
Introduction: An Indigenous Community in the Lacandon Rainforest (1972–2023)

This book contributes to integrating a broader discussion about indigenous peoples (nations, communities and tribes) into political theory. Centred on the notion of ‘political community,’ it presents and closely examines a case study, through which it explores the process whereby an ethno-cultural group transforms into a political entity. This process is analysed based on the concepts of self-determination, autonomy, self-government and consent. A central claim of the book is that these four concepts are crucial components of an adequate framework for analysing indigenous nations, communities and tribes, in relation to notions such as ‘people,’ ‘territory,’ and ‘institutions.’ The book’s argumentation draws extensively on the conceptual progress that has come about through the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), in terms of the recognition of indigenous peoples at the international level. As a result, this framework offers a critical lens through which the narratives surrounding the establishment of political orders can be scrutinized.

Empirically grounded in the case study of the *Comunidad Zona Lacandona* (Lacandon Community) – an indigenous community located in Chiapas, Mexico – the book contributes to a re-examination of the dominant narratives about how political orders were founded. These ‘foundings,’ which encompass the prevailing political narratives and practices – along with historical accounts that define the birth of contemporary states – are relevant today because they are the anchors of political authority and sources of democratic legitimacy. The case study of *Comunidad Zona Lacandona*, a multi-ethnic community established in Mexico over the period 1972–1979 by

means of governmental action (i.e. land reform), serves as a vivid illustration of the process of transitioning from an ethno-cultural group to a ‘political community.’

The implementation of a land reform programme – through policy actions known as ‘recognition and titling of communal lands’ (1972) and the subsequent negotiated incorporation of land-claimant groups of Tzeltal, Chol, and Tzotzil speakers (1976–1979) – led to the formation of the Lacandon Community (LC). Seeking to understand this process better, this book examines the broader historical context of how Mexico’s Revolution (1910–1921) radically reformed its land tenure system. Codified in the country’s Constitution of 1917, this new system laid the foundation for indigenous peoples’ land claims. Moreover, in understanding the configuration of the contemporary territorial base of indigenous communities, such as the one considered in the case study, the analysis of two policies is important: land policy and environmental policy. The issues addressed by these policies are central to the current realities of indigenous peoples in the twenty-first century, including threats to their indigenous lands, territories and ecosystems, which in turn jeopardize their way of life.

By tracing out the transition from an ‘indigenous community’ to a ‘political community,’ this book identifies the core constituent elements of a political organization. For a political community, those elements are ‘a people,’ ‘a territory’ and ‘forms of organization.’ Similarly, for an indigenous community, the core constituent elements are a people, a territorial base and cultural institutions. These constitutive elements are recognized not only in Mexico’s Constitution, but also in international law and human rights law such as the 2007 United Nations... (ILO C169). the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the 1989 International Labour Organization Convention no. 169 (ILO C169).

The book also discusses the notion of indigeneity – ‘a people’ often being defined in terms of historical continuity and varieties of membership criteria. As indigenous communities are part of constitutional states, membership has been codified in national legal systems – which the case study examined herein illustrates. Moreover, an association with a particular territory is strongly implied in definitions of indigenous peoples, and this association is perhaps the main challenge that indigenous peoples have faced throughout their entire history. In this regard, the case study illustrates the discussion on the topic of ‘traditional occupation.’ Furthermore, indigenous customs

and practices ('indigenous institutions') illustrate the dual life of indigenous peoples in contemporary constitutional states: indigeneity is reproduced in traditional customs, to which self-government provides an administrative and a political element. At the same time, indigenous communities are part of larger socio-political orders (constitutional republics) – and their existence has been internationally acknowledged and recognized.

The indigenous community, defined in these terms, poses a challenge to the authority and legitimacy of contemporary constitutional democracies. This entails that the 'foundings' of contemporary states, being the anchors of their political authority and the source of their legitimacy, are vulnerable. Indigeneity de-authorizes political origins. In addressing the problem of 'foundings' as a problem of authority and legitimacy in democracy, the book suggests a model of engagement between indigenous peoples and states on the basis of the four concepts of self-determination, consent, autonomy, and self-government.

