Quetzaltenango's First Mayan Mayor: Transforming Political Culture and the Politics of Belonging?

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of ethnic political mobilisation in Latin America, this article examines how, as Quetzaltenango's first Mayan mayor, Rigoberto Quemé Chay transformed two interrelated dimensions of citizenship: political culture and the politics of belonging. It analyses the way in which citizenship is constituted at three levels. The first is within Xel-jú as an indigenous political organisation whose practices contrast with *ladino* ways of doing politics. The second is in relation to internal divisions between the militant indigenous line and the intercultural group. The third is within Xel-jú as a city-centred, middle-class-oriented indigenous organisation rather than a rural, indigenous community organisation. This article argues that transformations in citizenship are limited by the political, economic and ethnic context, and that overlapping systems of repression still prevent the participation of marginalised groups in Quetzaltenango.

Keywords: Guatemala, indigenous political mobilisation, local politics, radical democracy, community organisation, citizenship

Introduction

Rigoberto Quemé Chay's victory in the municipal elections of Quetzaltenango in 1995 inspired euphoria in all of Mayan Guatemala. It was the first time that a Maya K'iche' would be governing Guatemala's second-largest city, a place that had always been characterised by exclusion of the indigenous population. Until Quemé entered the municipal palace as the first Mayan mayor together with his predominantly indigenous syndics and councilmen, the indigenous population of Quetzaltenango had largely been excluded from the exercise of its political rights.

Through an ethnographic account of how Quemé transformed the practices and meanings of citizenship within two interrelated dimensions, the politics of belonging and the contest over political culture,[1] this article

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[1] Nancy Grey Postero, *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

analyses how indigenous groups in Quetzaltenango have broken with the inequalities based on ethnicity that marked the practice of citizenship. By the 'politics of belonging' I refer to the process by which members of society are included in the democratic system: who is 'called to the table'? By the 'contest over political culture' I refer to the specific way in which citizens make citizenship rights meaningful in practice; how they claim the right not only to participate within the political system, but also to determine what kind of political system this should be.[2] Political culture involves institutionalised fields that structure the negotiation of power, and that may be considered the domain of practices and institutions that historically can be properly considered as political.[3] I thus go beyond the legal definitions of citizenship to analyse how indigenous groups, and especially the local and municipal authorities of Quetzaltenango, negotiate what Yashar has called 'the boundaries of citizenship' and the way politics should be practised.[4]

Xel-jú, the political organisation behind Quemé, was founded in the early 1970s.[5] Its emergence should be considered within the broader context of indigenous political mobilisation in Latin America. Especially at the municipal level, indigenous-based political parties have come into power and have, since the 1990s, proposed participatory approaches to democracy.[6] They have been negotiating the terms of belonging within the political and democratic system. Municipal authorities can be important actors in the process of constituting citizenship. In most Latin American countries, neoliberal reforms have led to decentralisation and greater responsibility on the part of municipal authorities for public services and economic and social development.[7] At the same time, indigenous leaders have gained control over local government through participation in municipal elections. Once in

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[2] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*, p. 223; Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar (eds.), *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

[3] Alvarez et al. (eds.), *Cultures of Politics*.

[4] Deborah J. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[5] *Xel-jú* means 'below the ten thoughts' in K'iche'.

[6] An often-mentioned example is Pachakutik, which emerged out of the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE) in Ecuador. See, among others, Donna Lee Van Cott, *Radical Democracy in the Andes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and John D. Cameron, 'The Social Origins of Municipal Democracy in Rural Ecuador: Agrarian Structures, Indigenous-Peasant Movements, and Non-Governmental Organizations', unpubl. PhD diss., York University, 2003. Anthony Bebbington, 'Los espacios públicos de concertación local y sus límites en un municipio indígena: Guamote, Ecuador', *Debate Agrario*, 40–1 (2006), available at www.cepes.org.pe/debate/debate40-41/16-Bebbington.pdf.

[7] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*; John D. Cameron 'Municipal Democratisation in Rural Latin America: Methodological Insights from Ecuador', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 24: 3 (2005), pp. 367–90; Sarah A. Radcliffe, Nina Laurie and Robert Andolina,

office, indigenous mayors and council members can assume different positions, whether or not rooted in an ethnic identity, regarding indigenous rights, citizenship and democracy. This has produced varied, often hybrid practices of citizenship; in Bolivia, for example, associative politics (politics in which room is given to the participation of civil associations) has often been a starting point for indigenous organising, and 'new' forms of organising go hand in hand with Andean principles of leadership, accountability and community service in urban contexts.[8]

Such processes of local indigenous political mobilisation are especially interesting to study in Guatemala, where space has been accorded to multicultural politics only recently. The return to civilian rule after 36 years of internal conflict that pitted the state against its indigenous citizens paved the way for indigenous-based organising. Popular and culturally based Maya organisations became crucial to the peace and democratisation processes.[9] However, the election of Quemé in 1995 should be considered not only within the context of the peace process, but also within that of the municipality's own history of ethnic relations. The presence of an indigenous Maya K'iche' bourgeoisie,[10] with a history of reclaiming an indigenous presence in the municipal council since the Alcaldía Indígena (Indigenous Mayoralty)[11] was abolished in 1894, has shaped Quetzaltenango's Maya K'iche' political activism since the 1970s. Ladino–Maya relations are marked by racism, which Xel-jú members experience on a daily basis, notwithstanding their often economically privileged position. Within this context urban Mayas in Quetzaltenango have used liberal politics as a vehicle for community governance,[12] a process that has resulted in hybrid forms of citizenship. However, what makes Quetzaltenango an exceptionally interesting case for studying the constitution of citizenship are the less studied tensions between Quemé as a Maya leader at the national and international levels and the way representatives of the indigenous rural areas, the auxiliary mayors, expected him to represent them. Thus, while Quemé's project has produced new

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'Reterritorialised Space and Ethnic Political Participation: Indigenous Municipalities in Ecuador', *Space and Polity*, 6: 3 (2002), pp. 289–305.

[8] Robert Albro, 'The Culture of Democracy and Bolivia's Indigenous Movements', *Critique of Anthropology*, 26: 4 (2006), p. 394.

[9] Roddy Brett, *Movimiento social, etnicidad y democratización en Guatemala 1985–1996* (Guatemala City: F&G Editores, 2006).

[10] Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj, *La pequeña burguesía indígena comercial de Guatemala: desigualdades de clase, raza y género* (Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 2002); Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

[11] Lina Barrios, *Tras las huellas del poder local: la Alcaldía Indígena en Guatemala, del siglo XVI al siglo XX* (Guatemala City: URL, 2001). The alcaldías indígenas were created by the Spaniards to collect taxes and maintain communication between the municipal council and the representatives of the rural communities, the auxiliary mayors.

[12] I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this formulation.

practices and meanings of citizenship, it has also reproduced existing hier-archies as regards rural Indians[13] and urban Mayas within a new multicultural setting.[14] This field of tension is of central importance in my analysis of how agents at the level of the municipality negotiate within the legal framework to constitute citizenship.

In order to grasp the local dynamics of citizenship, I conducted fieldwork in Quetzaltenango between 2001 and 2006. I interviewed over 50 people who were directly or indirectly involved in Xel-jú or other local government issues. I participated in meetings of Xel-jú's *junta directiva* (board of directors) and general meetings and, of course, also interacted informally with government representatives. In addition, I became very closely acquainted with the activities and views of the auxiliary mayors of the rural outlying areas of the municipality.

In the first section of this article, I discuss the conceptual relationship between citizenship and indigenous political participation in Guatemala. In the sections that follow I analyse how Xel-jú's intercultural project has been subject to contestation and negotiation as a way of constituting citizenship at three different levels. The sections are organised in relation to these levels. The first level at which citizenship is constituted is between Xel-jú as an indigenous civic committee and non-indigenous ladinos. The second level is between the 'indigenous' and the 'intercultural' group of the civic com-mittee. The third level is between Xel-jú and the impoverished Indians that it claims to represent.

