agricultural production. Juan reflected on the classes:

“The students did not want to work the land, they thought it was boring. [...] I wanted the students to dedicate themselves to agricultural work after graduation, instead of migrating to other places. We do not want them to leave. But their parents did not enroll them in school to become peasants, and now we are telling them to become peasants. They do not understand”.

When CACTUS initially came to Tepejillo, the teachers imagined the students' future to be in the community. They hoped that the students would pursue the project of autonomy and cultural recognition merely by staying and continuing life as peasants, rather than migrating to the United States. However, the students told me about their various ambitious plans which did not often include staying in Tepejillo and even less working as peasants. Consequently, students resisted the educational practices of working the land. Obviously, their experiences of citizenship are not limited to the classroom, but dependent on wider social, political and cultural systems (Lazar 2010:189). When the teachers started to understand the students' complex reality of migration, they brought a halt to this specific practice to strengthen indigenous identity. Juan noted that they ought to focus on another aspect of indigenous identity: "*lo comunitario* [the communal] is something that goes beyond Tepejillo, something the students can take with them, whether they migrate or stay in Tepejillo". Like the educational practices to strengthen critical dispositions and indigenous identities, these practices are not simply adopted by the students.

### **Communal dispositions**

With the start of the new semester, the teachers decided to include *servicio social* [social service internships] in the curriculum of the third year students. All university students in Mexico need to do social service as part of university programs, however it is not a compulsory activity in most preparatory schools.<sup>15</sup> The teachers of CACTUS included it in the curriculum as they hoped that it would strengthen community solidarity. They hoped that students would envision the community as a shared value by prioritizing work for the common interest, which is an aspect of communitarian citizenship (Bertely 2009, Lazar 2008). Students could choose to participate in the community radio project, help the doctor in the clinic or give gymnastic classes to children in the nursery school. The teachers have already seen positive results as Martha asserted: "The students learn to contribute to the community, they are actually covering the needs of the community".

Apart from social service, communal values are highlighted in courses like ethics, philosophy and social sciences. During a class about Mixtec ethics, students were asked to discuss whether values like collectivity, mutual aid, respect and reciprocity were still present in Tepejillo. The students gave examples from the community that showed that some values persisted: "the performance of voluntarily, collective work is still based on collectivity"; while other values had gone: "young people do not show respect for older people anymore". In addition, they reflected on an article about differences between solidarity and individualism, related to indigenous communities and European societies respectively. After an animated discussion, the students proudly concluded: "Our mothers still have this sense of solidarity, but we only think of ourselves, we are individualists, just like the people from Europe!". At this moment, the teachers' citizenship project failed to come across. Rather than identifying themselves as having communal values, the students proudly recounted that they were individualists. As such, the students subverted the educational practices that aimed to trigger communal dispositions.

On other occasions however, the students actively embraced the educational practices to strengthen a sense of communal solidarity. During a discussion in class about the bad reputation of the school in the community, a student suddenly got up. Out of the blue, Eduardo argued that the communitarian preparatory school was better than any other school: “Here, we coexist, we live together [*aquí convivimos*]”. Also during interviews, students’ positive remarks about the school often referred to *convivir* or *colectividad* [collectivity]. Students exemplified these remarks with the organization of *convivio’s* [collective class celebrations] where teachers and students celebrated and danced together; collective cooking sessions outside class hours; hanging out; amicable relationships with teachers, and helping each other out. Even though there were enough quarrels between individual students, these remarks showed that the students experienced a feeling of community within the school that they had not experienced in their previous schools. Hence, although educational practices to encourage a communitarian sense of citizenship by means of the curriculum could be resisted in class, on other occasions the practices to encourage feelings of solidarity are embraced and recognized as such by the students. This stresses the sense of dynamism in citizenship formation, in which its success or failure depends on the particular situation and the specific individuals involved (Lazar 2008:14).

In this section, I demonstrated that the alternative curriculum of the teachers results in educational practices that aim to shape critical and communal dispositions and indigenous identities, as part of the counter-hegemonic citizenship project of CACTUS. It became clear that the students creatively engage in the educational practices which they off and on tend to contest, negotiate and incorporate. Sometimes this can be explained by the differences in aspirations, although it also seems to be dependent on specific situations or persons. The flexibility of the teachers and the imaginative interpretations of educational practices by the students make citizenship formation a dynamic process in which different citizenship models interact, dissipate or come together. However, the curriculum is only one dimension through which citizenship formation takes place in the classrooms of Tepejillo. To deepen the understanding of the process, I will analyze the pedagogies practiced by the teachers in the following section.