A Multidisciplinary Approach to Studying Indigenous Peoples

This study adopts a multidisciplinary approach. While primarily concerned with core concepts of political theory, it draws upon a number of other academic disciplines, including sociology, law (constitutional, agrarian, international and human rights), history, anthropology and ethno-history. Two seminal works that have informed the central arguments of this book are those of James Anaya (2004) and Angélica Bernal (2017). Because this book explores the conceptualisation of an ethno-cultural group as a political entity, it draws from political theory such concepts as self-determination, autonomy, self-government, and consent (discussed in Chapters 1, 6, and 7). It also includes a thorough review of the relevant literature in the fields of anthropology, ethno-history and agrarian law – specifically on the historical identity of the Lacandon Indians,¹ and the issue of land restitution within Mexico's land reform. Regarding international law and international human rights law, it references the Inter-American norms and jurisprudence, the 1989

¹ Previous studies on the Lacandons include: Thompson (1970), Scholes and Roys (1948), Pons Saez (1997), Boremanse (1998).

International Labour Organization on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO C169), and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The book heavily draws upon and presents observations and insights gained throughout my academic career. The case of the Lacandon Community has consistently served as an empirical foundation for my research. My approach to Indigenous affairs has evolved over the years.

As it focuses on the constitutive elements of such a community – ‘people,’ ‘territory,’ and ‘institutions’ – the book tries to integrate the conceptualisation of self-determination, autonomy, self-government, and consent as developed within the internationally recognised rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Archival work and fieldwork have been fundamental in ensuring that this book is firmly grounded in the relevant data. This is the result of long-term research on social conflict and political process that began as a doctoral project at the University of Leeds – a project that focused on the dynamics of landed conflicts over indigenous lands. Later, during my tenure at El Colegio de Tlaxcala A.C. (COLTLAX), I was able to examine more closely the political processes in which the Lacandon Community was involved, addressing land disputes and examining international human rights debates regarding indigenous peoples’ territorial claims. These research efforts resulted in three academic articles on topics such as political process, indigenous identity, and claims over territory and natural resources. Additionally, supported by a grant from Mexico’s Science and Technology Council (CONACYT), I researched the topic of indigeneity and constitutional democracy, which led me to examine the experiences of Native Americans in the United States of America. That research resulted in two publications. I returned to more mainstream strands of Political Science during my research visit at the Institute of International Relations at the University of Warsaw. Sponsored by an academic exchange programme between Mexico and Poland, I focused on studying the institutions of constitutional democracy and concepts such as consent, dissent, consensus, legitimacy, and resistance. From this period, three articles were published on the political institutions of Mexico, Poland, and the United Kingdom – I was able to complete this work during a subsequent brief research visit to the Research Institute of the University of Bucharest.

My incorporation into the American Studies Center (ASC) at the University of Warsaw provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the methodological approach I had taken throughout my career. The product of that

reflection was an article published in *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* (Calleros Rodríguez, 2022). At the ASC, I continued to explore the topics of Constitutional Democracy and ethno-racial diversity in the United States. At the same time, I began to explore different sources of data: I examined census data in relation to indigenous peoples in both, Mexico and the United States. Some further publications resulted from that effort.

Also in terms of data, in the summer of 2019, I visited the historically significant *Archivo General de Indias* (AGI) located in the Iberian city of Seville. This visit marked a significant shift in my research towards examining primary historical sources of the European expansion to the continent of America. Following in the footsteps of Jan de Vos, I read seventeenth and eighteenth-century manuscripts classified under the name Guatemala. Those primary sources have provided insights into the historical processes of establishing a new political order from which ‘indigenous’ populations would emerge. The experience of researching this archive greatly contributed to informing the discussion developed in Chapter 7 – originally published in the journal *Ameryka Łacińska – Kwartalnik analityczno-informacyjny* (Calleros-Rodríguez, 2023).