Citizenship and Indigenous Participation in Guatemala

The ways in which the two Quemé administrations transformed practices and meanings of citizenship in Quetzaltenango are analysed within the framework of two consequences of neoliberal reforms which produced new meanings and practices of citizenship in Latin America: the emergence of indigenous movements and the politics of decentralisation. Xel-jú, as part of the Maya movement and as a municipal authority, is located at the crossroads of these two frameworks and negotiates power relations within Quetzaltenango as an indigenous movement occupying the space granted to it by decentralisation politics.

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[13] The term 'Maya' is used consciously as a mode of self-identification that is freely chosen and not imposed from the outside. Whereas *indio* and *indígena* originate from colonialism, 'Maya' refers to a shared glorious past. Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus, *Entre el mecapal y el cielo: desarrollo del Movimiento Maya en Guatemala* (Guatemala City: Cholsamaj, 2003).   [14] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens.*

Indigenous movements and the redefinition of citizenship

The debate on citizenship has been deeply influenced by the emergence of the 'politics of difference' in the 1980s, when indigenous movements began to employ a 'language of rights' as a way of claiming citizenship.[15] Indigenous movements not only began to claim rights within the political system, but also demanded the right to participate in the definition of the political system itself.[16] They rejected the assimilation of state projects and began to reimagine the nation-state as multicultural, pluriethnic and multilingual.[17] The notions of 'citizenship' and 'rights' became central to the language of contention employed by indigenous movements.[18] In many Latin American countries, this has led to the constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples and their rights, a process that Van Cott has termed 'a friendly liquidation of the past'.[19] The emergence of indigenous movements and their appropriation of the concept of citizenship brought about two important changes in the citizenship debate: the introduction of culture, and a focus on 'citizenship from below'. This implied a redefinition of the notion of liberal citizenship articulated by Marshall in the 1940s, which saw citizenship as the achievement of three separate categories of rights: civil, political and social.[20]

The first change, a new conception of the relationship between citizenship, rights and culture, contested the idea of Latin American democracies as being based on an ideal of liberal citizenship in which rights-bearing citizens participate as equals and guide formal political decision making. This form of citizenship has also been called universal citizenship because it expresses ideas of belonging, equality and participation in public life, in which cultural and racial differences are not relevant.[21] Liberal and universal definitions characterise citizenship as a universal category that can be claimed by any

[15] Evelina Dagnino, 'Citizenship in Latin America: An Introduction', *Latin American Perspectives*, 30: 2 (2005), pp. 3–17; Joe Foweraker, Todd Landman and Neil Harvey, *Governing Latin America* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

[16] Alvarez et al. (eds.), *Cultures of Politics*, p. 21.

[17] Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[18] William Roseberry, 'Hegemony and the Language of Contention', in Michael Joseph Gilbert and Daniel Nugent (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 355–67.

[19] Donna Lee Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

[20] T. H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963).

[21] Aihwa Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States', in Rodolfo D. Torres, F. Mirón and Jonathan Xavier Inda (eds.), *Race, Identity and Citizenship: A Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), pp. 262–95; Maria Elena Garcia, *Making Indigenous Citizens: Identity, Development and Multicultural Activism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Charles Hale, *Más que*

legitimate member of the nation-state. Such categories, however, are created in politically structured contexts.[22] Social cleavages can hinder or even undermine altogether the political equality promised by universal citizenship. Particular groups within a society, such as women or ethnic minorities, might not identify with the political community, or might not have the kind of representation that enables them to actually exercise their rights.[23] As a result, a growing literature has arisen that advocates the development of differentiated citizenship.[24] Such a view favours identity politics and demands the granting of special rights to marginalised groups. The possibility of claiming special rights as indigenous peoples has been called ethnic, indigenous or multicultural citizenship.[25] Democracies that recognise group-specific rights and that acknowledge that equality cannot be achieved without granting such rights are called multicultural democracies.

For indigenous movements, the International Labour Organization's Convention 169 is an important referent for ethnic citizenship, as it is a document that lays down political, cultural and economic rights for indigenous populations. The Convention was signed by the Guatemalan state in 1995. In Guatemala, the Identity Accord, part of the Peace Accords concluded in 1996, is one of the most important frameworks for negotiating indigenous citizenship. The Maya movement[26] played an important role in the formulation of the Identity Accord, which radically alters the social framework of Guatemalan politics: it is an instrument for combating racism and for defining new forms of citizenship. The Identity Accord recognises the identity of indigenous peoples as well as their cultural, civil, political, social and economic rights. Cultural rights include the right to use Mayan languages and Mayan given names and surnames, as well as the right to Mayan religious practices, the protection of Mayan holy places, and the use of indigenous clothing. Political rights include the right to participation at all

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un indio: Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 2006).

[22] Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*.   [23] *Ibid.*

[24] For this argument, see, among others, Iris Marion Young, 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship', *Ethics*, 99: 2 (1989), pp. 250–74; and Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Other scholars reject the legal and political recognition of difference. See Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[25] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*; Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*.

[26] I use the term 'Maya movement' to refer to the political mobilisation of indigenous organisations, groups and institutions that through their own efforts attempt to transform the relationship between the indigenous population and the Guatemalan nation-state. Bastos and Camus, *Entre el mecapal y el cielo*, p. 7.

levels, but also the right to maintain indigenous forms of conflict mediation and governance.[27]

The redefinition of citizenship as a project and as a way of contesting legal frameworks, the second development in the citizenship debate, resulted in a more actor-oriented approach in studies of citizenship. This change is rooted in the observation that the granting of rights by the state does not guarantee equal exercise of those rights. Moreover, a focus on the role of the state in granting citizenship rights seems to neglect the agency of citizens.[28] Studies of citizenship should therefore also focus on the agency of the subjects.[29] Citizenship is then framed as a process through which individuals contest and negotiate legal frameworks, social practices and cultural imaginaries. Within this framework, individuals contest what is political and who counts as a political actor; they transform political culture.[30]

Citizenship and indigenous participation

Among all the different layers that comprise the concept of citizenship today in Latin America, it is participation that seems to receive the most attention in terms of research, as well as in the actual practice of governance.[31] Closely related to the notion of participation is the idea of participative democracy, which entails the active role of citizens in decision making.[32] Alternative ideas of democracy emerged in the 1990s as a result of neoliberal policies on the one hand and pessimism towards democratic institutions on the other. Within this context, citizenship is conceived as a form of action; to become a citizen is to participate. The relationship between indigenous participation and decentralisation is twofold. Decentralisation provides the space to, on the one hand, claim political rights of participation, and on the other, give form and content to local governance rooted in an ethnic identity. Within such legal frameworks, the form and content of citizenship can either be the practice of indigenous law or the incorporation of indigenous elements into state structures. Below I will briefly explore how the two developments within the citizenship debate that I have discussed above – the right to culture as part of the content of citizenship and the study of the agency of

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[27] Rachel Sieder (ed.), *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Warren, *Indigenous Movements*.

[28] Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject Making', p. 263.

[29] Bryan S. Turner, *Citizenship and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1993).

[30] Rachel Sieder, 'Rethinking Democratisation and Citizenship: Legal Pluralism and Institutional Reform in Guatemala', *Citizenship Studies*, 3 (1999), pp. 103–18; Juanita Sundberg, 'Conservation and Democratization: Constituting Citizenship in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, Guatemala', *Political Geography*, 22: 7 (2003), pp. 715–40.

[31] Dagnino, 'Citizenship in Latin America'.   [32] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy in the Andes*.

subjects – relate to indigenous participation at the municipal level in Guatemala.