#### **4. Citizenship formation through pedagogies**

##### **Alternative pedagogies**

When you enter the house of the teachers on a random afternoon, it is very probable you will find them sitting on the ground surrounded by numerous books, articles and other educational material. Students hop in and out for a chat or to bring homework and their mothers come by to bring fresh home-made tortillas, to discuss matters about the school or just for a friendly natter. In this lively setting, the teachers critically evaluate their teaching practices of the day and question how to best conduct their classes the following day. A look at the pedagogies used by the teachers provides insight into what kind of dispositions, local political agency and what kind of democracy is fostered by the teachers; elements identified by Levinson (2011:284) as part of citizenship formation in schools.



During the first week of class, Martha explained the differences between traditional education and liberating education [*educación liberadora*] to the students:

“When I was in preparatory school, I was really good, I never paid attention, I was drawing all the time [...]. A day before an exam, I memorized everything I needed to know and got a 10, so my family thought I was very smart. But when I left school, I had no voice and was afraid to talk. I could not remember anything that I had learned [...] here [in this school], we do not want teachers who are like depositors in banks and we do not want students who are like sponges who only absorb”.

The students started to giggle and argued that they did know a sponge that could talk, referring to SpongeBob.<sup>16</sup> Martha responded that she wanted all the students to transform themselves into SpongeBob’s, so that they could find their voice and use it critically.

This example shows that Martha aims to arouse critical dispositions, which points to the concept of critical citizenship formation (Giroux 2005, McLaren 2007). As teachers, they refrain from being authoritarian so that the students have space to create their own opinions and wisdom. I observed the teachers put this into practice during their classes for instance when they took on subordinate roles in discussions and never forced students to do something. Also, they refrained from coercion as a way to make students participate in class and rather encouraged participation by the use of dynamics and games. Furthermore, the teachers preferred asking questions rather than answering them and dialogues were used to transfer knowledge instead of dictation. Jairo explained how he took on a subordinate role in a history class about the Mexican civil war with the United States so that students could form their own opinions:

“I let them [the students] listen to two songs about the violent north American expansion and the consequences for the indigenous pueblos in our territories. After the students listened the songs, they stayed silent, there were no comments. I did not say ‘horrible Americans [*pinche gringos*], we have to fight them’, nothing like that. I simply explained a historical process. [...] I kept silent and I saw that something was happening, something was moving in their hearts and minds”.

The implicit message in this narrative reveals Jairo’s underlying intention, namely that he wants the students to become part of the resistance against indigenous marginalization. As such, he wants to awaken agency that emancipates the students. Holston (2008:13) defines this as “agency of resistance” which he contrasts to agency that reproduces entrenchment, persistence and inertia.

The pedagogies that the teachers employ aim to contest a citizenship model normally practiced in schools that in their opinion makes for uncritical and passive students. The underlying motive of the teachers to contest this citizenship model is the objective to democratize power relations in the classroom, as encoded in various critical pedagogies (Giroux 2005, McLaren 2007). Inspired by the new politics of social movements that call for more participatory and direct democracy in every sphere of society, the teachers aim to empower the position of the students in the classroom. This becomes clear when the teachers strongly emphasized the difference between this school and others school: “Whereas in normal schools, teachers make the decisions and rules, here we make decisions together, in deliberation, we take your opinion into account”.

This was practiced during the weekly assembly where students and teachers decided together on the rules and necessities for the school. Furthermore, in daily classes I observed how the teachers took the comments and proposals of students seriously. How did the students respond to the educational practices that encouraged critical agency and democratic dispositions?

### **The encouragement of critical agency**

During the weekly assemblies, students were meant to learn to participate in school politics, to make decisions based on consensus and to speak up, critique and defend their rights. However, the learning of these capacities was often made difficult by the extremely chaotic and unstructured nature of the assemblies. A couple of students dominated the meetings by making their voices heard while the rest was busy giggling, screaming and fighting in Mixtec language. On this day, the teachers were trying to reach consensus about rules on phone use in class, since students often walked out of class to make calls with friends. After fifteen minutes of tumult and unrealistic proposals from the students, Martha provoked them: “Ok, nobody is allowed to use their phones anymore during class”. Some students were quick enough to respond: “Why are we having this assembly, if you do not take our opinion into account!”. Together they agreed that students could make one call of two minutes during class and only if their family rang. As such, the agency that the teachers aspired to trigger was enacted by some students. The same students told me about their feeling of emancipation since their enrolment in preparatory school, as Juanita recounted:

“I used to be very quiet, even if I wanted to say something. In the preparatory school, I stopped being afraid. Even if it is someone of importance, it does not matter, now I perceive them as equal, and just say what I think. I learned this during talks with the teachers”.