Archival research has constituted an important aspect of my professional trajectory. Data for this book has been sourced from various archives over different stages of my research career. Additional sources include census data (Calleros & Ibarra, 2022) and geographical data (Calleros-Rodríguez & Guevara Romero, 2016).

In addition to this, fieldwork observation, interviews, and document collection have been conducted in the towns of Nueva Palestina, Metzabok, Najá, Lacanjá Chansayab, and Frontera Corozal. The data collection process has included visits to relevant Chiapas cities such as Ocosingo, Palenque, San Cristóbal de las Casas, and Tuxtla Gutierrez. Additionally, I collected data from the agrarian archives of the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (ASRA), the National Agrarian Registry (RAN) in Mexico City and Tuxtla Gutierrez (Chiapas’ capital), as well as the General Agrarian Archive (AGA)

Crucial data, in the form of official documents, were obtained through Public Information Requests (PIR). Secondary sources encompass websites, reports, human rights recommendations, press releases, legislation proposals, and judicial decisions from national, multilateral bodies, and private organizations.

Fieldwork for the case study included a preliminary investigation in January 2007, followed by further visits in March–June 2008, January 2010, and September 2015. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during those periods. The names of informants have always been kept anonymous.

Overall, the case study presented in this book still remains very much relevant today, as the dynamics of social conflict persist and new ones emerge – including the criminal violence that has become a significant problem in the Lacandon Rainforest.

The Case Study

The Lacandon Community

This book is centred around the case of the *Comunidad Zona Lacandona* (Calleros-Rodríguez, 2013, 2014; Calleros-Rodríguez & Guevara-Romero, 2016). The Lacandon Community (LC) is located in Lacandonia (Chiapas, Mexico);² it has the status of an ‘agrarian community’ established through an agrarian restitution procedure called ‘recognition and titling of communal lands.’³ Since it received land in restitution in 1970s, this community has been advocating for its rights over land, territory and natural resources.

Thus, within Mexico’s land reform, the LC was established by two presidential decrees. The first was a Presidential Resolution on the Recognition and the Titling of Communal Lands (*Reconocimiento y Titulación de Bienes Comunes*), officially enacted on 6 March 1972. By means of this procedure, sixty-six Lacandon Indians, together representing some 350–400 people (Paladino, 2005), received 621,324 hectares of tropical forest in southern Mexico in restitution. The decree established that this land was made up of a combination of tracts originally slated to be national parks, lagoons, archaeological sites (30,365 hectares), national lands (160,211 hectares), private holdings (423,745 hectares) and land that could have been reserved

² The Lacandon Rainforest is in the eastern part of Chiapas, in the Usumacinta River basin, contiguous with Guatemala’s El Petén region and the Yucatán peninsula.

³ Article 27 of Mexico’s 1917 Constitution established tenure principles for different land-based communities: *ejido*, agrarian colonies and agrarian communities (recipients of land restitution actions).

for the creation of land-based settlements (*ejidos*)⁴ through land reform (de Vos, 2002: 101–4; Ascencio, 2008: 39). The second decree – the Presidential Resolution on the Recognition of Communal Agrarian Rights in the population centre called Zona Lacandona (*Resolución Presidencial sobre Reconocimiento de Derechos Agrarios Comunales en el núcleo de población denominado Zona Lacandona*) – dates from 8 March 1979 and recognized the land rights of a further 1,452 non-Lacandon members of the community (*comuneros*). Since 1979, then, the LC has become a multi-ethnic community incorporating Tzeltal and Chol, plus a small number of Tzotzil indigenous families as land-right holders.

The LC has 1,450 land-right holders, or *comuneros* (Ascencio, 2008: 129), and a total population of 16,879 inhabitants (Calleros-Rodríguez & Guevara-Romero, 2016). The population lives in language-based settlements: Lacandons live in Lacanjá Chansayab, Najá, Metzabok and Ojo de Agua Chankin; Tzeltals (and Tzotzils) live in Nueva Palestina, and Chols in Frontera Corozal (Figure 2). It has a three-tier governance structure (community level, settlement level and ward). The territory of this community encompasses lagoons,⁵ archaeological sites (de Vos, 2002: 105) and seven protected natural areas (PNAs)⁶ which together cover 350,250 hectares of its land (CONANP, 2006a,b).