Citizenship at the municipal level is constituted within the legal framework of participation and indigenous rights that have been granted to the indigenous population in national legislation and international agreements. The recently reformed Municipal Law (2002) recognises the *alcaldías indígenas* and accepts an identification of the local representatives as 'communal' (instead of auxiliary), as well as recognising the *usos, costumbres* and traditions of the communal mayoralties.[33] The Law on Decentralisation and Law on Development Committees, both approved in 2002, provide municipal and local authorities with more responsibilities for social and economic development. The 1985 Constitution recognises the existence of Guatemalan indigenous groups of Maya descent and the 'right to their cultural identity in accordance with their values, their language and their customs'.[34] It also establishes that the state 'recognises, respects and promotes their ways of life, customs, traditions, forms of social organisation, the use of indigenous dress by men and women, and [indigenous] languages and dialects'.[35] Thus, there are some legal grounds for giving form to indigeneity at the local level through participation within and outside state structures.

When we examine the ways in which indigenous actors actually give form and meaning to those legal frameworks, it becomes clear that participation is rooted in ethnic identity and often entails changing existing ethnic power relations. Following the lead of mayors such as Auki Tituaña (Cotacachi) and Mario Conejo (Otavalo) in Ecuador, Quemé combined notions of a decentralised liberal democracy with principles of interculturalism, an ideology that seeks to actually change power relations through the construction of relations between different groups, as part of his objective of transforming state institutions and policies.[36] As a utopian political philosophy rather than an empirical reality, interculturalism seeks to construct citizenship within the context of a plural nation and adds an ethnic component to participative democracy.[37]

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[33] Código Municipal, Arts. 55–6.   [34] Constitución de la República Guatemalteca, Art. 58.

[35] Constitución de la República Guatemalteca, Art. 66.

[36] Catherine Walsh, 'Interculturalidad, reformas constitucionales y pluralismo jurídico', *Boletin ICCI–RIMAI*, 4: 36 (2002), p. 2; Joanne Rappaport, *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation and Ethnic Pluralism in Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 130.

[37] In a multicultural democracy, different ethnic groups are entitled to uphold their individual rights and are granted collective rights. Interculturalism goes beyond multiculturalism: it seeks to create new horizontal relationships, whereas multiculturalist policies seek to allow special provisions for protecting distinct cultures through the recognition of ethnic and cultural rights. See Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*.

From this standpoint, indigenous mayors often create institutions which combine the exercise of political citizenship rights (that is, the right to participate in government by taking active part in a legislature or local government, or by exercising the right of suffrage)[38] that are associated with Western or liberal notions of democracy with the logics of community-based institutions, often referred to as customary, indigenous or Maya law. Indigenous activists often summarise those logics as: reconciliation and a return to harmony, restitution instead of punishment, exemplary punishment such as public work carried out before the whole community,[39] re-incorporation of the offending individual into the community, public discussion and apology.[40] Whether or not those are 'real Mayan values', they are used to give form and meaning to the 'culture of politics' dimension of citizenship.[41] Fischer has called the mobilisation of these values as a way of claiming indigenous rights 'strategic essentialism'.[42]

Taking as a point of departure the conception of citizenship as a negotiation of legal frameworks, in what follows I analyse how Xel-jú transformed the meanings and practices of citizenship in the two previously mentioned interrelated dimensions of citizenship: negotiating the terms of belonging and contesting political culture. I focus primarily on the ways in which Xel-jú, as an indigenous and political organisation, claims indigenous rights on both an individual and a collective level. I analyse the ways in which the two Quemé administrations have produced negotiations of the legal frameworks within which they participate.

Xel-jú as a Political Indigenous Organisation versus a Ladino Culture of Politics

As a civic committee, Xel-jú is a local organisation that is only allowed to exist during election campaigns. Members, the number of whom depends on the population of the municipality, must be residents of the municipality,

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[38] Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*, p. 46.

[39] 'Community' in this context has different meanings. Firstly, it relates to the administrative unit, often legally called *aldea* or canton. Secondly, it is the central point of identification for the indigenous population. In many indigenous communities there is a continuous tension between communal balance and individual rights. See also Stener Ekern, 'Are Human Rights Destroying the Natural Balance of All Things? The Difficult Encounter between International Law and Community Law in Mayan Guatemala', in Pedro Pitarch, Shannon Speed and Xochitl Leyva Solano (eds.), *Human Rights in the Maya Region: Global Politics, Cultural Contentions and Moral Engagements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 123–44.

[40] Jim Handy, 'Chicken Thieves, Witches and Judges: Vigilante Justice and Customary Law in Guatemala', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 36: 3 (2004), pp. 533–61.

[41] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*.

[42] Edward Fischer, 'Maya Identity and Cultural Logic: Rethinking Essentialism and Constructivism', *Current Anthropology*, 40: 4 (1999), pp. 473–99.

and at least 50 per cent of them are required to be literate. Civic committees, which are automatically dissolved after the elections, have the right to run candidates for offices in the municipal council.[43] Civic committees are considered a novel way of giving form to citizenship by the indigenous population. Because they do not depend on political party structures, they have space to incorporate 'indigenous elements' into their practices of citizenship.[44] Xel-jú was founded in 1972 in order to address the problem of the lack of indigenous presence in municipal and national politics. After losing the elections of 1974 with an electoral slate that was completely indigenous, it would take another 21 years before it was able to run a candidate who would win an election. In the following section, I discuss how Xel-jú members give form and meaning to legal frameworks and indigenous and universal rights on the first level of analysis: namely, how Xel-jú is constituted in relation to the ladino part of the population.

Internal Organisation: Contesting Political Culture

Indigenous citizens use the space of Xel-jú to contest ladino political culture. The ways in which Xel-jú and the individual members within it contest traditional political culture come to the fore in, among other areas, its internal organisation. Although many of its basic principles, such as accountability, the form of elections and decision-making procedures, are liberal democratic values, Xel-jú members evaluate them as 'indigenous'. They do this as a way of opposing ladino ways of 'doing politics'.

While Xel-jú members seem proud of having 'not just one ideology', many of them define 'the continuity of indigenous values', to use the words of a female Xel-jú member, as the guiding principle for Xel-jú's organisation and government. In interviews, middle- and upper-class Xel-jú members mentioned honesty, sincerity, the form of organisation, the importance of the family, *compañerismo* and mutual support as the most important values upon which the organisation was based. They identified those values as their guiding principles and as sometimes being explicitly informed by Maya K'iche' culture, and regarded them as distinct from the values of traditional political parties.

Those values also resonate in the key principles that Xel-jú defined in order to regulate the internal affairs of the committee. Overall, the basic principles of Xel-jú were directed towards the development and revival of the Maya K'iche' culture and indigenous political participation. The internal organisation was shaped by the following four key ideas. Firstly, the

[43] Ley Electoral y de Partidos Politicos, Decreto Ley 1–85, Art. 99.
[44] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.

organisation should always be put before the individual member. Secondly, financing electoral campaigns should be a duty shared by all members of the committee. The third principle, alternation, was aimed at avoiding a situation in which a person was nominated as a candidate for two consecutive terms of service. Finally, membership in the committee has never involved the payment of any fee. It was assumed that 'any person who identifies as a member of Xel-jú does so as an expression of indigenous identity, or as an expression of solidarity with the indigenous cause'.[45] The ideas of alternation and the importance of the collectivity in particular resemble what Mayas often call 'real community values' and have been identified as indigenous elements of the organisation by Xel-jú members. These key ideas and values would, it was hoped, not only produce transparent and open governance of the municipality, but also serve to empower the indigenous population. Although these values are present in participatory democracy discourse as well, the point here is that, in Xel-jú's formulation, they are imbued with indigenous meaning. They are deliberately contrasted with those of ladinos, and are meant to define practices of citizenship in relationship to ladinos.