Also during a conversation in class, I noticed that students had incorporated the idea that agency makes for good students, and hence citizens. Some students told me about a community assembly last summer. A student who went to a preparatory school in Huajuapán told the authorities of Tepejillo that the communitarian preparatory school was a bad school. Pia told me full of pride: “[...] but it is clear that our school is much better, because he could not even talk in public, he was very nervous and stuttered. Of course, we defended our school to the authorities”. The fact that the boy could not express himself in public was a reason for Pia to assume that the preparatory school in Huajuapán was a bad school. The educational practices of the teachers orientated at developing a critical agency had thus been adopted by some students. However, even though all students were offered the space for participation in class and in school politics, many students refrained from active involvement during assemblies or other participatory activities. This makes citizenship formation in the communitarian preparatory school a fractured and incomplete process which develops through a dialectic whereby the subjects define the terms of its incorporation (Lazar 2008:6).

The citizenship model encouraged in class does not stay within the walls of the school but rather sometimes seeps into community politics. Youth are usually excluded from community politics which are dominated by older men in Tepejillo. The current authorities of Tepejillo were often described to me by students and inhabitants as “useless and incompetent”. In addition, they gave no financial help to the preparatory school while the students’ classes took place in rooms without doors and windows and there were hardly any resources like books, blackboards, tables or chairs. On a cold November morning, some members of the authorities interrupted classes with the intention of covering the window openings with pieces of plastic. Martha described it as “a historical movement of pure indignation”. Students were furious, the authorities had been promising real doors and windows for months. Uneasily standing with the plastic in their hands, the authorities were overwhelmed by some courageous students who stated that they would not accept this, that they deserved better. “Within three months”, the authorities promised. The students made an official record of the statement to hold the authorities to their promise. This event suggests how the educational practices to stimulate critical agency could have broader political implications in the community and hence underlines the effects of the educational practices of the teachers (Levinson 2011:283).

### **Democratizing power relations in the classroom**

During one of the weekly assemblies, one of the students, Daniela, announced: “We are going to organize a *posada* [a celebration during the nine days preceding Christmas] in the name of the school”. Daniela was not asking if she was allowed to organize a *posada*, she just informed the others. She glanced at Martha, awaiting a response, but Martha remained in silence. Afterwards, Martha enthusiastically told me that the students were taking decisions on their own and started organizing amongst themselves. She clearly interpreted this in terms of emancipation in contrast to passive and uncritical behaviour. Later on, I interviewed Daniela who proudly told me her side of the story: “We wanted to organize a *posada* and we did not even have to ask permission! We just did it, the teachers did not say anything!”. She interpreted the event as a triumph of the students who had won independence and freedom at the expense of the teachers.

This event shows that students embrace the citizenship model that subverts power relations between teachers and students as practiced in normal schools. In this sense, most students experience the school as a site of freedom. This is illustrated by answers to an assignment where I asked the students to write down the differences between their school and ordinary schools:

“In this school we have *freedom*”; “Teachers take our opinion into account and listen to us, we have *freedom* of speech”; “The teachers take us into account and we are *free* to do whatever”; “It is a school where we are *free*, in primary and secondary school the students obey to the rule of the teachers”; “We can express ourselves *freely* without fear”.

This experience of freedom starkly differed with previous school experiences where teachers were described as very strict and authoritarian. Furthermore, especially for female students, the freedom in school was in sharp contrast to their home environment.

Their mothers were very protective since they feared their daughters would run away with boys without completing their education. This often happened in the community because of the pressure some girls felt to get married, the communitarian preparatory school had already lost two female students in this way.

During my time in the school, I could clearly see how the educational practices to democratize power relations in the classroom were constantly being negotiated; teachers and students dialectically produced the citizenship model practiced in class (Ong 1999). Students constantly searched for the boundaries of the newly obtained freedom in school, which expressed itself in the behavior of the students in class. At the start of the semester, most students only occasionally did their homework, mutually agreed rules about listening and participating in class were often disobeyed and some students even came and went whenever they pleased. Although most students seemed to enjoy this sense of freedom during class, they also expressed ambiguity towards the pedagogies used in school. In interviews, students sometimes told me that they did not like the *manera relajado* [relaxed ways] of the school. Rather, they wanted the teachers to be stricter and demanding, “like normal teachers”.