The Lacandon People

At the core of the agrarian community known as the Lacandon Community is the Lacandon people (Calleros-Rodríguez, 2013). Their history is documented in numerous documents, dating back to the eighteenth century – with 1793 often cited as the starting point of their documented presence in Lacandonia (de Vos, 1980/1996; Inaremac, 1985; Aubry, 1987). The nineteenth century also provides accounts of them, including references to their

⁴ The land reform programme granted land in the form of ‘*ejidos*’ to groups of landless peasants, conferring them the usufruct of land rights both as individuals and collectively.

⁵ El Cedro, Lacanjá, Miramar, El Ocotal, Santa Clara, Petjá, Itzanocú, La Maroma and Metzabok.

⁶ Biosphere reserves (Montes Azules and Lacant-Tún) and protected natural areas (Chan-Kin, Najá, Metzabok, Yaxchilán and Bonampak).

presence along the banks of the Usumacinta River in 1834 (Tozzer, 1907/1962, p. 52). Later, in 1877, explorer Juan Ballinas (1951, p. 38; Baer & Merrifield, 1971, p. 53) met a group of Lacandons by the Jataté River during his search for a route to El Petén. The twentieth century saw an upsurge in historical mentions of the Lacandon presence. In 1905, Tozzer (1907/1962, pp. 20–33) observed scattered groups west of the Usumacinta River and south of Tenoisique and the rivers Lacantún and Lacanjá, with similar reports and accounts corroborating these observations (Baer & Merrifield, 1971, p. 129; Interview 11). Between 1927 and 1943, Lacandon *caribales* were found in several locations, constantly moving around as a result of disease, family separations, and the scarcity of marriageable women (Baer & Merrifield, 1971, p. 37). From the 1940s onwards, interactions between the Lacandons and the outside world intensified. In 1944, there were 10 *caribales*⁷ (Villa Rojas, 1967b, p. 468; Duby, 1944) and more groups were reported in 1945⁸ (Baer & Merrifield, 1971, p. 43). A significant event occurred in 1964 when a group of Lacandons in Monte Líbano was displaced by timber company operations, leading them to flee to the Metzabok Lagoon (de Vos, 2002, p. 111). By 1967, settlements were reported in northern Lacandonia⁹ (Villa Rojas, 1967b, p. 481), with several *caribales* scattered throughout the rainforest and a group from San Quintín relocating to Lacanjá Chansayab (Baer & Merrifield, 1971, p. 131). These records collectively suggest that the Lacandons traditionally inhabited a vast territory in the region.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Lacandons witnessed various transformations of the territory they have traditionally occupied: Mexico's boundary dispute with Guatemala (1821–1895), the Tabasco dispute with Chiapas over the jurisdiction of Lacandonia (1898–1912), the formation of large estates (1889–1972), and the development of commercial logging (1863–1989) (Valdez, 2006; de Vos, 1996; Holden 1994). In the twentieth century, factions of the Mexican Revolution used logging concessions and land rights to consolidate their power. In the 1950s, the arrival of landless indigenous settlers to Lacandonia led to its 'agrarianisation' (González

⁷ Peljá, Metzabok, Arena, Santo Domingo, Chocolja, Lacanjá, Laguna Chan, El Cedro, El Desempeño and San Quintín.

⁸ Miramar Lagoon, Sic Rum and Ya'rírXa'n.

⁹ La Arena, Yukman Babar, Pasa Macho, Santo Domingo, and Ilusión; also Najá, Het-já and Río Perlas located between Het-já and Tenosique.