Xel-jú members also give an indigenous meaning to the way in which the organisation's board of directors, the junta directiva, is elected, and consider this feature as distinguishing Xel-jú from ladino political parties. Xel-jú is presided over by the junta directiva, the members of which are chosen every two years by a general assembly of all the people who belong to the organisation. Various more or less organised groups within Xel-jú, such as the youth group, women, or groups from specific neighbourhoods or rural areas, can all propose their full list of candidates. The junta directiva is always accountable to the general assembly of all Xel-jú members, which is the highest-ranking body of the association. There is a constant dialogue between the general assembly and the junta directiva, especially during election campaigns. The general assembly has a very important voice in putting forward candidates for municipal elections.[46] The meetings of the general assembly resemble community meetings, and decisions are sometimes taken on the basis of a vote and at other times by informal consensus. The idea of consensus is described as an indigenous way of making decisions. Again, these internal practices are said to be rooted in an indigenous identity as way of changing political culture.

The consensus-oriented nature of the organisation, along with its deliberative and open character, should not be overstated, however.

[45] Ricardo Cajas Mejía, 'Lógica local de participación política Maya: la experiencia de Xel-Jú en Quetzaltenango 1972–1998', unpubl. MA thesis, UAM, 1998.
[46] Through the years, Xel-jú has managed different procedures in deciding on the electoral slates. See Elisabet Dueholm Rasch, 'Representing Mayas: Indigenous Authorities and the Local Politics of Identity in Guatemala', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Utrecht, 2008.

General meetings are often organised at night, which can make it difficult, if not impossible, for women and rural representatives to participate. Women often complain about being treated disrespectfully by their male counterparts during meetings. Xel-jú is also marked by structuring mechanisms of class and gender when it comes to designation for eligible slots on the electoral slates and the presidency of the junta directiva. One does not need money to become a part of the junta directiva; ambitious and talented activists within the organisation can rapidly make their way up the ladder. For don Máximo, an urban, higher-class Maya male, it was a lot easier to make a career within the committee than it was for don Julio, a shoe salesman and community leader from a rural community. Don Julio ended up with an electable slot on the electoral slate in 2007; there was, however, some resistance to this within the committee, and many years passed before don Julio gained a place on the slate, even though he was politically much better prepared than don Máximo. It can also be difficult for women to gain a place on the slate. There is an organised group of women, and although it is easy to join the committee and participate, there has never been a female candidate for mayor, and it was not until 2007 that the first woman was proposed to become a council member. Women often complain that they are not listened to, and sometimes feel pressured to wear their traditional K'iche' clothing so that they can be considered 'authentic' Maya K'iche' representatives.[47]

On the level of constituting citizenship in relation to ladino forms of 'doing politics', Xel-jú members identify the use of consensus and openness as part of their indigenous background, and feel that these values constitute a way of doing politics which is different from that of traditional ladino political parties. As Dagnino explains, they claim the right to decide upon the nature of the system in which they are participating, within the legal frameworks offered to them.[48] Xel-jú uses the possibility of creating a civic committee that is defined in the Law on Political Parties as a vehicle to express and practice notions of horizontal organisation, transparency, deliberation and consensus. It contests the existing political culture in the same way as the urban associations in Bolivia that Albro describes and which are also characterised by horizontality and room for deliberation.[49] The structures of exclusion that participatory democracy seeks to overcome are still present within Xel-jú. The emphasis on indigenous roots has at times hindered women and rural participants from having a voice. This is a problem that has

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[47] Interview with female Xel-jú member, 2006. See Gemma Celigueta Comerma, 'Mujeres e indígenas: dimensión local y acción política – el comité cívico Xel-jú de Quetzaltenango', *Nueva Sociedad*, 153 (1998), pp. 73–81, for an analysis of the position of women within Xel-jú.   [48] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*.   [49] Albro, 'The Culture of Democracy'.

also been addressed by Okin and Barry.[50] These authors warn that too much attention to group-specific rights may stand in the way of the exercise of individual rights.[51] In the case of Xel-jú, we see that the claiming of individual (and thus not group-specific) rights rooted in an indigenous identity does not automatically resolve problems of overlapping systems of repression.[52]

Quemé and the Politics of Belonging

Quemé's victory should be considered within Guatemala's broader political context of the peace process and democratisation, and as a local manifestation of the growing trend within Latin America of indigenous control over municipal offices. In 1995, one-third of elected mayors in Guatemala were indigenous[53] – but not all of the indigenous mayors aimed at changing existing power relations or made particular efforts to exercise their office on the basis of a politics rooted in an indigenous identity. Quemé did, however, and a significant part of his political programme involved changing the categories of inclusion by calling different sectors 'to the table', to use Postero's words.[54] Quemé used the legal frameworks of the Municipal Code to facilitate the involvement of indigenous, female and rural citizens in municipal politics. He focused on the right of the indigenous population and other sectors to participate in municipal politics. This became especially visible during the electoral campaigns, which I will discuss below, and in his advocacy of participatory politics, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

Xel-jú won the 1995 elections with an electoral campaign that focused on 'intercultural democracy' and an electoral slate that comprised both Mayas and ladinos. This implied a radical break with a past in which only Mayas had been nominated by the organisation as candidates. One of the most prestigious places on the electoral list was occupied by a ladino. The rest of the electoral list was occupied by respected Mayas from Quetzaltenango's central neighbourhoods. Over the years, Xel-jú came to include ladinos, women, youth and a representative from the rural area on its electoral slate. This can be considered a first step towards the construction of equal relations between different groups, and between their practices and internal systems of logic.[55] In both the 1995 campaign and the 1999 re-election campaign,

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[50] Barry, *Culture and Equality*. See also Susan Okin (ed.), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[51] Barry, *Culture and Equality*; Okin (ed.), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*

[52] Sundberg, 'Conservation and Democratization'.

[53] Brett, *Movimiento social, etnicidad y democratización.*   [54] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens.*

[55] Walsh, 'Interculturalidad, reformas constitucionales y pluralismo jurídico', p. 2.

Quemé opened up space for participation and for voting, two basic political rights that a number of sectors had not been able to exercise before. He did this not by invoking group-specific rights, but rather by giving an indigenous meaning to individual citizenship rights, thus changing not the content of citizenship but the meaning of that content.

During its 1995 electoral campaign, Xel-jú succeeded in gaining the sympathy and support of both important business people in Quetzaltenango and residents of urban suburbs, neighbourhoods and communities. The civic committee made adjustments to the symbolism and content of the electoral campaign: the Maya calendar was stripped from Xel-jú's logo, and the *chirimia* and *tum*, 'authentic' indigenous instruments, now appeared in fuchsia instead of black and white. Marimba music was replaced by Latin American popular music. Xel-jú members organised up to 400 meetings in the municipality; in the rural areas the party did not give away shirts and caps, but organised a mobile photo shop to enable people to obtain identification cards and provided voter registration information.[56] The civic committee opened up its doors, both literally by providing opportunities for slots on the electoral slate and symbolically by adjusting its symbols so as not to imply exclusion of any sector of the municipality, including the rich ladino elite.

The basis for Xel-jú's electoral strategy and action plan in 1995 was Agenda XXI of Participatory Development, also known simply as Plan 21, which focused on a participatory democracy in which all sectors of Quetzaltenango society would participate. As Ricardo Cajas recalled: 'We didn't say that it was about the right to be different. We said: "Every sector of the population is responsible for development".'[57] Plan 21 focused on the active participation of the population and on long-term projects such as water, sewage, the construction of new roads and improvements in public transport. The projects on which they focused were in the city centre as well as in rural areas. The explicit goal was to transform the politics of belonging by including different parts of the population in the governing process by calling them to the table.

To summarise, then, Xel-jú promoted citizen participation in order to create new categories of inclusion and change existing power relations. In addition, the intercultural proposal represented an alternative way of governing the municipality. Xel-jú sought to remodel municipal government in order to make it more effective, more transparent, less bureaucratic, better organised and more participatory. Xel-jú envisioned new categories of inclusion by using elements that it thought of as having roots in indigenous Maya K'iche' culture, mixed with ideas of participatory democracy.

[56] Cajas, 'Lógica local de participación política Maya'.
[57] Interview with R. Cajas, Quetzaltenango, 2002.