Initially, the teachers accepted the students’ behavior since they did not want to coerce students to do their homework or oblige them to be in class, in line with critical pedagogies (Giroux 2005, McLaren 2007). However, the teachers became fraught with despair because of what they called the “lack of commitment” of students who sometimes seemed to do whatever they pleased rather than learn. Furthermore, this behavior jeopardized the possibilities of students to pass exams and obtain diplomas, a commitment which the teachers took very seriously. Afternoons and late nights were spent deeply discussing the situation. The teachers came to the conclusion that there was no other solution than to be more strict and disciplining. Following this logic, the teachers warned all students that the next time that homework was not done, they were not allowed in class. Furthermore, lists were being kept about presence in class and absence would be punished by lowering grades. When Paco once again did not show up in class and Martha later ran into him in the streets, she told him: “With great pleasure, I reduce your grade by two points”. Later she admitted to me:

“This is not liberating education, this is the other type of education, the one we do not want. Yes, I was very authoritarian. But Paulo Freire can say that we should not make recipients, but what if the students want to be recipients!”, she joked.

The teachers moved further away from the initial educational practices to democratize power relations (Giroux 2005, McLaren 2007). The behaviour of the students in class improved since the teachers practiced teaching methods normally exercised in schools. Yet the teachers continued the alternative pedagogies, however in a more subtle and less radical manner. Martha reflected on the changes in educational practices: “The longer I am here, the more I adapt to the students. I became satisfied with small things”. In this case, teachers and students negotiated a middle ground which resulted in the moderation of alternative pedagogies.

In this section, I showed that the critical pedagogies adopted by the teachers aim to encourage critical agency and subvert power relations in the classroom. This citizenship model is based in the politics of new social movements and hence Zapatista struggles that aim to democratize every sphere of society. The way the students responded was diverse. Some students embraced

the educational practices that aimed to encourage critical agency whereas others refrained from participation, which underlines the fractured nature of citizenship formation. However, the engagement of students in community politics does reveal the potential impact of the educational practices. Furthermore, most students enjoyed the newly obtained freedom the pedagogy of the teachers provided them. However, this also meant an enormous break with the citizenship models they were accustomed to be taught in school, which sometimes made them yearn for these traditional pedagogies. The students' creative search for the boundaries of their freedom made for a process of negotiation of the educational practices between students and teachers. Eventually, this led to a moderation of the alternative pedagogies and hence the practice of more traditional ones. This analysis of the pedagogies used by the teachers emphasizes the dynamic nature of citizenship formation in the communitarian preparatory school, where educational practices are continually negotiated within the tension of divergent citizenship models. To complete my analysis of citizenship formation by CACTUS, I now turn to citizenship education outside the classroom.

## 5. Citizenship formation outside the classroom

### **The organizational structure of the school**

Levinson has argued that citizenship formation also takes place outside de classroom, which he terms citizenship education: "(...) efforts of societies and social groups to educate their members to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as citizens" (2011:284). With the alternative educational project, CACTUS engages in citizenship education for the mothers of the students, "the señoras". The teachers associate indigenous peoples with having a communitarian sense of citizenship (Bertely 2008, Lazar 2008) which they aim to strengthen by means of the organizational structure of the school.

Registered as a private school, the school does not receive government funds. All the mothers of the students are part of the committee that supports the school and in which important decisions about the school are made. The señoras organize festivities to collect money and sell food in the local park to cover the expenses of the school, as well as the material needs of the teachers who work voluntarily. As such, the school is organized according to indigenous self-governance structures defined as *usos y costumbres*. In general, the employment of the communal forms of organization *usos y costumbres* gives indigenous communities a great deal of *de facto* autonomy (Mattiace 2003). By means of the school, the teachers aspire to encourage a process of autonomization in the community: by self-determination and self-sufficiency over education. Martha explained how she understood the school following this logic:

"The process that takes place here provoked collectivity, dialogue and organization among the señoras. They are in charge of the school, it gives recognition to the fact that the *pueblo* [community] can do it themselves, without help of the government. The school is communitarian. I hope that it gives them [the señoras] a lot of self esteem, and feelings of worth that they are able to support and run a school. Although it is tiresome, they are doing it for the *pueblo*".

Indigenous communal forms of organization are also associated with values of solidarity in which the communal well being has a central place and the supreme value is social participation (Bertely 2009:186). Mateo expressed his aim to expand what he called the communal awareness [*la conciencia comunitaria*]:

“We want to articulate what was once very alive in the indigenous communities: the communal work [*el tequio*], horizontal and affectionate relationships, mutual aid. [...] doing communal work is already a struggle in itself. They are resisting a system that already permeated every corner of indigenous communities”.

