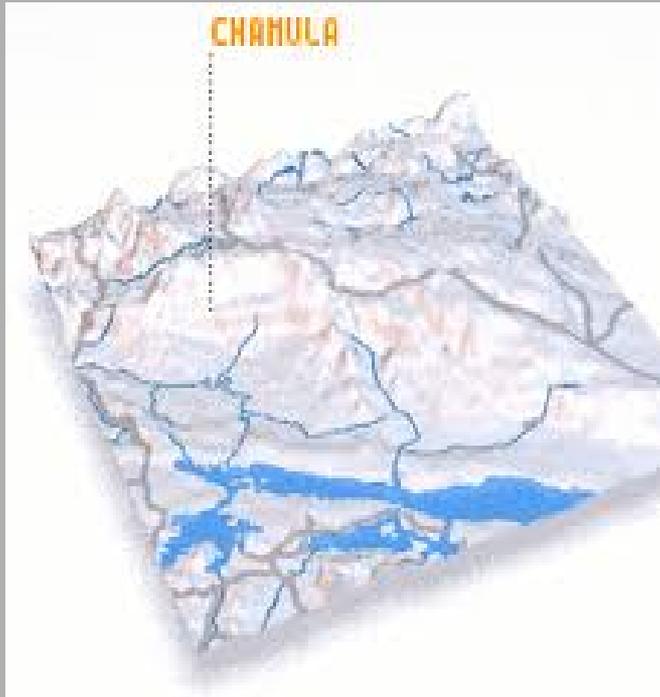


# Chamula: A small indigenous village in Chiapas

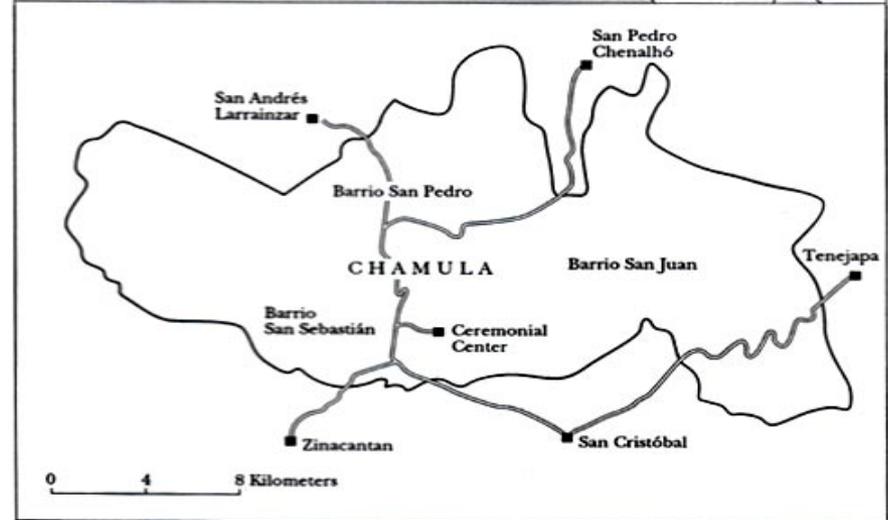




# State of Chiapas, Mexico



# Chamula



MAP 2

Chamula in Chiapas and Mexico, by Gary H. Gossen

- This is a community of Pre-Hispanic origin whose name means "Thick Water." The Chamulas have always been fiercely independent: they resisted the Spanish upon their arrival in 1524 and later staged a famous rebellion in 1869, attacking the nearby colonial settlement of San Cristobal.
- San Juan Chamula is the principal town, being the main religious and economic center of the community.
- The Chamulas enjoy being a closed community. Like other indigenous communities in this region, they can be identified by their clothes: in this case distinctive purple and pink colors predominate.
- This Tzotzil community is considered one of most important of its kind, not only by sheer numbers of population, but by customs practices here, as well.

Information taken from [www.luxuriousmexico.com](http://www.luxuriousmexico.com)



This is the house of someone who migrated to the States to work and returned to build a house styled like those he saw in the United States. In the distance is the town square with the cathedral.



This picture was taken in front of the cathedral.



Sheep are considered sacred by the Chamula. Thus, they are not killed but allowed to graze and used for their wool.

How do you think this happened historically?



**The Sunday Market**



**Girl with Huipil**

# Syncretism

- Religious syncretism is the blending of two belief systems
- Religious syncretism often takes place when foreign beliefs are introduced to an indigenous belief system and the teachings are blended
- For the indigenous peoples of Mexico, Catholic beliefs blended with their native religious beliefs
- Syncretism allowed the native peoples to continue their traditions while adapting to a changing world



The above picture shows the traditional offerings from a Mayan festival with a picture of Jesus, a central figure in the Christian religion.



The Mayan cross is a pre-Christian cross. Looking at the picture on the left, can you see evidence of syncretism?