The vehicle the party used was popular elections, which it won. During this process of negotiating legal frameworks, Quemé did not revert to claiming group-specific rights, but instead gave indigenous meanings to individual political rights as a way of determining the nature of the political system in which Xel-jú as an indigenous political organisation was participating.[58]

Inside Xel-jú: The Indigenous Group versus the Intercultural Group

The second level of analysis concerns the way in which citizenship is constituted in terms of the politics of belonging and the contest over political culture within Xel-jú. There was always a group within the committee that thought that interculturalism was a betrayal of what the group considered true indigeneity. The tensions between the so-called intercultural group and the indigenous group shaped the practice and meanings of political culture and terms of belonging within the committee. The first serious tensions between the committee and Quemé came to the fore when it was decided that Quemé would run for a second term as mayor; they were then further deepened by rumours of fraud and scandal that affected the internal relations of the committee. The final rupture came when Quemé ran for president in 2004 and distanced himself from the committee. An examination of the internal dynamics of Xel-jú reveals that, within the committee, both the right to participate (that is, the terms of belonging) and the way in which participation should take place (that is, political culture) were contested.

An important argument against Quemé's second candidacy was that it violated the principle of alternation of leaders and candidates. Many Xel-jú members consider alternation to be an indigenous principle. Carlos Velázquez, a former Xel-jú militant of the 'indigenous line', believed that the committee's violation of the alternation principle constituted a break with the indigenous values and principles on which Xel-jú was based. Keeping Quemé at the head of the movement would, many believed, lead to a dead end, result once again in the exclusion of marginalised groups from the political process, and violate the idea of a horizontal organisation. From the perspective of the indigenous line within the committee, Quemé was too intercultural in his approach and lacked the toughness needed to pursue a 'truly indigenous' agenda. The second candidacy of Quemé polarised positions within the committee and provoked contestations about the political culture (too 'Western', according to the indigenous line) and the terms for belonging (too open to ladinos, according to the indigenous line). This polarisation resulted from the clash of different ideas as to how to put indigeneity into practice.

[58] Dagnino, 'Citizenship in Latin America'.

Van Cott has argued that the re-election of indigenous mayoral candidates in itself can be considered a general indication of success, as it was for the Ecuadorian Auki Tituaña, mayor of Cotacachi.[59] Quemé's re-election in 1999, however, ended up dealing a severe blow to Xel-jú. The election cycle was dominated by the candidacy of Alfonso Portillo, presidential candidate for General Rios Montt's political party, the Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (Republican Front of Guatemala, FRG). The day after the election, the results were declared void because of accusations that Xel-jú had bought votes on the day of the election. This kind of conduct represented the very worst of what Xel-jú was supposedly against in the traditional way of conducting politics. Although eventually Quemé was able to assume mayoral duties for a second term, these accusations shook the foundations of Xel-jú. While indigenous and human rights organisations closed ranks behind Quemé, his political rivals accused him of playing the card of indigenous victimisation whenever it was convenient for him. The image of Xel-jú as a clean and honest political organisation proved difficult to restore, and continuing rumours about the financial state of the municipality, and the imprisonment of a council member for blackmailing taxi drivers in 2003, made this even more difficult. This corruption not only shaped the way the electorate evaluated the second Quemé administration, but also produced tensions within Xel-jú. Some felt that the presence of ladinos within this group and in upper-level positions in Xel-jú, and on the electoral slates, was in large part responsible for all of the problems. People such as Velázquez saw a direct relationship between the increased participation of ladinos and the erosion of what they thought of as indigenous principles, such as transparency and loyal public service.

Internal relations became even more complicated as Quemé began distancing himself from the committee when the Keme movement backed his presidential candidacy in 2003.[60] At that time, the intercultural group within Xel-jú supported the candidacy of Quemé for president. The indigenous line began to see Quemé as an indigenous leader, surrounded by a small group of privileged persons, mostly ladinos, who was primarily concerned with maintaining his grip on power. Postero has argued for Bolivia that in new multicultural settings, old hierarchies are often reproduced.[61] The same

[59] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.
[60] Keme was a political movement that consisted of several political parties and a civic movement composed of civic committees mainly from the western highlands, as well as human rights and Mayan organisations from the capital. Xel-jú was the catalyst of the Keme movement. It had created a platform of progressive civic and cultural organisations that came together and engaged in debates over a new way to govern Guatemala, and over how to nominate the first indigenous candidate for president in Guatemala. See Rasch, 'Representing Mayas'.   [61] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*.

seems to be the case in Quetzaltenango. The eventual rupture between Quemé and Xel-jú reveals how power relations and hierarchies between the capital (Guatemala City) and the indigenous population were re-contextualised in a new multicuitual setting.[62] Maya cultural and political organisations in the capital would not accept the candidates proposed by the civic committees, and for their part exclusively proposed members from the 'Maya society of the capital'. In the end, Xel-jú withdrew its participation in the movement. The day after this happened, Quemé withdrew his candidacy.

Xel-jú was founded for the purpose of transforming the terms of belonging as well as the culture of politics. The ways in which Xel-jú members negotiated the legal frameworks within which they operate on the two first levels of analysis were characterised by adding indigenous meanings to individual political rights, rather than claiming group-specific indigenous citizenship rights. This resulted in a political proposal that sought to incorporate women, Mayas, ladinos and rural areas into the governance of the municipality. In the contest over political culture, Xel-jú members identified indigenous elements of their organisation in order to counter populism, corruption and bureaucracy. In the lead-up to the 1999 elections, however, new processes of exclusion became visible: Xel-jú became excluded from Quemé's national project, marking and reproducing old hierarchies between the capital and the rest of Guatemala. The vote-buying scandal of 1999, rumours of corruption, lack of transparency and fights over places on the electoral slates transformed the contest over political culture and also polarised internal relations within the committee. The dynamics of making politics more (or less) inclusive become particularly clear when we look into the tensions between Quemé on the one hand and the Xel-jú bases and indigenous electorate in the rural areas on the other, tensions that had begun to develop some years before. I will now look into how this process evolved.

Xel-jú as a city-based indigenous organisation versus rural community organisation

Participatory development was one of the key elements of both the 1995 and 1999 election campaigns. This concept was not only directed towards economic development but also aimed at changing existing power relations between Indians and ladinos and constructing an intercultural democracy that was characterised by participation. Participatory democracy, as a way of giving form to citizenship and changing political culture, was an arena in which the first Quemé administration created common referents and categories of inclusion for urban Mayas and rural Indians on how to govern

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[62] *Ibid.*

the municipality. The way in which the first Quemé administration approached this project resembles the ideas of the mayors in the Andes studied by Van Cott: it emphasised the incorporation of voluntary associations into spheres of decision making and called for economic redistribution.[63] Xel-jú considered the auxiliary mayors, the representatives of the communities of the municipality, to be crucial actors in this process, and its efforts thus focused on creating sites of governance by strengthening authority structures at the community level as well as on organising these structures into several coordinating entities at the municipal level. Rigoberto Quemé, in his function as municipal mayor, did so within the legal frameworks of the reformed Municipal Code and the Law on Development Committees.

The auxiliary mayor as agent of development?

I have already mentioned that the participation of auxiliary mayors in the structures of municipal government was considered crucial to changing the power relations of the municipality. The participatory initiatives concentrated on the functioning, position and work of the auxiliary mayor and his aides, the *alguaciles* in Quetzaltenango's 23 rural communities. The auxiliary councils were originally established in the late nineteenth century in order for the municipal authorities located in the city to maintain control over the rural, indigenous areas.[64] By strengthening those local institutions, Quemé aimed to create active citizens and decide who counted as a political actor, to paraphrase Dagnino.[65]

Today, many former rural areas have been urbanised and officially declared urban zones. In many rural communities, the auxiliary mayor has become no more than an extension of the municipal mayor, with no authority or legitimacy at all within his community. The auxiliary mayors find themselves in the awkward position of carrying out projects that their communities have demanded, without having any control over the financing of those projects. Their responsibility is limited to the maintenance of roads and bridges. As one of the most important of the auxiliary mayors' functions was for a long time that of delivering mail in their communities, the office was considered typical of backward and underdeveloped areas where the national postal service did not deliver the mail. As a result, being seen holding the *vara*, the wooden staff that symbolised the office, has become a source of embarrassment rather than of pride. In most communities, the auxiliary mayors do not know the exact extent of their authority; when approached by citizens to resolve particular conflicts, for example, they sometimes do not

[63] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.   [64] Barrios, *Tras las huellas del poder local*.
[65] Dagnino, 'Citizenship in Latin America'.

know whether they should try to solve the problem themselves or to call the police. In communities near the centre, the inhabitants always call the police, as they consider this to be a course of action that is more 'civilised' or 'modern' than calling upon auxiliary mayors, whose efforts to resolve matters more informally appear to them to represent 'backward' and 'underdeveloped' ways. The meanings attached to these practices of citizenship are, thus, extremely negative.