The teachers envision indigenous ways of life as resistance in itself, they often celebrated *lo comunitario* [the communal] as being *the* alternative for individualistic, capitalist societies. The great fear of the teachers is that Tepejillo will lose their autonomy and collective values because of increasing migration that lessens communal ways of organization. Thus, founded in CACTUS’ broader politics of autonomy for indigenous peoples and the revitalization of indigenous culture, the teachers aim to strengthen what they perceive as an already existing citizenship model in indigenous communities. By collective work for collective interests, the school is meant to strengthen a communitarian sense of citizenship (Bertely 2009, Lazar 2008). That the project is primarily focused at women lies in the aspiration of the teachers to emancipate the position of women in community politics who normally hold marginal positions. In this sense, the school is meant to subvert the existing citizenship model by actively including women in community politics. How do the señoras engage in the community work that aims to encourage a communitarian sense of citizenship and triggers inclusion in community politics?

### **Collective work**

On Sunday afternoons, you were very likely to find the señoras sitting together in one of the classrooms, or in nice weather scattered around in the garden of the teachers’ house. The sound of chewing gum echoed around and some señoras were embroidering beautiful napkins to cover tortillas while others were engaged in discussions. The committee of the preparatory school was in a meeting, which often took hours and jokes were alternated with heated arguments. Although disagreements often caused tensions between the señoras, Doña Elbertina, the current president of the committee, emphasized: “We are all part of the committee [*todos somos comité*], even if I am the president that does not mean that I am the committee, we all work, we all bring the teachers tortillas, here we are all equal”. This is the collective participation and sense of solidarity the teachers aspire to in the logic of communitarian citizenship. When I helped the señoras prepare food which they were going to sell as income for the school, I observed this collectivity expressed in their behaviour. In the garden of one of the señoras, they were harmoniously working together and all doing their share of work.

One was grinding *mole* [traditional sauce] while others were removing the intestines of a turkey, chopping limes or stirring the enormous pot in which the food was being prepared. In the meantime, they talked animatedly and commented on the music played by the community radio.

The señoras sometimes seemed to enjoy the collective work, however all too often I heard them complain about the work for the committee. In addition to all their responsibilities as heads of households, most of their husbands were at work in the United States, they perceived the work for the committee as very hard, tiresome and just too much. Although the señoras were accustomed to work in committees, since all schools in Tepejillo functioned in this way, this committee was different. The poor conditions of the school and lack of funds made work urgent and compelled the señoras to work hard. Furthermore, normal committees only consisted of five persons, whereas in this committee they agreed that everyone, always had to take part in the work. Rather than perceiving the maintenance of the school as a collective achievement, the señoras often perceived it as a burden that lay heavy on their shoulders. To be relieved from the tiring work, the señoras dreamed of a public school where the government paid the salaries of the teachers, provided a building, uniforms and educational material. As Doña Elbertina recounted: “A real school, how beautiful would that be, right?”. Thus, whereas the teachers have ideological reasons to structure the school as it is, the señoras only engage in the collective work because there is no other option: not because it is in their collective interest to support a school, as a communitarian sense of citizenship would entail.

The señoras give a different interpretation to the word *lo comunitario* than the teachers. This became evident in an interview with Doña Maria who asked me: “Can you [the teachers] also found a communitarian university in Tepejillo?”. When I asked for clarification she explained that she did not have enough money to send her two daughters to university. Although public universities and preparatory schools are supposed to be free of charge in Mexico, in practice it turns out that often high fees are demanded. For the communitarian preparatory school, the señoras only had to pay a small fee to the private preparatory school of which they were an extension. Hence, the señoras engaged in the collective work in this particular situation because it responded to their practical need of a cheap and accessible school for their children. In addition, they greatly valued to have their children close by and were not forced to “abandon them” to preparatory schools in cities. Hence, this demonstrates how different citizenship models interact: the work to encourage a communitarian citizenship is embraced by the señoras but also provided with another meaning than the teachers had in mind. Ultimately, the señoras dream of the possibility to make claims on the state for financial resources and hence a “real school”, based on their constitutional rights as national citizens.

### **Engagement in community politics**

When CACTUS initially founded the school in Tepejillo, the teachers dreamed of eventually making the school autonomous from the government. These radical ideas originate from the new politics of social movements that seek autonomy from the groups that work through state power, political parties and trade unions (Böhm, Dinerstein, Spicer 2010:18).

The assumption is that autonomy largely involves practical negativity, hence that the negation of state power can deconstruct state power (Holloway 2002). However, the teachers' objectives changed quickly when they realized that the community was not looking for an autonomous school. As mentioned above, the señoras dreamed of a public school with their own *clave* [code] hence official recognition from the government. Martha explained her shift in point of view:

“I did not want recognition from the government, but the señoras are always asking for it. Now, I think the request from the señoras [for recognition] is valid, I acknowledged the wishes of the community. It has to do with their history, they have always been excluded and unrecognized [as indigenous peoples], and now they want this recognition, that their way is respected”.