- Chamulans worship in Cathedral built by Spanish
- Town dedicated to John the Baptist, priest comes once a year for baptisms
- Chamulans are Catholic by name; helped keep their traditions alive under Spanish rule
- No pews
- Floors covered in pine needles
- Catholic saints rest on tables posted in church but represent Mayan gods
- Candles lit and people sit on floor and pray below saints
- Sometimes chickens sacrificed
- Pox traditionally drunk, now substituted with Coca-Cola
- No pictures allowed

## Chamula Syncretism

# Other Forms of Syncretism: The Virgin de Guadalupe

- The Virgin de Guadalupe is a cultural symbol that unites Mexicans
- The Catholic Church encouraged festivals that coincided with indigenous festivals in order to blend the two and appropriate indigenous festivals as new Christian celebrations
- “After the conquest, the church destroyed shrines to indigenous gods and goddesses, and tried to stamp out the cult of Tonantzin, an Aztec virgin deity”
- Tonantzin was the “honored mother” of Mexico and a fertility goddess
- Mary, mother of Jesus, merged to symbolize the Mother figurehead in both Catholicism and ancient Aztec beliefs



Source: Rose Anna Mueller, *Virgin of Guadalupe*  
<http://www.blueroadrunner.com/virgen.htm>

# Chiapas

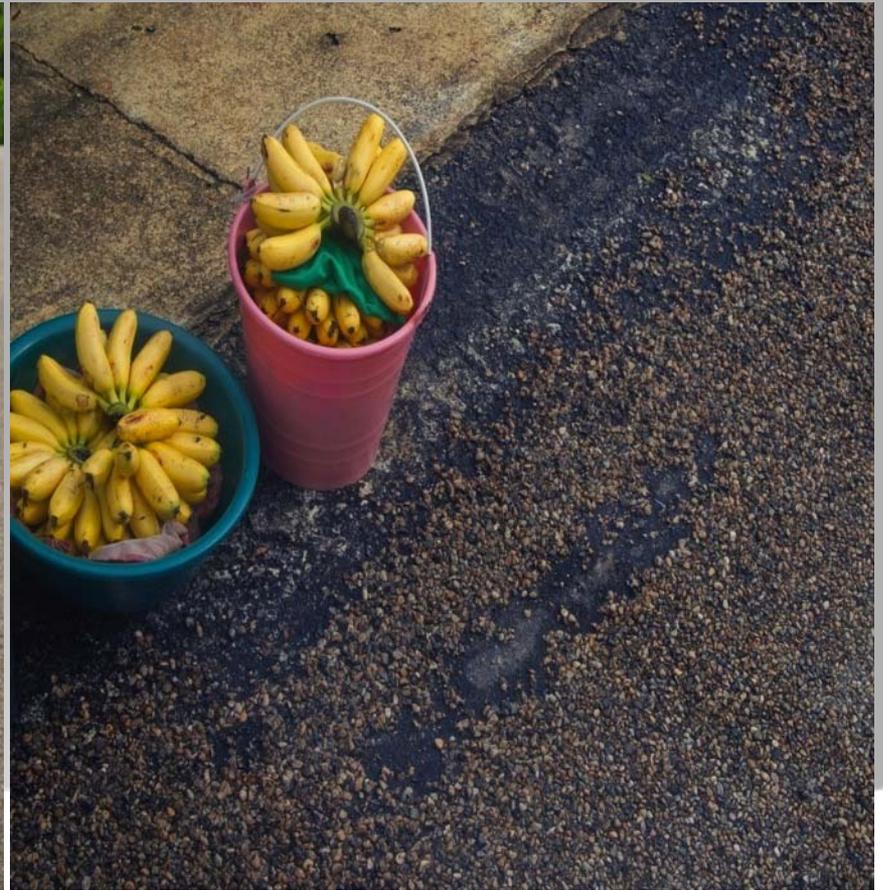




How would you describe their socioeconomic status?

## Chiapan House and Family

In Chiapas some indigenous women stop traffic and force people to buy items before letting the traffic pass. These are the bananas she and another woman were selling. What might be her economic status?





Girl with Women on Highway



This is a traditional sling for carrying babies or goods. The woman wears a traditional wool skirt.

Mother and Child



Traditional Mayan House



Traditional Mayan House and Fire  
(model from Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City)

## Models from the National Anthropology Museum in Mexico, City



Inside Traditional House



Chiapans grow corn, even though Chiapas is mountainous and not ideal for harvesting large amounts of corn. Ancient Mayan religious beliefs state that humans were made from corn by the Gods.