Pacheco, 1983; Valdez, 2006; de Vos, 2002; Paladino 2005; Villafuerte et al., 2002; Leyva & Ascencio, 1996/2002; Lobato 1979). In the 1970s, the Mexican State changed its traditional role in the region: shifting from a role limited to issuing concessions, property titles, customs, and overseeing logging and rubber tapping (Dichtl, 1988, p. 37) to the direct exploitation of resources: parastatal lumbering (1974–1989), oil exploration (1976–1981) and drilling (1984–1992) (de Vos, 2002; Barreda, 1999). Current concerns involve governmental interests in uranium (Díaz-Polanco & Sánchez, 2002, p. 60) and water resources (Interview 10), not just ecosystem conservation. The Lacandons have also witnessed a shift in the types of actors who have entered the rainforest: shifting from workers, explorers, Christian missionaries, Maoist activists and Marxist-Leninist guerrillas¹⁰ to government officials, NGO activists and international donors. More recently, Lacandonia has seen the rise of various forms of trafficking (people, wildlife and merchandise), accompanied by an increased military presence.

A Periodisation of the History of the Lacandón Community

Perhaps one of the most significant crises the LC has faced since its establishment in 1972 came in 2014, when the leadership of the Lacandon *comuneros* was openly challenged by non-Lacandon community members. Although the leadership was eventually re-established, the incident revealed the fragility of the principle of Lacandon pre-eminence in a plural indigenous community.

Over its fifty-year history, the LC has experienced ongoing tensions and conflicts. This history can be divided into five periods. Interestingly, these seem to align with Mexico's six-year presidential terms, suggesting that the country's political system imprints the dynamics of its six-year cycles upon the Community.

The First Period (1972–1999) was marked by the LC's efforts to have federal land authorities to complete the boundary demarcation of its land tract, as the land was also claimed by several neighbouring communities (*ejidos*). This dispute falls within the realm of agrarian politics – which often involves

¹⁰ For a discussion on the presence of the EZLN in Lacandonia see Legorreta (1998); Orive and Torres (2010) and Santiago Quijada and Balderas Domínguez (2008).

securing land tenure for landless claimants, typically spearheaded by ‘social organizations’ (see Chapters 4 and 5). Since the lands of the LC are rich in natural resources, ecosystem conservation has been a policy imposed on the region. Environmental conservation became a main goal for governments, through agencies such as CONANP and in partnership with non-governmental organizations. The *comuneros* have continually criticized this policy and its civil society partners (Mandujano, 2019, 2020). The environmental authorities (federal and state) will rely on organizations such as *Natura y Ecosistemas Mexicanos* to enforce environmental policy. In this complex arena of competing interests and objectives, political parties have sometimes represented the *comuneros*’ position in Mexico’s federal Congress (Partido del Trabajo, 2019).

The Second Period (2000–2006) saw the implementation of the Comprehensive Attention Programme for Community Assets in the Lacandon Rainforest and MABR (*Programa de Atención Integral a los Bienes Comunes Zona Lacandona y Reserva de la Biosfera de Montes Azules*), a public policy action that operated from June 2003 to December 2006 with the objective of addressing land disputes (Ascencio, 2008). It was the last and most extensive agrarian policy aiming to cooperatively resolve the presence of human settlements within the boundaries of the LC, demonstrating the unavoidable necessity of government intervention to solve land disputes. The programme was also important as it initiated a round of negotiations and agreements between the parties involved in agrarian disputes in the region.

The Third Period (2006–2012) was a time of contrast between the government authorities’ priorities of enforcing environmental policy and the LC’s main goal of continuing to resolve the issue of irregular settlements within its lands. By 2008, the LC sought resolution through ‘dialogue and concertation with neighbouring towns and organizations,’ a premise that often led to tension with the authorities (federal and state) over matters of land tenure and the environment. The LC, after deliberations of its general assembly, decided to try to peacefully settle land disputes through negotiations with relevant stakeholders (i.e., *ejidos* and social organizations) in areas such as El Desempeño, Zona Norte, Cañada Agua Azul, Cañada Amador Hernández, Río Negro Basin, Cordon del Chaquistero. This approach of ‘negotiated land disputes’ stood in contrast with the environmental authorities’ priority of securing protected natural areas (PNAs) by evicting irregular settlements. For many in the LC, that policy merely perpetuated land conflict in a region