During my time in Tepejillo, the teachers were looking for ways to obtain official recognition from the government for the school, in response to the determination of the señoras who were not content with the current structure as an extension of another preparatory school. Clearly, the organization of the school was negotiated between teachers and señoras (Ong 1999). But although the objective of *de facto* autonomy had been abandoned, the way the school was organized still aimed to stimulate political participation among the señoras, with the underlying goals to strengthen self-sufficiency and self-determination.

When Bety Cariño came to Tepejillo when the school was initially founded, her words made heavy of impact on the señoras. She is still cited, as Doña Elbertina recounted:

“Bety talked beautifully, she said we were going to do great things together, that we were going to uplift [*levantar*] the community. She also said that the times when we depended on the government were over”.

Bety Cariño clearly wanted to emancipate women in Tepejillo and this ambition is embodied in Doña Elbertina. She is the current president of the committee of the preparatory school, a small indigenous woman with a twinkle in her eyes and a strong spirit. Other señoras sometimes compared her with Bety Cariño, as courageous women. In my first week in Tepejillo, I already observed Doña Elbertina's outstanding qualities. We visited the municipal residence, the building where the authorities of Tepejillo often gathered. Despite numerous requests by the señoras, the authorities refused to give financial help to the preparatory school. On this afternoon, Doña Elbertina decided that enough was enough and she interrupted the men who were in a meeting. Firmly, she stepped inside the room and gave an emotional speech in which she demanded their help to improve the poor conditions of the school. The men looked around nervously, they clearly did not know how to handle this. As the mayor was not present, the men urged Doña Elbertina to come back the following day. She said she definitely would. “But for the time being, I would like to take that blackboard, since we do not have one in school”. She took the blackboard that the authorities were using for the meeting, and left with a small smile of triumph.



The work in the committee of the school activated Doña Elbertina to engage in local community politics. In conversations with other señoras, I also noticed how the work in the committee encouraged their political participation. Doña Maria told me:

“First I was scared to go to the committee and to leave the house, what would my husband say? I am still a little bit scared to give my opinion - what if people laugh? - but not in the committee, there I have a right to speak”.

In addition, Doña Isabela elaborated on her experience:

“I often think I do not have a right to give my opinion because I am a nobody, but here I realized what we can do together, to be independent, to work together, to earn money, to help each other”.

In this sense, the school indeed encouraged political participation and as such undermined a citizenship model wherein women held marginal roles in politics. However, the effects of the organizational structure of the school, analyzed in terms of citizenship education, were only modest. Especially the señoras who spoke little Spanish perceived themselves as unable to participate in the committee and other community politics, and hence did not actively took part. This highlights that the success of citizenship formation is highly dependent on particular situations and particular individuals which determine the level of incorporation (Lazar 2008:14).

In this section, I demonstrated how the organizational structure of the school aims to encourage a communitarian sense of citizenship and tries to emancipate women to take part in community politics. The responses of the señoras were various. While the señoras embraced the collective work which aimed to strengthen a communitarian citizenship, they simultaneously gave a different meaning to it and actually aspired a national citizenship status. Furthermore, the requests from the señoras for official recognition of the school, subverted the objective of CACTUS to encourage *de facto* autonomy, hence the organizational structure of the school was being negotiated. Moreover, the aim to trigger political participation amongst women was successful, but only on a minor scale since it was limited to a part of the señoras who sustain the school. Thus, obviously the dynamism and negotiation that is part of citizenship formation inside the classroom, can also be identified with regard to citizenship education outside the classroom.

## IV. Conclusion

This thesis explored the engagement of social movements in the contestation of citizenship in education. My intention was to examine how social movements engage in citizenship formation, in and outside the classroom, a field normally dominated by the state. More specifically, I aimed to explore how this process unfolded in the context of indigenous struggles over the meaning of citizenship. This was done by studying an alternative school project in the indigenous community of Santos Reyes Tepejillo, Mexico, which I understood as an attempt at counter-hegemonic citizenship formation. In this ethnography of citizenship, I focused on citizenship practices promoted in CACTUS' education. I examined what kind of dispositions, knowledge and values teachers of CACTUS sought to develop; what kinds of agency and democracy they fostered and how this was put into practice. This analysis answers to Levinson's (2011) call to gain more insight into the implications of citizenship education. Furthermore, I analyzed how the process of citizenship formation in the alternative educational project took place in the midst of various aspirations and local realities, which I related to theories on citizenship (Ong 1999, Lazar 2008). My central question was: how can the educational and political practices of the teachers of CACTUS be described and explained in relation to citizenship formation and local community contestation?