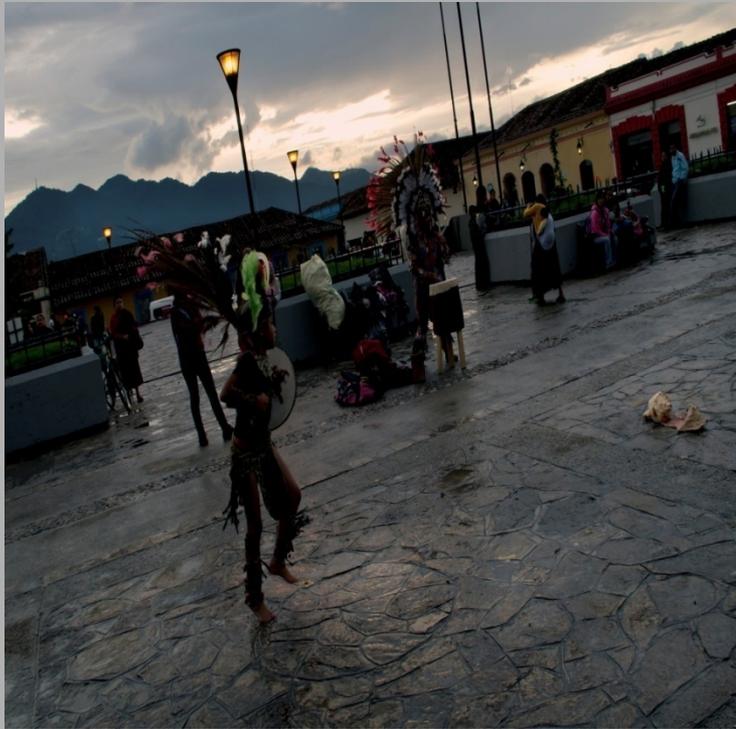
## Corn Field on Side of Mountain



San Cristobal de las Casas was a colonial settlement and the political capital of Chiapas until 1892. Today it is considered the "cultural capital."

Who do you think built this cathedral?

Main Square and Cathedral in San Cristobal de las Casas



Dancer in Square of San Cristobal de las Casas



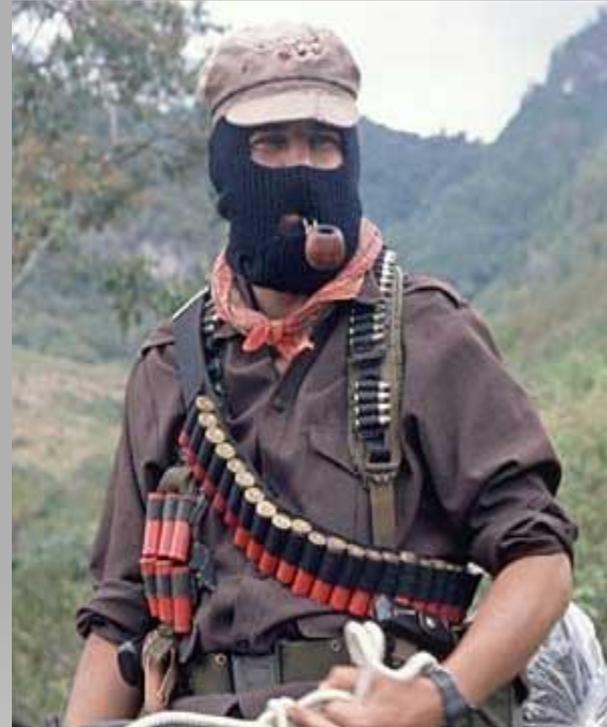
This woman comes to San Cristobal to sell her wares. She lives in a rural village a few miles from San Cristobal.

**Take out your K-W-L  
chart and fill in the new  
information you learned  
about the Mayan people  
of today.**

## Commandante Romana

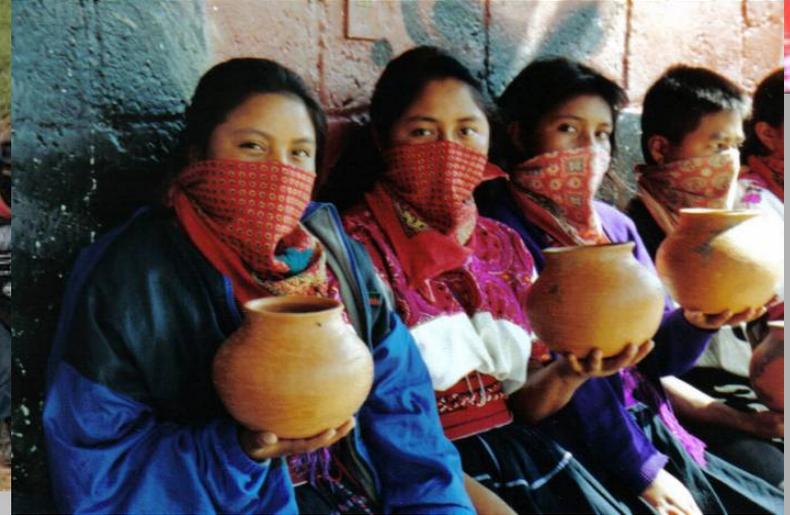


## Commandante Marcos



How would you describe these people?  
Why do they cover their faces?

# Zapatistas



Are these people intimidating?  
What might be their demands?



Many people in Chiapas are proud of the Zapatista movement because it gave them a political voice in Mexico. This is a display in San Cristobal de las Casas.

Display in restaurant in San Cristobal



Zapatista dolls sold by children in San Cristobal. They represent Marcos and Ramona.



What strikes you about this picture?

Pictures of Local Zapatistas



Art Dedicated to the Zapatistas

- Since the Zapatista movement of the 1990s, the Mexican government began building bridges and roads and has now started building government housing in Chiapas.
- The Zapatistas are controversial throughout Mexico. You will read an article about the state of Chiapas and the rise of the Zapatista movement.
- As you read, think about how the Zapatistas might be linked to Mexico's history of conquest and colonization.