The negative impression that many people have of the auxiliary council is also reflected in council participation. An auxiliary council ideally consists of several auxiliary mayors and their helpers, in addition to a secretary and a treasurer. The composition varies from one community to another, ranging from six to 20 members. Most auxiliary councils suffer from a severe shortage of participants. Auxiliary councils are male-dominated spaces, and therefore it is worth noting that the rural community of Xetuj elected Quetzaltenango's first female alguaciles in 2002 and Llanos de la Cruz elected its first ladina member of the auxiliary council in 2004. Again, participation is structured within an economic, political and gendered context.[66] Unequal access to community offices is common in indigenous systems of community service. Female members of Xel-jú have been helping to organise rural indigenous women who find themselves at the crossroads of class, gender and ethnicity structures. Access to the exercise of citizenship is structured, again, by gender and class. Poor indigenous males and middle-class indigenous women both have more access to political power than poor indigenous women. Although participatory politics that are rooted in an ethnic identity can favour the participation of indigenous citizens, they do not secure the participation of women and impoverished communities. This tension arises not only when indigenous people claim their group-specific rights, but also when they claim their universal rights rooted in their indigenous identity.

Notwithstanding its negative image, the auxiliary council does fulfil crucial functions in the community. Some main areas of activity can be distinguished: the maintenance of the community's infrastructure (such as roads and bridges), the initiation of new projects, the resolution of disputes, and addressing security concerns. For the upkeep of community infrastructure and the execution of projects, the auxiliary council relies on the participation of the community, known as *minga* in the Andes.[67] There is also the legal relationship between the community and the municipality, with the former being responsible to the latter for carrying out certain tasks, such as registering births and deaths and taking a census of the inhabitants of the community. In some communities, such as Chitux, the auxiliary council also

[66] Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*.   [67] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.

takes care of the forests,[68] while in others, like Llanos de Pinal and Xetuj, it organises local beauty contests. Violence is a recent problem that the local authorities have had to deal with. Many auxiliary councils have added tasks related to the 'public security' of their communities to their official duties due to rising levels of violence that affect the centre of the city. Finally, another important task of the auxiliary council is the monitoring and maintenance of the community's water installations. Notwithstanding its crucial functions for the community, the post of auxiliary mayor has little power in the community due to the negative meaning attached to its image.

The New Politics of Inclusion and Political Culture: Municipal Initiatives

By the time Quemé had begun his first term as mayor, several auxiliary councils had already disappeared or existed only in name. Xel-jú attempted to position the auxiliary councils within an alternative frame of meaning, conceiving them as an arena of indigenous cultural continuity and indigenous community mobilisation. The objective was to create a political community with which the population could identify and to change the culture of politics within the communities. The Unidad Básica de Servicios Sociales (Basic Unit for Social Services, UBSS), which executes municipal policies, not only went actively to the communities to look for possible participants in the auxiliary council and to organise community elections, but also set up a broad programme of training and community organisation, and made an attempt to organise the auxiliary mayors into a Board of Auxiliary Mayors. These programmes were financed by the Spanish Embassy.

The UBSS invested a lot of time in transforming the local political culture surrounding the way in which the auxiliary mayors and alguaciles were appointed. Many auxiliary mayors had been appointed and never been replaced. The UBSS introduced liberal democratic values of voting and elections in the communities. Community elections today have the character of a community meeting, organised by the sitting auxiliary council. Candidates are nominated during rather informal sessions where community matters are discussed. At such meetings, the community members propose candidates for the offices after a general invitation is extended to all present to volunteer themselves for consideration. In most communities, the candidate with the most votes wins the position of first auxiliary mayor. The process of nomination often seems arbitrary – someone may just nominate their friend or nephew – but there is some space to deliberate and to take different factors into

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[68] See Stener Ekern, 'Making Government: Community and Leadership in Mayan Guatemala', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2006, for community organisation and forest management in Totonicapán.

account: has the person participated in services before? Is he or she an active person? Still, participation remains a problem, despite these positive changes. In most cases there are not many people who either vote or come forward as candidates.

The UBSS tried to meet the need for more information by organising a training programme based on a 'Manual of Functions'. This manual was written in collaboration with the Board of Auxiliary Mayors and supported by the NGO Servicios Jurídicos y Sociales (Legal and Social Services, SERJUS). The Manual of Functions refers to the formal (that is, liberal) tools, rights and obligations of the auxiliary council, but also dedicates some space to the possibility of auxiliary mayors applying customary law as a way of mediating conflicts in their communities. The workshops dealt with a variety of themes, from gender and health care to participatory budgeting. They thus addressed both the universal and group-specific rights of the indigenous population, broadening the actual content of citizenship available for the auxiliary mayors. Through advocating the active practice of those rights, the UBSS intended to transform the local political culture.

Van Cott says that the success of indigenous mayors depends on their ability to create long-lasting participatory institutions.[69] The Board of Auxiliary Mayors constituted such an attempt, as it was a municipal initiative that was intended to establish the participation of all communities.[70] The Board was envisioned as serving as a mediator between the municipal council and the representatives of the communities, the auxiliary mayors. This institution would assist in organising communities and thus aid in the general development of the municipality of Quetzaltenango.[71] The first Board, which functioned for two years, in 2000–1, featured an enthusiastic group of people and prominent community leaders. They set out in a car that they rented with their own money to motivate the auxiliary councils to participate in their communities.

The members of the Board of Auxiliary Mayors were very much inspired by other successful organisations that functioned alongside municipal councils in order to empower the indigenous population and secure the cultural continuity of indigenous community organisations. Members of the Board visited similar organisations in other areas of the country, including the Association of Totonicapán and the alcaldías indígenas of Sololá and Chichicastenango, in order to share experiences.[72] All of the members of the

[69] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.   [70] *Ibid.*

[71] ADEAACOQ, 'Manual de funciones Junta Directiva de Alcaldías Auxiliares y/o Comunitarias de Quetzaltenango', unpubl. document, Quetzaltenango, 2001, pp. 3–4.

[72] See Ekern, *Making Government*, on Totonicapán, and Timothy Smith, 'A Tale of Two Governments: Rural Mayan Politics and Competing Democracies in Sololá, Guatemala', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Albany, 2006.

Board with whom I spoke confirmed that the ultimate goal was indeed that of being accorded a formal legal status so that they could raise funds and finance projects in the communities, rather than continuing to employ Mayan forms of organisation.

The Board of Auxiliary Mayors ended up having a tense relationship with the municipal council. There was still the need for a direct link between the town hall and the auxiliary mayors in the form of a Board, since the Quemé administration did not automatically bridge the gap between the municipality on the one hand and the rural communities and urban outskirts on the other simply by virtue of its being a Mayan political organisation. The municipal council especially grew uneasy at what it perceived as the Board's mission to create a new alcaldía indígena, a new site of governance in fact, with its own legal status, where it could position itself to claim rights and entitlements for indigenous people. Even Xel-jú did not favour giving the Board either an office in the town hall or a presence in the municipal organisational structure, and in this way it helped perpetuate the same power structures that had been in place for centuries. The municipality resisted the physical and symbolic presence of the Board within a political sphere that it regarded as its ex-clusive domain. In this sense, it created new terms of inclusion: the Indians from the rural communities that intended to break the existing hierarchy dominated by urban Mayas were not rewarded.