First I explored the oppositional politics and citizenship claims of CACTUS. It showed that a political organization can contest dominant citizenship models in Mexico in multifaceted ways and at various levels of their political activities. The involvement in indigenous struggles and new politics of social movements and the inspiration derived from popular educational traditions and critical pedagogies, laid the foundation for the citizenship models promoted in the communitarian preparatory school in Santos Reyes Tepejillo.

The school illustrated how the paradoxical stance of indigenous movements, demanding inclusion in the nation-state and also preserving difference, took shape in a local project which made it an area of potential conflict (Gustafson 2009, Smith 2007). This was reinforced by the ambiguous status of the project in the local community that was heavily impacted by migration and did not take part in broader struggles of indigenous resistance. However, teachers, students and mothers did share the objective in which the school was a tool to overcome exclusion and poverty by providing access to the constitutional right to education. The engagement of students and mothers in contesting the failing citizenship regime could be viewed as everyday forms of resistance in the context of the local community. Thus, the school was entangled in a variety of efforts to contest dominant citizenship regimes in Mexico. In response to Lazar's (2010:181) call, I examined the interplay of these diverse aspirations and hence how this shaped citizenship formation in the school.

The analysis of educational practices as expressed in the curriculum, pedagogies and organization of the school provided insight into how citizenship formation took place between teachers, students and señoras. I demonstrated that the educational practices to shape critical, communal dispositions and indigenous identities were sometimes embraced, but more often creatively contested and provided with new meaning by the students. The same applied to the educational practices that fostered a certain type of democracy by means of the alternative pedagogies, which the students experienced as unbounded freedom and therefore became intensely negotiated among teachers and students. The señoras also negotiated the practices aimed at promoting communal dispositions by embracing the collective work but subverting the meaning of *lo comunitario* [the communal]. Furthermore, educational practices that encouraged

critical agency and political participation among students and señoras respectively, were only incorporated on a minor scale depending on specific persons. As such, different citizenship models were reproduced, negotiated, resisted or re-elaborated in everyday educational practices. These processes followed the logic of Ong's (1999) theory of citizenship; as produced in negotiations and understood as dialectically determined by the state and its subjects. In the communitarian preparatory school, I found educational encounters in which certain elements were embraced by parents and students, while simultaneously efforts were made to modify or redirect these in ways that responded to their own interests and aspirations. Also, the negotiation of citizenship practices often seemed to depend on specific situations or persons which supports Lazar's (2008) emphasis on dynamism for understanding citizenship and stresses the unpredictable nature of the process. My specific contribution to the studies of education and citizenship as social practice, concentrates on what makes citizenship tangible in the school. I conclude that inside and outside the classroom, the experience of citizenship is part of permanent negotiations between local actors, social movements and states along a creative logic of give and take.

What does this thesis about a particular movement, in a specific community tell us about indigenous struggles over the meaning of citizenship in Mexico? It raises critical questions about generalized theorizing on multiculturalism and indigenous movements. My ethnography of citizenship stresses the complexities and inconsistencies of local realities and people engaged in everyday practices of social transformation. In a community that does not take part in indigenous resistance, CACTUS has great difficulty to put its objectives into practice. Moreover, the community deals with problems on its own way; students and mothers take part in a local struggle to cope with the dangers of migration to the United States as well as their exclusion from social mobility. But rather than simply conclude that Zapatista-like struggles in Mexico find little resonance in the Mixtec region, or that indigenous communities are becoming part of global modernity, this ethnography tells a more subtle and nuanced story. It shows the multilayered nature of the contestation of citizenship in the school and the organic ways different aspirations interact in a local context. This makes me conclude that we cannot think about indigenous struggles over the meaning of citizenship in unequivocal ways. It requires the unique perspective of the anthropologist to understand the connections between the often abstract goals of social movements or states with regard to citizenship, and local social processes where contesting citizenship can take on unexpected forms.

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<sup>1</sup> The Maristas belong to a Catholic congregation dedicated to the education of children and youth. <http://www.maristas.edu.mx/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.patronatodeextension.org.mx/Qsomos.htm>

<sup>3</sup> All the names of members of CACTUS, students and their parents have been changed in this thesis for privacy reasons, with the exception of important leaders Bety Cariño, Omar Esparza and Luis Ramírez.

<sup>4</sup> A indigenous social movement based in Chiapas who since 1994 are involved in a low intensity war against military, paramilitary and corporate incursions in Chiapas. The Zapatistas struggle for the recognition and protection of indigenous rights and autonomy in Mexico.