where there were no viable economic subsistence alternatives. The issue of the lack of economic alternatives for the populations that live near or within the protected natural areas (PNAs) suggests that the problem of environmental conservation cannot necessarily be reduced to one of agrarian politics, but rather seems to be one of human subsistence. If so, then the viability of PNAs might depend on building economic options for human populations, in such a way that the conservation of nature is compatible with social life. Nevertheless, for the authorities, continuing to negotiate with groups illegally settled within the perimeter of PNAs was an absurd policy. They argued that the LC ‘should not negotiate with the groups that were occupying its territory if only because that approach would incentivize new land seizures,’ accusing the LC of trying to capitalize on agrarian politics. At the same time, the environmental authorities exposed themselves to accusations of fostering social division in the region – precisely when social actors, the LC and social organizations, were trying to peacefully settle land disputes.

Government authorities were criticized for failing to resolve agrarian and environmental issues over more than four decades, for aggravating conflicts, and for contributing to land loss in protected areas. And so, in the years 2006–2012, land regularization ceased to be the priority objective of government action. Instead, the priority was placed on trying to evict the irregular settlements within the boundaries of the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve (MABR). In this period, agrarian problems that remained pending from the previous period with eviction initiatives were addressed. But for the LC, a policy of evicting groups would once again generate conflicts; for several *comuneros*, it was preferable to settle disputes through negotiation. Another point of tension with authorities was in terms of the enforcement of environmental policy. For example, as the LC would refuse to file the corresponding criminal complaints so that evictions could be carried out, it was exposed to pressure from federal and state authorities. Refusing to file the complaints would open it up to accusations of allowing invasions within the MABR, for instance (Partido del Trabajo, 2019).

The Fourth Period (2012–2018) was notably marked by the election of a non-Lacandon community member as community leader (2014–2017), in a break from the agreements that had led to the incorporation of non-Lacandon members into the Community in the late 1970s. This election, forming part of a *fait accompli* policy intended to force negotiations, aimed to alter the existing power dynamic within the Community. In a show

of determination to develop a policy of negotiating land disputes with neighbouring *ejidos*, some non-Lacandon *comuneros* (i.e., Tzeltal), mostly from Nueva Palestina, decided to elect a leader on their own, exhibiting a form of ‘grass-roots politics’ (SERAPAZ 2020). This was viewed by some as an attempt to destabilize the LC and, more broadly, an attempt at changing the politics of the region by empowering communities to challenge top-down public policy. The role of SERAPAZ, along the lines of the Catholic church in the region, deserves special attention. However, this form of *fait accompli* politics is often confronted with legal actions – as well as with a ‘politics of control’ (below).

The Fifth Period (2018–2024) has seen the wider Lacandon Rainforest region grappling with issues of security and criminal violence, becoming a focus of attention that overshadows traditional issues of land tenure and environmental conservation. In 2023, the federal government described the rainforest as a ‘new territory for drug [trafficking]’ (Mandujano, 2023c). The new reality of criminal activity and violence – marked by clandestine airstrips, drug seizures, murders and disappearances of people, and forced displacement of communities – was publicly acknowledged by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador at a news conference (Mandujano, 2023a). The federal government identified rainforest regions such as San Quintín, Benemérito de Las Américas and Frontera Corozal as being under the control of organized crime groups that conduct criminal operations. In a letter responding to this government evaluation, the LC authorities denied these claims (Mandujano, 2023b).

The operation of criminal groups within or near protected natural areas is not uncommon. In the Lacandon Rainforest, however, the problem is further aggravated by its proximity to the international border with Guatemala – an economic and commercial zone where unregulated economic and commercial activities abound (Devine et al., 2020; Galemba, 2017). In addition, insurgency is also present. Almost thirty years after the Zapatista uprising, the EZLN has reaffirmed its struggle and has called on new generations not to forget it. The year 2018 was a tense year for the Zapatistas, who denounced military overflights (Mandujano, 2018a) and had run-ins with the army (Mandujano, 2018b).