Maya Community Organisation

NGOs in Latin America have been active agents in the making of (indigen-ous) citizens.[73] The same has been the case in Quetzaltenango. Parallel to and sometimes in coordination with the municipality, NGOs such as the Asociación para la Promoción, Investigación y Educación en Salud de Occidente (Western Association for Health Promotion, Research and Education, PIES de Occidente) and SERJUS organised workshops for the auxiliary mayors and other community leaders. These workshops attempted to transform the existing political culture by focusing on the notion of Maya community organising as a way to promote citizens' participation. Focusing on what they considered Mayan values, they aimed at transforming political culture. Within this process they focused more on the group-specific rights of the indigenous population. By creating a 'political community', in the words of Yashar,[74] which fitted with the worldview of its citizens, they contested the terms of belonging. A good example is the way they ap-proached the possibility of changing the title 'auxiliary mayor' to 'communal

[73] See, for example, García, *Making Indigenous Citizens*.
[74] Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America*.

mayor'. 'Communal', according to Baudilio S., one of the facilitators at SERJUS, implied a higher degree of legitimacy in the community and a stronger connection with Mayan identity and culture. In accordance with Quetzaltenango's ethnic model, ladino mayors would prefer to call these other mayors 'auxiliary' as this confirmed the hierarchy between ladinos and Indians, and thus the role's very name would confirm its inferior status. In addition, a communal council (instead of an auxiliary council) would allow for horizontal (and not vertical) organising. In the words of don Vale, facilitator at PIES de Occidente and a former auxiliary mayor himself: 'When you say "auxiliary mayor", it seems like he is the helper of the municipal mayor – the municipal mayor himself – and thus the communities themselves have no authority … the mayors of the people should not be called "auxiliary" but rather "community" mayors.'[75]

Both don Vale and Baudilio S. had strong ideas about what 'real' Maya culture was, and they used those ideas to ensure that terms of inclusion were used in the political project and to change the culture of politics at the community level. They tried actively to pursue these aims in the Board of Auxiliary Mayors and through the organisation of the *consejos comunitarios de desarrollo* (community committees for development, COCODES) into an organisational chart that was inspired by Maya spirituality.

The 2002 Law on Development Committees enabled the creation of legally approved COCODES that comprised representatives of all community organisations. Within these committees, don Vale and Baudilio S. searched for a way to give form to what constitutionally had been recognised as indigenous communities' own form of organisation. The COCODES would directly influence the prioritisation of projects carried out in their communities. Despite widespread criticism on the grounds that this would violate the municipality's autonomy and would be appropriated by political parties, SERJUS and PIES de Occidente (among others) grasped the significance of this opportunity and set out to provide information to citizens on the law and to create the committees and give their own, indigenous, meaning to them. They considered it an opportunity to change the political culture of the rural communities. The two organisations stressed what they considered the Mayan features of the committees: specifically, the word '*consejo*' (committee), referring to an organisation that is organised horizontally from the grassroots level, is closely connected to the Maya world view. The initiative received a lot of support from the municipality: the communities were provided with extensive information, the UBSS organised numerous community meetings, and the committees were installed amid ceremonial symbolism, with pine needles strewn on the floor, the national anthem, marimba music,

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[75] Interview with don Vale, Llanos del Pinal, Quetzaltenango, 2002.

speeches, and food and refreshments. The constitution of the COCODES, which can be considered a practice of citizenship to which an indigenous meaning is given, transformed both the culture of politics within the communities and the politics of belonging.

SERJUS made many efforts to fit the organisation of the COCODES into an already existing coordinating body of community organisation, the Unidad de Organizaciones Locales de Desarrollo Integral de Quetzaltenango (Union of Organisations for the Integral Development of Quetzaltenango, UNOLDESIQ). According to its founders, among them don Vale and Baudilio S., the organisational chart of UNOLDESIQ is inspired by Maya spirituality and a Maya world view: it is circular instead of vertical, in order to indicate that no one person is valued more than any other. The four compass points serve to indicate the four different programmes, reflecting the termini of the two lines that form the Mayan cross: east-red (education), west-black (health), north-white (environment) and south-yellow (production). In a workshop conducted by SERJUS, collectivity, collaboration, advice and consensus had been formulated as the bases of a Mayan organisation. According to this proposal, instead of the earlier vertically structured proposal, the communities would be grouped into four micro-regions coinciding with the four compass points and their symbolic colours and meanings. One representative of each micro-region would join UNOLDESIQ.

The meeting during which this organisational model was explained exemplified the difficulties that the facilitators encountered in implementing what they had defined as Maya community organisation. During the meeting, don Vale explained that, by choosing the standard vertical model, one's 'own culture' would be destroyed because it would not fit with the community's original political culture. Pursuing his argument, he contended that the horizontal, circular model would be a perfect way to reconstruct the social fabric. The most important aspect of this model was, according to him, that 'it is ours'. The circular proposal was accepted with seven votes in favour and one against, and not by way of consensus. At the basis of the facilitators' position was the strong belief that it was their task to make a change in political culture and terms of inclusion by adding to them a Mayan element, as the state 'never strengthens what really belongs to us – the real Mayan culture – notwithstanding the fact that the majority of the population wants to keep things like they are within the culture.'[76] Knowledge about what was considered 'the real Maya culture', as well as access to that knowledge, was often limited to the facilitators themselves, however. For many participants it was the first time they had come into contact with those aspects of Mayan culture and spirituality. Don Luis, a middle-aged community leader,

[76] Interview with Baudilio S., Quetzaltenango, 2002.

explained to me how difficult it was to understand the concept of the Mayan cross: 'I don't know what the cross is … Despite the fact that it is here in this land, we were never taught about it; either that, or we have forgotten it'.[77]

Although the workshops provided a space where local community leaders could ask questions, voice their complaints and discuss the difficulties they encountered in the communities, they at the same time reflected a distance between the facilitators (university-educated and from the city) and the auxiliary mayors (limited education, lower socio-economic status, inhabitants of rural areas). The facilitators tried to change the local political culture by incorporating what they conceived as Maya into it, but the 'Mayan stuff' – new elements of political culture – that the trainers tried to convey to the auxiliary mayors was not particularly responsive to the practical needs of the auxiliary mayors. The facilitators considered the auxiliary council to be a site where Mayanness or indigeneity could be expressed, whereas the auxiliary mayors struggled with the limitations of their office.

Xel-jú and the auxiliary mayors used different indigenous political repertoires to contest political culture and define new terms of belonging.[78] Both Xel-jú administrations aimed discursively to change existing power relations in the municipality by carrying out their own participatory projects and supporting the participatory projects of other NGOs active in the rural areas of the municipality. Those projects endeavoured to transform the political culture by, firstly, creating platforms for communication and training and giving the communities a more active role in the governing of the municipality, and, secondly, 'Mayanising' the way the communities were governed – that is, incorporating more elements of what have been defined as typical indigenous values, such as consensus and deliberation. The participatory projects also aimed to set new terms for belonging by defining new terms of inclusion. In the end, however, the Quemé administration refused to execute the project of participatory budgeting, but also stopped working with the Board of Auxiliary Mayors. It also proved difficult to reform the community's political culture: neither Quemé, Xel-jú as an organisation or the NGOs succeeded in imposing a positive value on participation, something that Tituaña had succeeded in accomplishing for the *minga* in Ecuador.[79] Many of the new auxiliary mayors were not very happy the day they took their oath of office. Don Angel, for example, said: 'I felt nothing on that night. I wondered what I was supposed to do. I never studied anything.'[80]

[77] Interview with don Luis, Quetzaltenango, 2002.
[78] Roseberry, 'Hegemony and the Language of Contention'.
[79] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.   [80] Interview with don Angel, Quetzaltenango, 2002.