<sup>5</sup> The APPO [*Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*] is a combination of various organizations that assembled in response to the repressive political situation in Oaxaca in 2006.

<sup>6</sup> In 2006, the EZLN started a caravan called The Other Campaign [*La Otra Campaña*] through Mexico to meet various organizations and groups to unite forces against neoliberalism and capitalism.

<sup>7</sup> PowerPoint Presentation about the work of CACTUS made in 2008. The presentation was shown to me by Emilio, a member of CACTUS, on 05-12-2011.

<sup>8</sup> <http://tiempodelospueblos.saltoscuanticos.org/es/node/25>

<sup>9</sup> Enciclopedia de los Municipios de México, Oaxaca. Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal, Gobierno del Estado de Oaxaca. <http://www.elocal.gob.mx/work/templates/enciclo/oaxaca/municipios/20528a.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.migracion.oaxaca.gob.mx/FichasMunicipales/528.html>

<sup>11</sup> In English: customs and traditions. It is a legal term denoting indigenous customary law in Latin America.

<sup>12</sup> The *cancha* is the basketball field located in the center of the community which functions as community square.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cesder-prodes.org>

<sup>14</sup> Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Unidad Xochimilco (UAM), Bachilleratos Integrales Comunitarios (BIC's), Secundarias Comunitarias (SC's), Universidad Intercultural de los pueblos del Sur (UNISUR), Licenciatura en Planeación del Desarrollo Rural del Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo Rural (CESDER).

<sup>15</sup> *Servicio Social* in Mexico is a unique example of a university-based national service program. Officially, each student in Mexico must undertake a minimum of six months of social service as a requirement for receiving a higher education degree. Social service is a widely accepted ideal in Mexico, deeply rooted in the communal values of the indigenous population and the Mexican Revolution (Sherraden and Sherraden 1991).

<sup>16</sup> SpongeBob is a character in an American animated television series *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

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## Summary

Since the 1990s, neoliberal states in Latin America have adopted forms of multiculturalism through constitutional reforms in an effort to enhance the participation of indigenous people and to remedy histories of ethnic and racial domination. However, the failure of these reforms to profoundly change unequal power relations and the emergence of new vulnerabilities have provoked indigenous movements to engage in new struggles over the meaning of citizenship. Nowadays, indigenous movements struggle for the inclusion in the national community as well as for the preservation of political, economic and cultural autonomy. Several scholars have commented on what appears to be a paradoxical stance. This thesis explores the engagement of social movements in the contestation of citizenship in the particular field of education. In the last decade, Mexico has experienced a rise in alternative education projects initiated by civil society as a response to the partial exclusion of indigenous peoples from the public education system and their unequal treatment within it.

If schools are often understood in terms of citizenship factories, then what happens when social movements take over that role? The pluricultural civil society organization CACTUS [*Centro de Apoyo Comunitario Trabajando Unidos*] in the Mixtec region in Oaxaca, has founded a communitarian preparatory school in the indigenous community of Santos Reyes Tepejillo. This project is an attempt at counter-hegemonic citizenship formation. The aim of the school is to realize the right of indigenous people to quality education, but it also aspires to trigger an emancipatory political process. The latter is articulated in the school's educational model and organizational structure, based on notions as self-determination, social critique and the strengthening of indigenous identity, knowledge, language and communal ways of life. However, the school has an ambiguous status in the local community. For the community, the school is first of all a way to contest a failing citizenship regime in which indigenous communities are excluded from access to education and socio-economic mobility. During five-months of qualitative, ethnographic research in the community of Santos Reyes Tepejillo, I studied how the teachers of CACTUS engaged in alternative citizenship formation in school, and how the local community responded.

In this ethnography of citizenship, I examine educational practices with the help of theories that conceptualize citizenship as social practice. In this logic, I explore what kinds of citizens, with what kinds of knowledge, values, political agency and dispositions the teachers seek to shape by means of the curriculum, pedagogies and the organization of the school. While the teachers aim to trigger indigenous and communal identities as well as critical and democratic dispositions in school, students and their mothers actively put forward and appropriate schooling practices according to their own interests and aspirations. Hence, different citizenship models interact dynamically in a process of reproduction, negotiation, resistance and re-elaboration.

What does this discussion of what makes citizenship tangible in the school tell us? It raises critical questions about generalized theorizing on multiculturalism and indigenous struggles over the meaning of citizenship. It shows that the complexities and inconsistencies of local realities and people engaged in everyday practices of social transformation, can take on unexpected forms that contradict easy generalizations. This emphasizes the responsibility and capacity of anthropologists to question abstract objectives of social movements or states, and hence examine how their claims actually take shape in everyday life and local realities.