During the period 2018–2024, problems of land tenure and environmental conservation in the region received attention at the federal level, both in Congress and within the presidential cabinet. By 2019, the fate of illegal

settlements within the strategic MABR appeared to divide cabinet deliberations (SEDATU, 2021; CONANP, 2019b).

Environmentalism has been a defining policy for Lacandonia. Environmentalists denounce the practice of ‘agrarian politics’: a practice based on land claims, invasions of land tracts, government expropriations and compensation paid by governments. They see agrarian politics as a form of business, which they aim to hinder. They claim to have a long-term vision of heritage conservation and protection (Mandujano, 2019). However, the fact that protected natural areas are located within indigenous territories makes claims against them more visible. Communal authorities, in turn, have denounced and accused federal environmental policy’s partners (i.e., *Natura y Ecosistemas Mexicanos*). Accusations against them range from the commercialization of natural resources to questioning their ethics and the social viability of environmentalism. Others involve concerns about alleged foreign interests associated with USAID – allegations that have been denied (Rodríguez García 2017 – while still other criticisms focus on the compatibility of ecosystem conservation with the rights of indigenous peoples.

The structure of this book

The remainder of this book is divided into three sections. The first section (‘Framing the Discussion on Indigenous Peoples in Mexico’s Lacandon Rainforest’) lays the groundwork for the discussion on the Indigenous Community and the conceptualization of the political community. Chapter 1 (‘Political Communities in Indigenous Lands’) examines the elements of a people, territory and forms of organisation (i.e., institutions) as constitutive of political order. Next, Chapter 2 (‘Land Policy and Indigenous Rights in Mexico: Threats and Challenges’) presents the development of the topic of Indigenous land rights in Mexico. Chapter 3 (‘Indigeneity and State Formation in the Lacandon Rainforest’) examines the historical context specific to the Lacandon Rainforest, as a way to understand its ethno-cultural composition.

The second section (‘What is a Political Community?’) analyses the case study that forms the core of this book. It explores, in Chapter 4 (‘A People’), the concept of ‘a people,’ its territorial bases and its social institutions. Specifically, it examines the issue of the historical continuity of the Lacandons in relation to the concept of ‘traditional occupation.’ This chapter

also describes the process of establishing the LC and lays out the implications for multiple land-claimant groups. In Chapter 5 ('Territory, Land and Natural Resources'), the central argument is that the LC, a product of Mexico's land reform, is a multi-ethnic indigenous community with land rights protected by international law (i.e., the Inter-American norms and jurisprudence on the rights of indigenous peoples). The chapter also examines the issue of protected natural areas in indigenous lands. Chapter 6 ('Indigenous Self-Government and the Dual Thrust') raises the question of indigenous self-government in the context of the landed conflict in the Lacandon Rainforest. Taken together, these chapters argue that what is constitutive of a political community (a people with a territorial base and institutions) is, similarly, constitutive of the community examined in the case study.

The book's third section consists of Chapter 7 ('Indigenous Peoples and Polity Formation'). It touches on the topic of indigeneity and political community. The politics of 'founding' places indigenous peoples in the debates about political origins. The discussion borrows from the UNDRIP's conceptualizations of self-determination, autonomy, self-government, and consent to argue that the existence of indigenous peoples in contemporary (democratic) states effectively challenge the narrative of the foundations of a political order. The final Chapter 8 then presents the overall conclusions.

The introduction and Chapter 3 draw from an article published in the journal *Identities* (Calleros-Rodríguez, 2013). Chapter 4 is partly derived from articles published in the journals *Desenvolvimento e Meio Ambiente* (Calleros-Rodríguez & Guevara-Romero, 2016), *Identities* (Calleros-Rodríguez, 2013), and *Journal of Peasant Studies* (Calleros-Rodríguez, 2014). Moreover, Chapter 5 is also partly derived from Calleros-Rodríguez (2013) and Calleros-Rodríguez and Guevara-Romero (2016). Finally, Chapter 7 tries to refine the arguments published in the journal *Ameryka Łacińska – Kwartalnik analityczno-informacyjny* (Calleros-Rodríguez, 2023).