Lauer has argued that in a modern society where state institutions have entered indigenous communities and states manage a multiculturalist discourse, leaders need to acquire knowledge that goes beyond traditions and customs in order to effectively exercise their power.[81] It seems that this assertion certainly applies in Quetzaltenango: local leaders have lost their traditional knowledge and manage a more developmentalist discourse, but do not have the tools to bring that discourse into practice. Taking into consideration the different backgrounds of Xel-jú members in the Quemé administration, as compared with those who served as auxiliary mayors, it is not difficult to see where their different repertoires come from: the auxiliary mayors generally come from poor backgrounds and lack formal education, while Xel-jú members are for the most part both well educated and highly resourceful. Don Vale and Baudilio S., workshop facilitators, were very conscious of their Mayan roots and identity, although they came from very different backgrounds. Baudilio S. is from Cobán, a departmental capital, and is university-educated and worked in the NGO SERJUS. Don Vale was an auxiliary mayor who worked in the NGO PIES de Occidente, and was one of the few auxiliary mayors who actively practiced Maya spirituality. Those backgrounds shape the ways in which local actors give meaning and form to their citizenship practices, and thus how the culture of politics and the terms of belonging are transformed at different levels.

Conclusion

Taking as my point of departure a conceptualisation of citizenship as constructed from below and as multilayered and structured within a political context,[82] I have looked into how Quetzaltenango's first Mayan mayor since the abolition of the Alcaldía Indígena in 1894 transformed the practices and meanings within two interrelated dimensions of citizenship: the politics of belonging and the contest over political culture. Within those two dimensions I have analysed how Xel-jú gave meaning to legal frameworks by supposedly guaranteeing the indigenous population universal and group-specific rights granted to them by the state, and how the inclusion of 'culture' and 'indigenous' meanings to citizenship rights actually creates categories of inclusion and exclusion within the nation-state and changes the culture of politics.

The contestations over the terms of belonging took place at three levels. Firstly, Xel-jú was founded for the purpose of including the indigenous

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[81] Matthew Lauer, 'State-Led Democratic Politics and Emerging Forms of Indigenous Leadership among the Ye'kwana of the Upper Orinoco', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 11: 1 (2006), pp. 51–86.   [82] Dagnino, 'Citizenship in Latin America'.

population in municipal politics and enabling this population to exercise its political rights. Secondly, the terms of inclusion were subject to debate within Xel-jú: to what extent should ladinos be included in Xel-jú's project? Although including ladinos on the electoral slate enabled Xel-jú to win in 1995, it created tensions within the committee that still exist today. Thirdly, the politics of belonging were of critical importance in Xel-jú's project of creating an intercultural democracy: it aimed at including women and especially the inhabitants of rural areas as participants in the democratic process. When it came to actually letting the rural areas participate in processes of decision making, however, it became clear that Xel-jú's terms of belonging did not include more class-based notions of indigeneity that demanded radical economic distribution.

Different people at different levels have been called to the table, claiming their right to participate in the political system, but this is still to a large extent determined by class, gender and ethnicity.[83] Citizenship and access to rights are still structured by a political, gendered, economic context. The focus on indigenous and ethnic demands has hindered the participation of women and citizens from poorer neighbourhoods and rural areas. As a result, old hierarchies have been reproduced in a new multicultural setting.[84] Although the boundaries of citizenship have changed, new, excluded categories have simultaneously been created.[85] By recognising the very multicultural (and multisectoral) composition of Quetzaltenango, however, Quemé did open up the possibility of putting political citizenship rights into practice. This shows that recognising the existence of multiculturalism, rather than stressing the importance of assimilation, can provide better access to the practice of citizenship.

The political culture was contested in Xel-jú's municipal project, mainly through the transformation of the meaning of universal rights. Again, this transformation has taken on different forms at the three levels of analysis discussed in this paper. Xel-jú as an indigenous political organisation established inside mechanisms of decision making and deliberation that have a lot in common with what the literature has described as 'indigenous'. Those features have also been described in municipalities in urban Bolivia (by Albro) and the rural Andes (by Van Cott).[86] By giving an indigenous meaning to democratic values, Xel-jú constructed a political culture and community that indigenous people could identify with as opposed to what they considered ladino political culture.[87] Political culture was also subject to debate within Xel-jú. The values of transparency and alternation of government

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[83] Dagnino, 'Citizenship in Latin America'; Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*.
[84] Postero, *Now We Are Citizens*.   [85] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.
[86] Albro, 'The Culture of Democracy'; Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.
[87] Van Cott, *Radical Democracy*.

were considered 'truly indigenous' by the more militant indigenous group within the civic committee, as opposed to the intercultural 'open' group to which Quemé belonged. The idea that 'letting ladinos inside Xel-jú' was counterproductive to the construction of an indigenous political culture was confirmed when members of the Quemé administration became involved in fraud and corruption scandals. Finally, the two Quemé administrations provided space, albeit limited, to change the political culture within the rural communities. They introduced procedures, such as elections, that are associated with liberal democracy, and advocated Mayan community organisation at the same time. In actual practice, however, there was a tension between Xel-jú, as a city-based, mainly middle-class-oriented organisation, and the communities, which were populated by economically deprived Indians. As a consequence, the political culture of participation was limited to the community level and the discourses on Mayanness in community organisation did not find much support within the communities themselves.

The two Quemé administrations transformed the ways in which citizenship was constituted. They actively questioned the terms of belonging by founding Xel-jú and using popular elections to secure Maya representation in the municipal council. It was indeed the first time that the rural communities had become involved in municipal politics, but it also marked the differences and power relations between urban Mayas and rural Indians. The granting of universal and group-specific rights and the creation of participatory spaces does not guarantee that citizens will have access to those ways of exercising citizenship, which is structured in its political, economic, gendered and ethnic context. Although indigenous mayors can create new categories of citizens, their policies can also produce new mechanisms of exclusion. Not all individuals get the possibility to participate, to truly become citizens.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. En contra del escenario de movilización política étnica en Latinoamérica, este artículo examina cómo, siendo el primer alcalde maya de Quetzaltenango, Rigoberto Quemé Chay transformó dos dimensiones interrelacionadas de ciudadanía: la cultura política y las políticas de pertenencia. Analiza la forma en la que la ciudadanía se constituye en tres niveles. El primero es al interior de Xel-jú, como una organización política indígena cuyas prácticas contrastan con las formas ladinas de hacer política. El segundo se relaciona con las divisiones internas entre la línea militante indígena y el grupo intercultural. El tercero es al interior de Xel-jú como una organización indígena centrada en la ciudad con orientación de clase media en vez de una organización comunitaria rural indígena. Argumenta que las transformaciones en la ciudadanía son limitadas por el contexto político, económico y étnico, y aquellos sistemas de represión existentes aún que evitan la participación de grupos marginales en Quetzaltenango.

Spanish keywords: Guatemala, movilización política indígena, política local, democracia radical, organización comunal, ciudadanía

Portuguese abstract. O artigo examina como, contra o pano de fundo da mobilização da política étnica na América Latina, Rigoberto Quemé Chay, primeiro prefeito maia de Quetzaltenango, transformou duas dimensões interrelacionadas da cidadania: a cultura política e as políticas do pertencimento. Analisa-se a forma na qual a cidadania é constituída em três níveis. O primeiro é dentro do contexto da Xel-jú, como organização política indígena cujas práticas contrastam com a maneira latina de fazer política. O segundo é em relação às divisões internas entre a linha militante indígena e o grupo intercultural. O terceiro considera a Xel-jú como organização indígena urbana, de classe média, diferente de uma organização indígena rural e comunitária. É argumentado que as transformações na cidadania limitam-se ao contexto político, econômico e étnico, e que sistemas imbricados de repressão ainda inibem a participação de grupos marginalizados em Quetzaltenango.

Portuguese keywords: Guatemala, mobilização política indígena, política local, democracia radical, organização comunitária, cidadania